

OPINION



the Astorian

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BEHIND THE NEWS

‘I want more people to speak out’

The murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police ignited protests against racism and police brutality around the world.

On the North Coast, one memorable image was Alejandra Lopez, a Warrenton teenager who organized several Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

A year later, Lopez is still speaking out.



DERRICK DePLEGUE

“I want more people to speak out and continue to speak out about all of the injustices that they see happening, because if you’re silent, you’ve chosen the side of the oppressor,” she said. “So just make sure to speak up and really

fight for what you believe in.”

Lopez, who is completing her junior year at Warrenton High School, is interviewing remotely for state Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene.

In an interview via Zoom, Lopez reflected on the protests, the growing awareness of racial justice among young people, the murder verdict in Minneapolis and how to keep the movement alive.

Q: Why was it important for you to speak out in that moment?

A: I first thought about doing the protests, I was still at a pretty young age — I was 15 turning 16 — and I didn’t really know what I was doing. All I knew is that I needed to do something.

That was just the driving force. I needed to do something, because I needed to speak out about the injustices happening in Minneapolis.

And then, from there, I kind of was thinking, I need to do these protests because I want to bring awareness to Clatsop County, because it’s a really predominantly white area. As a person of color, being on the coast, it’s pretty hard just existing some of the times, because you’re faced with a lot of different racial injustices. You’re faced with racism. You’re faced with prejudice. And there is so many things.

Last year, when I saw the video that came out about George Floyd, that was just the driving moment. I was like, OK, I need to do something in my com-



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Alejandra Lopez is a student at Warrenton High School.

munity, because this community needs to speak out against the injustices happening.

We also have to focus, and kind of reflect, on our own communities. Seeing what can we call out. Can we call out our own family members for racism? Can we have conversations in workplaces and in schools about racism and how we can provide a really good and safe place for people of color?

Q: What did you hope the protests would accomplish?

A: I hoped the protests would not only bring awareness to the people of Clatsop County and on the coast, but I also wanted the people that were in charge of making policy. For example, the county commissioners, state representatives, the mayor — having and seeing, why are people doing this? What else can we fix in our communities? Where are there injustices happening?

Kind of things like that. And also focus on working on policy that would help fight that.

Q: Over the past year, do you think awareness about racial justice has increased among the young people you know?

A: Yes. I think that definitely there has been a lot of awareness around

racial justice ...

It’s amazing to see how many young people are so focused and driven to bring that justice and to fight for that justice. No matter what. Their age isn’t a barrier. Our age isn’t a barrier in all of these things, because we have access to technology and we have access to resources.

When we’re able to educate ourselves. When we’re able to reach out to our elected officials, have meetings with elected officials, and lobby for different bills that work to fight racial injustice.

Young people aren’t really scared anymore, because we are the future of America, basically.

I think it’s also kind of having to do with social media, because there’s a lot of things surrounding it, there’s a lot of young people that are on social media, and them kind of seeing the reposts and the social media posts about racial injustice and seeing how different people speak out about it and their thoughts on it.

It builds a community. And there’s definitely a drive there for young people.

Q: Derek Chauvin — the former Minneapolis police officer who had knelt on George Floyd’s neck —

was found guilty of murder and other charges in April. Three other former officers face trial next year. What are your thoughts on the verdict?

A: When I heard about the verdict — it was a good moment, because you see that there is finally accountability for George Floyd.

But there is also something else that you do notice when you see. This is only one case out of many other cases. And this is because there were protests, outrage. There were so many calls, messages, emails. There were people saying that this was not OK and that there needed to be accountability.

It’s still such a big path. This verdict — it’s one verdict. It’s not going to bring justice for all. So there has to be people continuing to push and to fight those systems of oppression and injustices.

This is justice for George Floyd. But there is still a lot more that needs to be done.

Q: Polls show that support for Black Lives Matter has declined since last summer. What do you think it will take to keep the movement alive?

A: I think there definitely has to be people that are willing to continue pushing for it and continuing to have that drive to fight for racial equity and equality.

People want change, and we want it now. But the thing is that policy takes time. And that’s something that’s very difficult.

Currently, I’m an intern for Rep. Paul Holvey and, with that, I have actually gained a lot of different experience, knowledge in policy and how the way it works. It’s a different look from protesting. But I’m starting to learn a lot more about how policy is crafted, how policy is drafted, how it’s voted on.

There’s also a lot of other young people that are working in different offices. There’s a lot of different groups that speak out on these injustices, kind of seeing how we can make a change, especially at a policy level — state level and federal level.

It’s going to be a struggle to continue doing this, but I know there are many people that are driven to do it.

Derrick DePledge is editor of The Astorian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tunnel?

Astoria has a deep-water port. Very few other places have such a great advantage, and it’s several days closer to Asian ports, making it even more valuable.

The problem is we have no railroad servicing the port. Reconstructing the rail-line would be an environmental nightmare. There is a way that it could be done and not affect the river.

With President Joe Biden pushing his “Build Back Better Plan,” I suggest Clatsop County should put in for some of this federal money, and use it to use a tunnel boring machine and construct a tunnel from just west of Wauna Mill, where there is serviceable track, and start by tunneling under U.S. Highway 30 at this location.

Then, in a long arch, bore under Nicolai and Wickiup mountains, coming out near the Burnside area north of Highway 30, only a short distance from the deep-water port at Tongue Point. A shorter version could be built coming out near the Knappa docks.

With my first design, less railroad track would need to be exposed to the river and the constant need of maintenance and spill hazards. There would be little need for dredging the Columbia River, saving many millions over the years.

Lots of jobs would be created building the tunnel, and lots of permanent jobs would be created at the new deep-water port.

I also suggest a second tunnel between Highway 30 and Oregon Highway 202 as the best way of getting truck traffic away from Astoria’s streets.

Please give these ideas a serious thought.

JESSE DAY
Astoria

A treasure

Regarding the letter by Bill Nix in the In One Ear section on May 6 about the USS Kitty Hawk’s destiny: What a treasure and history to be saved.

The supercarrier has a 4.5-acre flight deck and can house 5,624 people, over half the size of Astoria’s population. This offers limitless potential for usage: restaurants, stores, festivals, museum, garden,

park, lodging, conference rooms, theater, sports, etc.

I once attended a public meeting in the converted old ship Queen Mary in California. What a cool idea.

I am so glad Nix brought it to our attention. I do hope this gem will be saved.
NGUYEN TRUNG
Seaside

Do better

Memorial Day weekend isn’t about sales. When business owners use the word “Memorial” in their marketing, without any mention of the meaning, it looks like a cold way to capitalize on pain.

This pain is political, but also deep and personal. The ignorance of those who don’t consider it a painful day is testament to the spoiled nature of average Americans.

I’d like to challenge the business community to think deeper, and do better, when marketing for weekends like Memorial, Veterans and Independence days.

Do not be careless with your words. Make donations with a portion of sales to support a good veteran-related cause, like the Wounded Warrior Project or a humanitarian aid organization like Doctors Without Borders.

As humans sharing this planet, co-creating our democracy and culture, we owe it to ourselves to operate in a way that val-

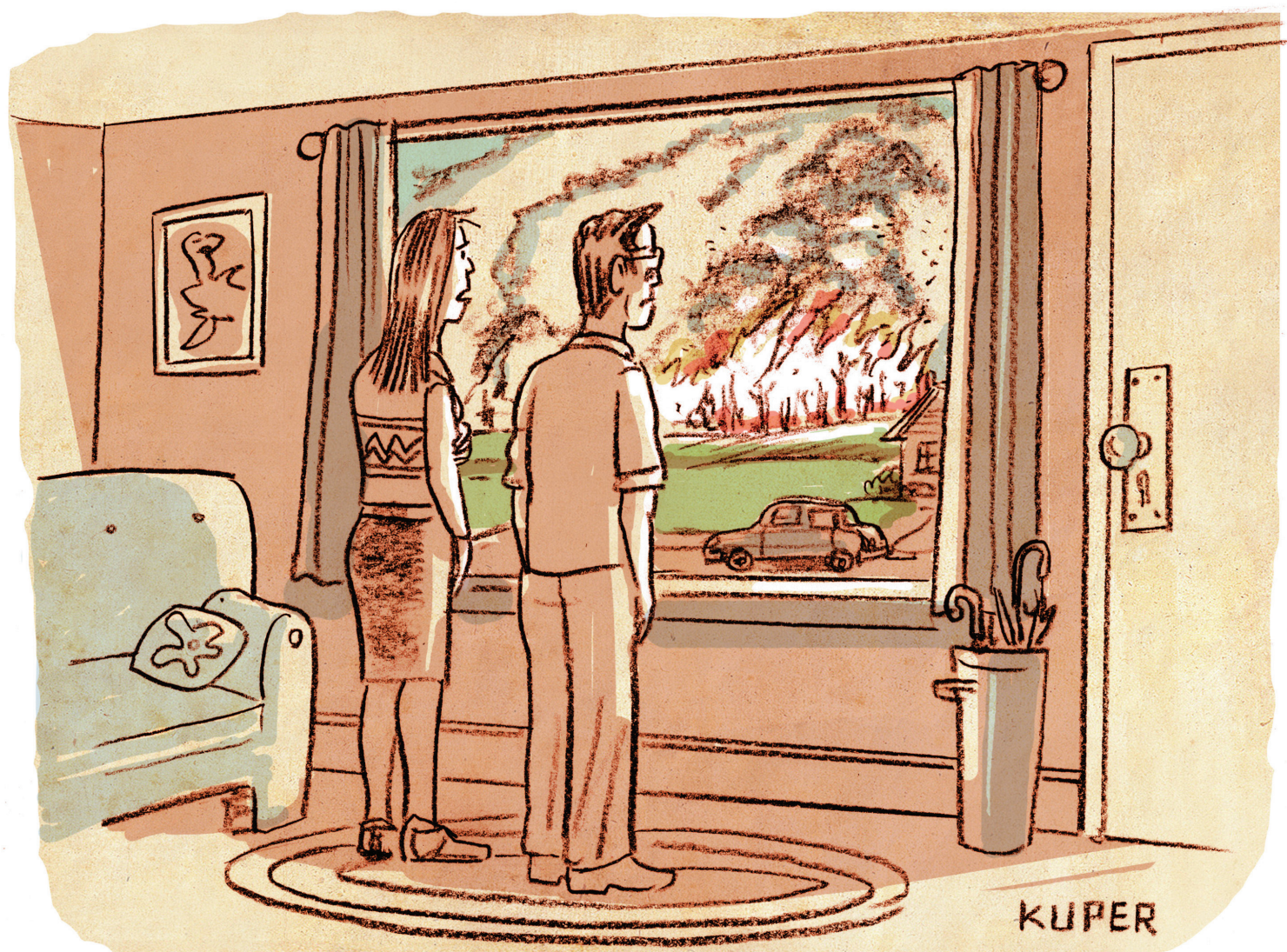
ues life, and also respects death.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, there have been over 650,000 deaths in battle since 1776. This does not include the more than 3,400 civilian employees working for the U.S. also killed in war zones since 9/11. Nor are there holidays to remember the countless civilian casualties that war causes on all sides.

The suicide rate of our soldiers is 50% higher than civilians. Of the 19.2 million veterans alive today, nearly 15 million of them served during wartime.

Something is wrong with us. We can all think deeper and do better.

ANGELA FAIRLESS
Rainier



“I’m just happy things are getting back to normal.”