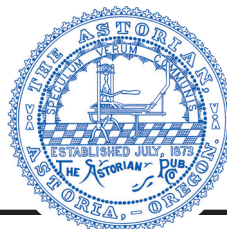


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## BEHIND THE NEWS

# ‘I learned that it’s a lot of work’

State Rep. Suzanne Weber’s first legislative session was shaped by the coronavirus pandemic.

Access to the Capitol was restricted to authorized personnel. Public testimony was delivered remotely. Votes were delayed by positive virus cases. “The Capitol being closed made it an almost eerie session,” Weber said.

A former Tillamook mayor, the Republican was elected last November in House District 32, which covers the North Coast. She is a vice chair of the House Committee on Education.

**DERRICK DePLEDGE**

In an interview, Weber discussed what she learned, the challenges of collaboration,

her vote against a key climate change bill, the House’s expulsion of Mike Nearman and her priorities next session.

**Q: This was your first legislative session in Salem. What did you learn that you didn’t know when you got elected?**

**A:** You never know what you don’t know until you get there.

I learned that it’s a lot of work. I used to quilt and sew and garden and all of these things and spend a lot of time reading. When I got into this position, I found out that all of those things were going to go by the wayside because the amount of reading and studying that I had to do was all-consuming.

I had to learn about all of the issues that were coming to us. And to be able to read the fine print and see how that was going to impact people.

The other thing that I learned — and I knew this, because it was very important to me, because of testifying in the past to different issues that I was passionate about, and then not having someone who had the ability to vote, vote how I wanted them to.

It was all of the time that I spent reading all of the emails and listening to the messages that people sent me with their opinions on how they felt and how those issues were going to impact them. And sorting them out and seeing how many there were of this and how many there were of that.

When it came time for committee work, it was a whole different set of bills that I would have to learn about and read all of the testimony that people had submitted in addition to all of the testimony that we also listened to with the (Microsoft) Teams and the Zoom meetings.

**Q: You campaigned last year as someone who could collaborate with Republicans and Democrats on behalf of the North Coast. How do you view that challenge now?**

**A:** People were surprised to find out I was a Republican, because what I think is important is that you work together to solve the issues that are in front of you.

That’s what I did in my time as mayor and as councilor, was I didn’t put any kind of a partisan assignment to anything. It’s what we needed as an area, how we needed to have our life enhanced, how these things were going



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**State Rep. Suzanne Weber, a Tillamook Republican, represents House District 32.**

to impact our area — not whether there was a D or an R in front of that person’s name.

I did find, however, that that was far more important to other people than it was to me. I thought that was kind of surprising because still, on the forefront of your mind, should be the impact that what we were doing had on rural and coastal Oregon.

One of the good examples that I can cite is the Coastal Caucus. That’s working both sides of the aisle, with Sen. (Betsy) Johnson being a Democrat, and Rep. (David) Gomberg being a Democrat, and all of the other folks up and down the coast having all of these similar issues that were coming before us.

We put that D and that R aside, also. We focused on whether it had to do with gillnetting or fishing or roads or ports. That’s what we focused on.

**Q: The Legislature passed House Bill 2021 to limit carbon emissions from the power grid by 2040, the biggest climate change legislation of the session. Pacific Power and Portland General Electric — the utilities most affected — both support the bill. But you and most other House Republicans voted against it. Why?**

**A:** My main focus is the coast and rural Oregon. And I see that this is going to raise the cost of electricity.

We’re already in a point where we’re recovering from the pandemic and the economic impacts of it. And, in doing that, how could we once again add something to people’s plates that they haven’t planned on?

And, yes, there will be some good things that come from that (bill). But I can also see — as my colleagues also saw — that there could be some downsides to access to electricity.

We had that heat event. I was in Albany, because I was staying with my daughter and then I could drive to Salem, and it was closer than driving from Tillamook to Salem on a daily

basis. And we had many times where the power went blank in the heat.

Are we going to have to look forward to that as we have additional climate change? There are going to be challenges in front of us. How are we going to work that all out?

Which is something that I have to also say is, there are so many bills that are introduced. They are debated. They are changed. They are amended. They are passed. But we really don’t know how they’re going to affect people until the time comes for it to take effect.

And then we find out that we have unintended consequences.

**Q: You were one of six House Republicans to vote with majority Democrats to weigh the punishment for former Rep. Mike Nearman, a Republican accused of letting protesters into the state Capitol during a special session in December. You also voted to expel Nearman. Why did you think a special committee was important when most of your Republican colleagues did not?**

**A:** I felt that that was important because the issues that were to be debated concerning Rep. Nearman were not Rule 27 (regarding legislative branch personnel). This was a special circumstance.

I thought that the man needed to be given the benefit of the doubt.

And I will tell you, until the recordings of the meetings that he had, I was still willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, because I watched that tape over and over and over again to see if there was just a hint of, ‘Oh, my goodness sakes. This is going to be a problem.’

No. He just walked out the door.

I also spent time talking with the people that were in the building at that time, and the fear that they had because of the people that were outside, and the results of what happened to the law enforcement people.

Some people experienced almost like a PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

And then we had the vote, which was very emotional, deciding that, yes, he should be expelled.

We were sitting in the chamber, getting ready for the vote. And the people were outside, and they were screaming and yelling. And so that was going on. I could empathize with the people that had been in the building at that particular time (back in December) as to what they were experiencing.

So we did the vote and then we went to leave the building. And I looked out of the window — my window looks directly down on the entrance to the parking garage — and all the folks had taken and gathered at the entrance and the exit to the parking garage.

So we went down into the garage — and there were about five of us that went just at that particular time — and the parking garage was filled with state police in their riot gear. And you could still hear the people screaming. And then they had to walk us out of there in our cars, and the people were in the streets and yelling.

So I can understand how the people felt that were inside the Capitol on that day (in December).

Mr. Nearman is a very intelligent man. He has brought a lot of good things in his position. But I think he made a big mistake.

**Q: What was something you wanted to accomplish that will have to wait until next session?**

**A:** I’m finding out that we have all kinds of infrastructure needs. And I am especially concerned about Highway 6 (a state route from Tillamook to near Banks).

That infrastructure package going forward is something that I’m really going to work hard for. If you go over Highway 6, you find that you have lots of places that are sinking. We have so few turnouts, passing lanes.

And the other thing that Sen. Johnson and I have been noticing in going over Highway 6 is the number of dead trees. And so the logging is something that has to be addressed — the fuel load.

We did experience the Tillamook Burn, and look at how that affected us and is still affecting us years and years and years afterwards. Could we possibly be in line for something like that again because of not addressing the timber issues along that highway?

And education. Education is something that I’m passionate about and I’m worried about funding. I wanted to make sure that we funded education first. And I’m going to continue to ask questions and look to see if the amount of money, which was less than what I felt was necessary to run our schools adequately without grants and all of the other things that you can pile on top that are not definitive.

I’m going to be watching to see how that all works out, because education — that’s our future, and that’s what we have to fund.

*Derrick DePledge is editor of The Astorian.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Don’t change the mascot

In recent weeks, much attention has been given to changing the Astoria High School mascot. A representative of our 1965 class — among the largest to have ever attended AHS — surveyed many of the remaining class members.

The majority are opposed to changing the mascot. It is the class position that fishermen, much like firemen and policemen, is a gender-neutral term.

The fisherman has been our symbol for a century. We believe it is inclusive of female, as well as male students, and should not be changed.

THELMA CRUSSELL ROSE  
Class of 1965 AHS Reunion  
Committee  
Seaside

### Make child care a priority

I am expressing my support for funding for child care purposes.

I have four kids and work as a farmworker. I have struggled to find care for my kids, especially when they were younger. Oregon needs funding that would help individuals like me access child care resources, without putting a burden on the families.

We need funding to pass a child care bill that makes care accessible for farmworkers and families who cannot afford child care at the moment. The pandemic

has brought the child care issue to light even more.

If I were paying for child care right now, I would have to decide between losing my home or paying outrageous prices. Not to mention, Oregon doesn’t have enough facilities to be able to help our families.

Our legislators must make child care a priority, and help families like mine that do not necessarily have access to child care. I wish I could stay with my kids at home; however, I cannot afford to, and I would like other families to have this opportunity and access to culture-based child care.

ROSA SOTELO  
Woodburn

### Surprise, surprise

The city of Gearhart spent considerable time and effort identifying locations for a replacement fire station. It was a timely and laudable exercise that considered comments and participation from the local citizens. The proposal ultimately failed.

Gearhart has reacted by endorsing a recently submitted proposal that significantly benefits a developer without benefit, courtesy and time to educate and solicit comment from citizens. The city sent a weak survey essentially asking: “We want it. Will you vote for it? And will you pay for it?”



The proposal allows the developer to double the amount of anticipated housing in that area (surprise, surprise!) effectively doubling the amount of water usage, and doubling the amount of septic, as well as burdening other infrastructure.

Historically, the Gearhart water system costs twice as much as proposed; it currently meets state standards, but has a disagreeable taste. Historically, discussions regarding a sewer system have been aggressively dodged.

Population demands on infrastructure have not been reanalyzed with foresight and awareness of global warming, increased population and increased vehic-

WE DON'T BELIEVE IN EVOLUTION EITHER!



ular traffic.

There are sufficient issues to be redressed before expanding Gearhart’s population. High-density population may be trendy, but may also be highly counterproductive.

Is the water system sufficient? Can the wells produce sufficiently in today’s warming climate and possibly drought conditions? With rising ocean levels, is the saline integration with groundwater or other effluent integration a consideration? What is the effect on traffic and other infrastructure considerations, etc.?

GARY LEWIN  
Gearhart