

OPINION



the Astorian

editor@dailyastorian.com

Founded in 1873

KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

SHANNON ARLINT
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

GUEST COLUMN

Prepare for digital storms

Think of the hazards threatened by ransomware as akin to those caused by the Great Coastal Gale of 2007.

Lights go out and furnaces shut down. Communications networks go silent. Gasoline stays in the ground, or in tanks outside the region. Banking grinds to a slow walk, as bankers return to the days of handwritten ledgers.



MIKE FRANCIS

Residents of the North Coast are accustomed to thinking about natural disasters, from the inevitable Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake to tsunamis to wildfires. But the same

kinds of disruptions to daily life can occur when criminals invade computer networks and hold them hostage, as we've seen in the last several weeks.

• In May, criminals crippled the network of Colonial Pipeline, not releasing their hold until the gas pipeline company paid a reported \$4.4 million in cryptocurrency. While authorities later recovered much of that money, gas shortages occurred on the East Coast while oil supplies were stalled by the attack.

• Also in May, JBS, the world's largest meatpacking company, halted all cattle slaughtering operations in the United States and Australia after a ransomware attack.

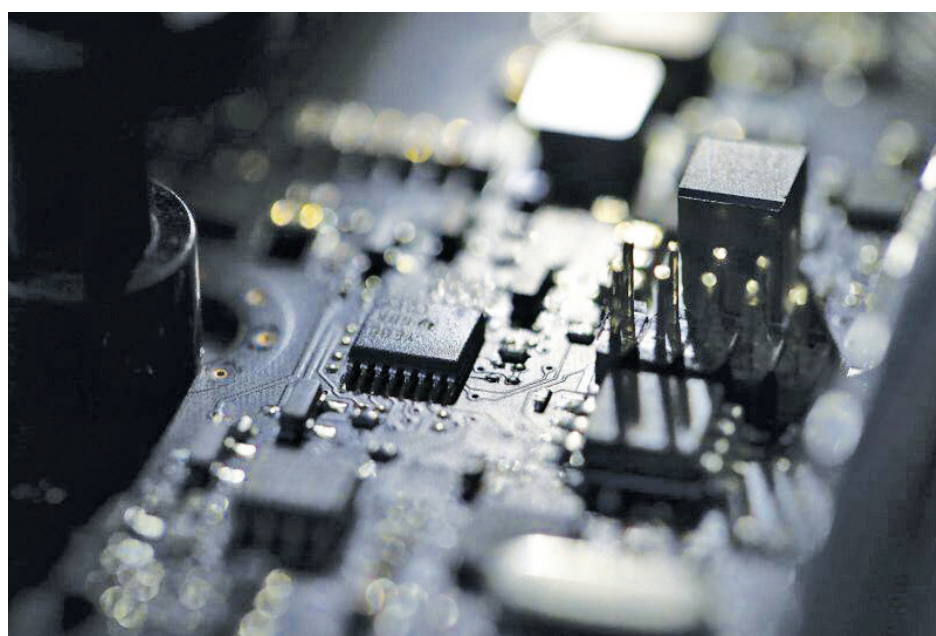
• Earlier in June, cyberthieves disrupted operations of the Massachusetts Steamship Authority, disrupting ferry service to Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard.

Cyberattacks, like natural disasters, can shut bridges, communications networks and power plants. As the recent spate of ransomware episodes shows, they are a jarring reminder that much of the nation's critical infrastructure is controlled by private companies, like banks, investor-owned utilities, food producers, hospitals and health care systems. And in the 21st century, any organization is vulnerable to a cyberattack.

Unlike the Cascadia Subduction Zone catastrophe that scientists anticipate, cyberattack disruptions aren't inevitable, said Pat Massey, the Seattle-based regional director for the federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

"Everyone is at risk of a cybersecurity threat," Massey said in a phone interview. "Ransomware has woken a lot of people up."

But Massey said he is guardedly optimistic that growing awareness will lead to growing readiness, as it has with planning for the Cascadia earthquake. He said the best protection against disruption of digital systems is what he calls



Jenny Kane/AP Photo

Ransomware attacks are on the rise.

RESOURCES

- Public agencies are invited to join the Multistate Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC) www.cisecurity.org/ms-isac/. The nonprofit center, which is free to join, offers threat maps, secure information portals, educational materials and even cybersecurity exercises.
- The FBI's Portland office described the rising incidences of malware and digital intrusions, including a link for reporting such hacks. That link is www.ic3.gov.
- The FBI recently issued its 2020 Internet Crime Report www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/AnnualReport/2020_IC3Report.pdf. The report notes that Oregon ranked 25th in the nation in terms of the number of internet crime victims, with 6,817 victims who suffered aggregate losses of more than \$38 million.
- The regional office of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) offers advisory, educational and emergency communications resources www.cisa.gov/region-10
- The Oregon Department of Justice oversees the Oregon Titan Fusion Center, which studies, investigates, prosecutes and shares information about digital attacks. justice.oregon.gov/ortitan/

"basic cyberhygiene." By that he means using up-to-date antivirus software, using strong passwords and multifactor authentication and avoiding opening or clicking on suspicious emails and links.

He also encourages any public agency, from tiny school districts to county governments, port authorities and cities, to join the Multistate Information Sharing Analysis Center, a clearinghouse for cybersecurity information, including conducting exercises and providing guidance on how to respond to attacks. It is free for any public entity to join, but in the lower Columbia River region, few agencies are on the member rolls. They should be.

"Local officials, especially, need to start running tabletops and other scenarios, and get emergency plans in place," said Charles Jennings, of Portland, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and

co-author of the digital security book "The Hundredth Window: Protecting Your Privacy and Security In the Age of the Internet."

"They need to make certain their systems for the delivery of water and electricity are checked and double-checked, and maintained at a high level, even if new federal infrastructure dollars are not forthcoming," Jennings said in an email. "And Astoria would be a great place for rainwater barrels also — something every Oregonian should have."

Cybersecurity generally and ransomware in particular have increasingly become the focus for federal law enforcement, starting with the White House, which announced this month President Joe Biden will confront Russian President Vladimir Putin about the prevalence of ransomware attacks that originate in Russia.

"Ransomware is a big issue for the FBI," said Beth Anne Steele, spokeswoman for the FBI's Portland office, in a phone interview. The agency is working to educate people and organizations about how to keep their networks safe, and to share information with the agency and with one another when attacks occur.

Attackers are relentless and well-resourced, said Dave Nevin, a computer science professor who leads the Oregon Research & Teaching Security Operations Center at Oregon State University. Nevin, who said by email he was speaking in his personal capacity, said organizations are increasingly gaining access to resources of their own. But security begins at the ground level.

"As we've seen from Colonial Pipeline and others, cyberattacks can be costly and damaging to a business. They can result in loss of revenue, inability to deliver key services, theft and reputational damage," he wrote. "But organizations can do things to limit that damage: practice good cyberhygiene and plan for the inevitability that, at some point in time, you will be the victim of a data breach. Having a good disaster recovery plan that addresses ransomware and other cyberattacks is important. Detection is key: organizations have been able to thwart potential ransomware attacks by early detection — the less time an attacker is inside your network (because it will happen) the better."

Astoria City Manager Brett Estes said the response to the Great Coastal Gale of 2007 demonstrated Astorians' resilience and resourcefulness. He said city information technology staffers worked with the manager of Safeway, for example, to figure out how to get gasoline pumping from the store's underground tanks.

The gale also showed that "we don't know how tethered we are" until systems are disrupted, Estes said. It's a lesson echoed by many after the gale.

"The biggest takeaway was that the city needed a truly multihazard emergency response plan," Jay Raskin, who was a city councilor in 2007, told The Astorian on the 10-year anniversary of the storm. "Our emergency response had been geared for a Cascadia earthquake and tsunami with the idea if we prepared for that we would cover the other hazards," Raskin said. "The storm taught us that different hazards require different responses."

The same is true of digital storms, which can break suddenly and catastrophically.

Mike Francis is a longtime Oregon journalist who has extensively covered military and veterans issues. He resides on Astoria's South Slope.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Remove bias

Regarding Oregon House Bill 2505: This bill will help remove bias within the foster care system.

As a former foster youth, going through the system was one of the hardest things. I did not go through racial bias, but I did go through ageism — it's a real thing.

I was 14 when I went into care with my brother and sister, who were preteens. No one wanted a group of teens. After being removed, we had to wait at the Department of Human Services building for two to three hours, due to finding us a home.

We ended up in an emergency placement. If these people did not speak up and take us, we would have been split up and put into different homes. I could not believe how hard it was for someone who wanted to have teens in their house.

This bill will help remove this from child welfare. The system needs to treat the kiddos the same. No matter how old they are, or what the color of their skin is.

I ended up getting to talk to state Sen. Betsy Johnson. She is a kind-hearted person. She took time out of her weekend to listen to why this bill means so much to me.

I am so glad that we have her support on this. Thank you, Sen. Johnson, it means the world to Oregon Foster Youth Connection.

We hope you will support the bill, too. Be the change for foster youth. Take a stand.

JADE VOLLNER
Astoria

Report card

This past week, I had the privilege to substitute teach for a kindergarten class in Seaside, and one in Warrenton. In

one instance the kids went for a "full" day of education and in the other, the students spent time in a cohort half-day program.

This two-day experience coming at the end of a full year of COVID-19-induced instruction is quite illuminating. If some intrepid doctoral candidate in primary education needs a thesis topic, I can see a bounty in this year's youngsters.

The obvious obstacle for this past year's crop of kindergartners is the mask. It's hard enough to understand the average 5-year-old's broken English. Slap a mask on a kid, and their often rambling words become nearly undetectable.

Add in a handful of students complaining of an untied shoe, in need of the use of the restroom or that a student had just been whacked over the head with a pizza stick, and you can appreciate what the nation is working with.

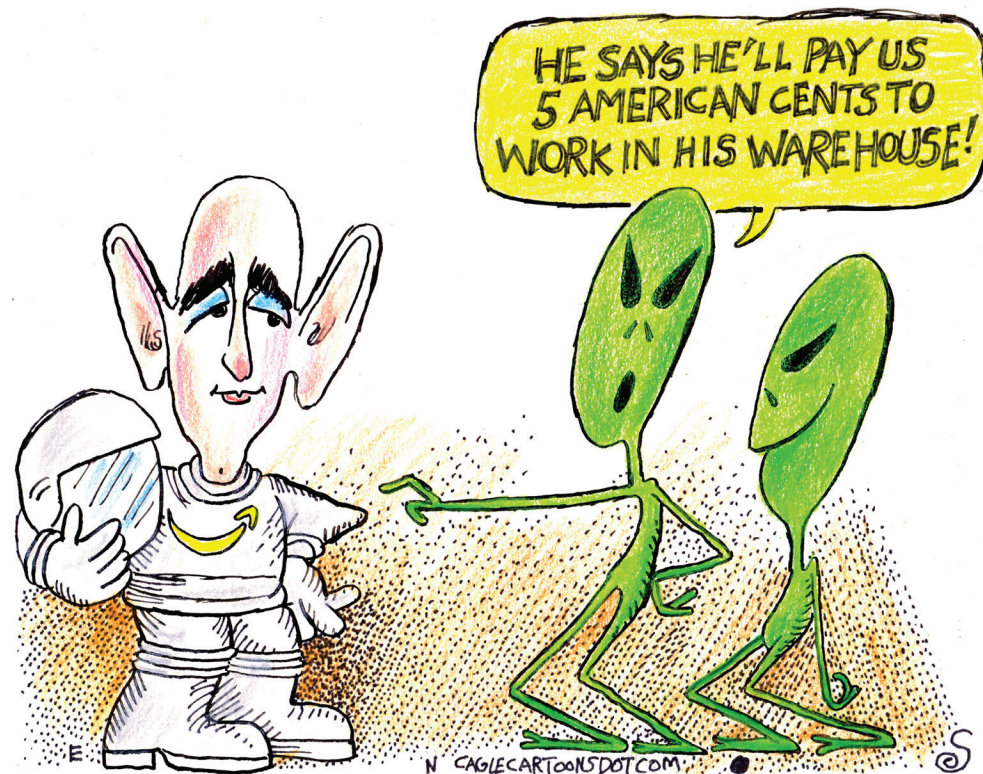
When masked youngsters are let loose in public it is worth investigating. From my own experience, I can tell Clatsop County taxpayers that your money has been well spent on the youngest of masked students.

There has been a concentration on the basics for these kiddies and, for the most part, the students have done well. I only have 33 years in education, but I can see that next year's first graders might survive because our kindergarten teachers expertly taught the basics.

MATT JANES
Jeffers Garden

Ample resources

With the abundance of road levy funds paid by rural property owners, there are ample resources to improve the (mostly) county-owned Pipeline Route for an emergency route for east Clatsop Coun-



ty's U.S. Highway 30.

Instead, the county wishes to upgrade the public works facility outside the tsunami inundation zone with Road District No. 1 funds. The catch is: public works is much more than roads and bridges.

Our surveyor, the Public Land Corner Preservation Fund, parks, the Westport Sewer Service District and the county engineer are components of the public works campus. How does a road fund end up funding these county offices that have little or nothing to do with roads?

Why is a levy not presented to the voters for this major capital improvement, as we have been for new schools, or the jail? Why are major planning strategies to remodel the county's zoning happening during COVID-19, with little public engagement?

To move public works to Warrenton Fiber's sort yard would require a zone exception, forest to industrial. The former plan was to site public works in the North Coast Business Park, which is zoned industrial.

The Road District No. 1 has become a multimillion-dollar cash cow for the county, and is currently being treated more like a real estate investment account than a public service for maintaining roads and bridges.

It's budget season. I encourage you to look at where your money is going and why. Developing an emergency route for Highway 30, not a palace for public works in a forest zone, seems a more dire need for road funds.

LINDA BRIM
Astoria