

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Oregon knows technology is fallible

Oregon doesn't have traffic crashes. But it does have computer crashes.

A routine bill in the 2021 Legislature would have changed the terms "accident" and "collision" in state traffic laws to "crash." However, House Bill 3050 died in the Senate Rules Committee, where state Senate President Peter



**DICK HUGHES**

Courtney, D-Salem, had inexplicably sent it in the Legislature's final month. Due to what was described as "some sort of technical glitch," it never appeared on the committee's list of bills to work.

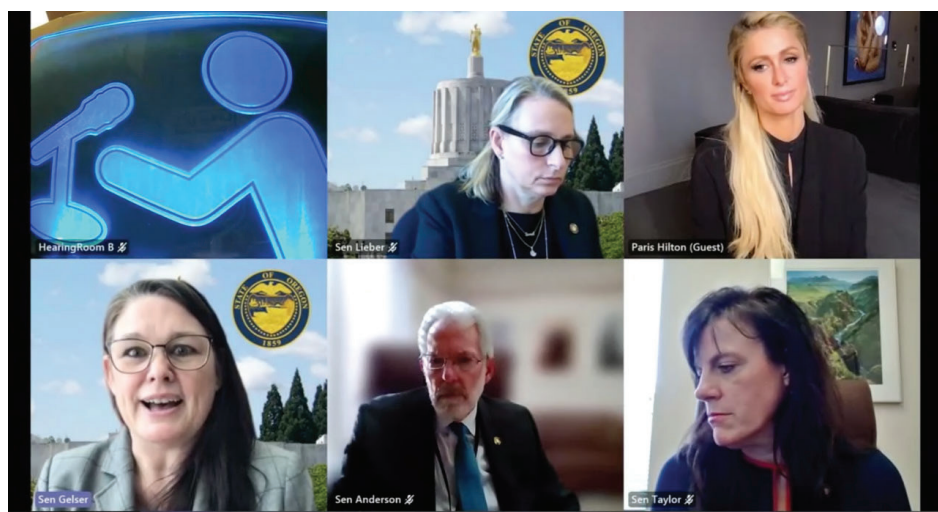
The 89-page bill itself is not a big deal,

although the term "accident" is considered outdated because most crashes are preventable — the result of human errors as opposed to accidental occurrences. What matters is that HB 3050's fate was not unique. Legislative staff said at least a few other bills also "disappeared" due to IT glitches.

Technology is fallible. Its shortcomings in the 2021 Legislature are nothing compared with other recent IT woes in state government — the new state phone system, an emergency radio network, the Cover Oregon health care site debacle and, of course, the highly publicized problems with the Oregon Employment Department systems.

Neither is overconfidence, or hubris, unique to the IT world. Remember the confidence with which Pat Allen, the director of the Oregon Health Authority, said in February 2020 that our state was well-prepared to handle this emerging coronavirus known as COVID-19?

Democrats touted the 2021 session



Paris Hilton, top right, a former reality television star who has become an activist for regulating youth treatment centers, testified remotely before a state Senate committee in March.

as the most accessible and transparent in Oregon history because people could testify on bills from anywhere in Oregon via videoconference or telephone. Sticking with that talking point, legislative leadership rarely acknowledged the shortcomings: Committee meetings were confined to specific time blocks, due to technology limits, which in turn limited the amount of public testimony and legislator discussion. Video feeds sometimes crashed. Committee members often were not viewable to the public, and sometimes not to each other. People frequently told of being unable to get through when it was their turn to testify. Written testimony and other documents sometimes became difficult to find as legislation moved along.

Though the Legislature's technology was vastly improved from years past, it widened the gap between the technological haves and have-nots. Oregonians needed some level of technical savvy to participate. They also required

reliable internet or phone connections, which are absent in much of rural Oregon. Viewing stations were set up outside the Capitol so anyone lacking internet access could watch the proceedings. As best I can recall, I never saw anyone using them.

Regardless of what the world may wish for, the old "normal" is forever gone. The pandemic inserted technology into our lives in valuable ways that may never disappear — from enabling remote participation in legislative hearings to conducting medical appointments via video, ordering online from restaurants and combining in-person and video worship services.

And so, the overriding technology question for the Legislature and Oregon Capitol staff can be divided into four parts: A) What lessons were learned this year? B) Who is compiling, evaluating and following up on those lessons? C) In addition, what ideas can Oregon borrow from other states, local govern-

ments and the private sector? D) What improvements will be made for the 2022 Legislature, and beforehand, and how will these improvements be effectively tested by real people across the state?

Here are two more questions about Capitol operations:

Are metal detectors coming to the Capitol?

The Oregon Capitol is reopening to the public. But what will the public experience be like, given that the main public entrances remain off-limits due to construction?

Meanwhile, the Legislature voted to ban individuals, including holders of concealed weapon permits, from carrying guns into the Capitol. That presumably would affect legislators or staff who regularly carry concealed weapons for self-defense. How will this be enforced, if it comes to that?

Three Republican representatives — E. Werner Reschke, of Klamath Falls, David Brock Smith, of Port Orford, and recently ousted Mike Nearman, of Independence — filed an initiative on June 2 to overturn that Senate Bill 554, which also includes other firearms restrictions. They have until Sept. 24 to collect 74,680 valid signatures from voters and force an election.

The Legislature, not the governor, is in charge of the Capitol. If SB 554 does take effect this fall, will the Legislature install metal detectors, institute searches of people entering the building or enact other security measures? The front of the Capitol already resembles a fortress with concrete security bollards blocking the drive-thru where cars and buses would unload visiting school children, tourists, demonstrators and others.

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

## LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.



## GUEST COLUMN

# Some bumper car therapy

Over the last 40 years, our family has vacationed at the same place on the beach. While the buildings have been refurbished, the complex remains largely unchanged. The exception was last year when the COVID pandemic shut down travel and beach lodging.

Over the years, our entertainment has changed a lot. We still swim, jump the waves and build sandcastles, but our board games, puzzles and playing cards have been replaced with kids' electronic tablets, smartphones and movies downloaded from the internet.

We still take lots of pictures, but rather than taking them to film processing centers, we use cellphone cameras to instantly text and post photos on Facebook.

As long as we remember, the small Seaside arcade featuring a miniature golf course, Tilt-a-Whirl and bumper cars, has been popular and profitable.

Riding bumper cars is more than entertainment, for us it is annual ritual that is highly therapeutic. It is family building.

There are no psychological studies, as far as we know, analyzing the benefits of "bumper car therapy." However, from practical experience, we know driving bumper cars is a safe and an effective way to get rid

of frustrations and angst.

Bumper cars became popular in 1920. The models in Seaside haven't changed in years. Each vehicle is surrounded by a rubber bumper and drivers ram each other as they travel. The technology is anything but high-tech.

The drivers control an accelerator and a steering wheel as they scoot across a metal floor. The 1940s style metal cars are powered by small electric motors. The cars are multidirectional and can turn on a dime. They are even made to spin.

The operators monitor the brisk action and adjust the flow of electricity to unsnarl pileups and to prevent injuries from head-on collisions.

Bumper cars are contact entertainment and everyone is out for him or herself. It is sort of a controlled demolition derby where the only thing dented is one's pride.

In bumper cars, every driver is equal. You pay your money and the only difference in the cars is their color. It is impossible to text while driving. Drivers can't avoid getting hit and once the bumping starts, it is highly contagious.

Bumper cars can humble even the most powerful people, but after the ride ends drivers walk away more relaxed and smiling. They have something to talk and laugh about for years.

"Dodgems" as the British call them, may make a comeback. They are a way for



Bumper cars in Seaside.

people of all ages to just have fun without expensive electronic gadgets.

The nice thing about the small amusement center in Seaside is its rides are affordable. Time and computerization have not eclipsed bumper cars.

There could be a new market which could return bumper cars' popularity to the heydays nearly 90 years ago. Think of their therapeutic benefits as a way for dueling politicians, pandering media types, feuding families and opposing groups to unlock horns.

Perhaps, they could eliminate the bitter political polarization just as the famous poker games between President Ronald Reagan and House Speaker Tip O'Neill did

in the early 1980s.

For a few seconds, imagine Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, Mitch McConnell, Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer and Donald Trump banging into each other in bumper cars in Seaside. It would be international headline news.

A bumper car ride or two might even bring some harmony — at least for 10 minutes. Given what's going on today, it's worth a try.

Don C. Brunell is a business analyst, writer and columnist. He retired as president of the Association of Washington Business, the state's oldest and largest business organization, and now lives in Vancouver, Washington.