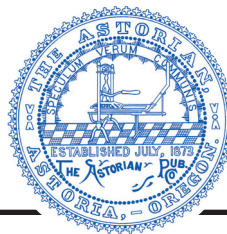


OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

Capitol closure will continue

When will the Oregon Capitol reopen to the public? First came the coronavirus, then the windows boarded up against protest violence, and now even more Capitol construction. Any chance of reopening the Capitol before the 2021 Legislature ends in roughly two weeks seems questionable, regardless of when Gov. Kate Brown lifts most statewide restrictions.



DICK HUGHES

The Legislature's coronavirus safety plan limits who is allowed in the Capitol so long as Marion County is in the Oregon Health Authority's extreme, high or moderate risk levels.

I asked Danny Moran, the communications director for state House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, about the decision-making process.

"As of the latest update this week, Marion County remains one of 11 high risk counties in the state," he said in an email. "When Marion County enters moderate risk status, an evaluation group consisting of the presiding officers, caucus leaders, and supported by the OHA, shall direct the Legislative Administrator to develop a framework — based on subgroup recommendations — to expand in-person access to the Capitol and increase staff presence in the building in anticipation of entering the lower risk category."

The Legislature, which is in charge of the Capitol, always could change that timeline. However, Democrats control the Legislature. So far, they have blocked Republicans' attempts to reopen the building or end Brown's pandemic state of emergency and curb her emergency directives.

Construction challenges await: As part of the ongoing Capitol upgrades, a construction fence blocks the main entrance. Piles of construction material sit between that fence and the front doors.

Once the 2021 Legislature leaves town, much of the building will be shut down for construction. The Capitol wings — legislative offices and hearing rooms — and underground parking garage will close July 10 for the rest of the year. Lawmakers have until July 9 to pack up their offices.



Sara Cline/AP Photo

Protesters gathered outside the Capitol in Salem in December as legislators met for a special session to discuss coronavirus relief measures.

Legislative committee sessions will continue via Microsoft Teams. However, the House and Senate chambers will be useable during this fall's expected special session on redistricting.

For the 2022 Legislature, committees are expected to be back to meeting in-person but in temporary hearing rooms. Legislators will be assigned parking spots in the Capitol Mall parking garage used by state employees.

Construction trucks, construction workers' personal vehicles and temporary "no parking" signs occupy many of the public parking spots around the Capitol.

Who oversees ethics?: In last week's Capital Chatter, I wrote about the inconsistent responses to allegations of questionable conduct by lawmakers.

It gets curiouser and curiouser.

Taking Mike Nearman's future out of the hands of the House Conduct Committee, Kotek appointed a special bipartisan committee to consider his expulsion. Creation of that House Special Committee on December 21, 2020, required a change in House rules.

In part, a separate committee was needed because it's unclear whether the

House Conduct Committee's purview is restricted to cases only involving harassment, discrimination and a hostile workplace, according to co-chair Rep. Julie Fahey, D-Eugene. However, an outside investigator's report on Nearman's actions already had been completed for the House Conduct Committee.

On Thursday afternoon, the special committee sent House Resolution 3 to expel Nearman to the House floor. The House voted 59 to 1 for expulsion, with the Independence Republican the only "no" vote.

Meanwhile, I'm still wondering ... who oversees legislative ethics? If not the House Conduct Committee, who?

By the way, nothing bars Nearman from running for election again, according to Dexter Johnson, the legislative counsel. He also could apply to fill his vacant seat.

Nothing to sneeze at: The majority of bills introduced each session never become law. Why do lawmakers propose them despite a zero chance of success? Sometimes, it's because the bill is a token effort on behalf of a constituent or interest group. Often, it's to start the long process

of educating colleagues about an issue and gaining their support.

The latter is the case with Rep. Bill Post's bumpy journey toward helping Oregonians gain faster access to Sudafed and other cold and allergy medications containing pseudoephedrine.

Assuming Gov. Brown signs House Bill 2648, as of next year Oregonians no longer will need a health provider's prescription to buy such medicines.

Oregon was the final state holding onto that requirement, a relic of law enforcement crackdowns on homemade meth labs, which use pseudoephedrine as an ingredient. Oregon remains awash in meth, but today it comes primarily from Mexican drug cartels. And last fall, Oregon voters decriminalized possession of small amounts of drugs, including meth.

Under HB 2648, medications containing pseudoephedrine will remain behind the pharmacy counter, with ID required for purchase. But a prescription won't be necessary.

Post, R-Keizer, first introduced the legislation in 2017. The bill didn't get a hearing. Two years later, the bill passed the House but floundered in the Senate. This year, Post worked hard to get bipartisan and bicameral sponsorship, including Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, and Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, and Rep. Andrea Salinas, D-Lake Oswego.

Most of the opposition had faded. HB 2648 passed 54 to 4 in the House and 27 to 2 in the Senate.

"I am really relieved and excited," Post said. "It was a 'team' win."

Close to the end: Under the Oregon Constitution, this year's Legislature must adjourn by 11:59 p.m. on June 27. In the meantime, legislators may continue to introduce bills. For example, Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, and a number of his Republican colleagues last week introduced House Bill 3407 to ban issuance of "vaccine passports."

Because sine die — the formal adjournment — is deemed imminent, committees are allowed to meet on only one hour's notice. If you're interested in a bill, keep watching the legislative website — oregonlegislature.gov — to track its status.

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

GUEST COLUMN

School mascot a reminder of our history

I have read that there is discussion at Astoria High School about whether the school mascot, the "Fishermen," needs to be "updated" to be more gender friendly.

While I no longer attend Astoria High, I would like to share my opinion on this matter. A school mascot often is chosen for something from the community and the Astoria mascot has deep roots in our community.



SUE DOWTY

It may be hard for high school students living in Astoria today to understand why over 100 years ago the selected mascot would be the Fishermen.

But, looking into the history of Astoria, we find the fishing industry was one of the first ones in this area.

This fishing led to a cannery being built in 1866 on the Columbia River. Soon, other canneries followed and, by 1883, there were over 55 canneries dotting the river.

Feeding these canneries were the fishermen who went out on the river. This industry brought people to Astoria — not only fishermen and cannery workers, but laborers and merchants whose businesses supported fishing.

Pacific salmon was among the most valuable fisheries in the world — centered here in Astoria. And it was the fisherman — with his ability to read the tides and weather, risk personal safety to find the salmon and work hard to bring in the fish — who was responsible for the growth of Astoria.

Perhaps now you can see why Fishermen was a natural choice when Astoria was selecting a mascot that represented the community.

Perhaps if I put this on a personal level, you can understand why Fishermen was a logical choice.

Granted, today you don't see — or smell — truckloads of frozen fish going up Commercial Street, but 50 years ago that was a common sight. While the smell was bad, my mom used to remind me that it smelled like money — fish was responsible for many jobs.



Alex Pajunas/The Astorian

'Stomper,' the Astoria High School Fishermen mascot, decorated the locker room building at the old John Warren Stadium.

It was for my family.

While my paternal grandparents came from Finland to farm in this area, it was my maternal grandparents that found love while fishing on the Columbia. Grandpa John was a fisherman one summer, where he met Grandma Sophia, who was a cook on a scow boat. She had been told by friends that it was the best way to "land" a husband, as fishermen would come unload their fish at the scow boat and then enjoy a hot meal cooked by the scow boat cook.

This is what happened to my grandparents and after that fishing season, they settled in Astoria. Grandpa John continued to be a fisherman for many years and he later became one of the first game wardens on the river.

I can remember Grandma Sophia saying that in Astoria's early days there were as many churches as bars — bars for the hard-working fishermen to blow off steam from their demanding jobs and churches for fishermen families to pray at as the fishermen's job was so high risk.

My parents, Dick and Helen Aho, were not fishermen, but they were merchants who benefited from selling salmon at their grocery store, Modern Cash Grocery on Commercial Street.

When the store was sold in the late 1960s, my dad went to work for Bumble Bee cold storage in the winter butchering frozen fish from the summer. Come April, my father would head up to the South Naknek in Alaska to manage the general store for Bumble Bee that served local and out-of-state fishermen.

It was from the efforts of those fishermen that enabled my sister and I to attend college. In the mid-1960s, my sister spent her summers working at Bumble Bee in Astoria. In the early 1970s, I worked at Bumble Bee in South Naknek.

For both of us, those paychecks helped put ourselves through college and made us into the teachers we were. As you can see, through three generations, the hard work of the fishermen of Astoria directly influenced my family.

I challenge those of you who are thinking it is time to change the Astoria mascot to ask your older neighbors to see if the fishing industry impacted them or their family.

Fishermen is also a term that represents character traits that both men and women can ascribe to — traits like preserving, stamina, guts, courage, knowledge, no fear of hard work, self-sacrifice and risk-taking.

I may be the odd one out, but during my time at Astoria High School from 1967 to 1970, at the end of a pep assembly or a game, when we were all asked to join in the singing of our alma mater and face Stomper, I would often think of the fishermen I know — parents of friends in the stands with me — and the risks they faced daily on the Columbia River.

I would also reflect on those traits they needed in fishing — traits that can benefit any of us. Mascots can give us a glimpse of the history of an area, but also inspire us; not just the athletes, but the fans as well. Fishermen does just that.

There is a concern in this present culture that mascots need to be gender friendly. In looking at the history of the Astoria fishing industry, there were always lady fishermen working alongside men in the fishing boats.

But if you want a more current response to the question of, "Do women prefer the term fisherwoman over fishermen?" check out the responses given by Toni Marsh — who first went to Alaska to work in the fishing industry in 1982 — to a Parade reporter. Marsh replied, "You earn respect as a male or a female fisher so the gender labels are not necessary. You work hard to be one of the crew and respected, not one of the 'guys' — there is a big difference."

So if women are actively fishing feel no need to be called fisherwomen, perhaps it might be time to put this desire to change the mascot of Astoria away and let the Fishermen remain — reminding generations to come how the fishing industry played a vital role in the development of our hometown.

Sue (Aho) Dowty was part of the Astoria High School Class of 1970. She taught middle school language arts, U.S. history and leadership in Beaverton before retiring.