

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

Courtney reflects on changing government

Want to improve Oregon government? Elect some Democratic legislators in Eastern Oregon. Elect more Republicans in the Portland metro area.

So says state Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem. When he first entered the Oregon House in 1981, its rolls included Democrats from Eastern Oregon and the south coast. Republicans represented parts of Beaverton, Portland and Eugene.



DICK HUGHES

Unless Oregonians are represented by people like them, Courtney said, it's hard to create the feeling that the Legislature cares about them. However, Oregon's geographic divide

has widened through the decades.

"Clearly the legislative body that I was in in '81 is not there today. It's a different body and it will be. It's a different generation of legislators. The process and the institution has changed since we have annual sessions. I think the advocacy community is much more active now and more controlling than it was," Courtney said.

"I don't think anywhere the process or institution is revered as much as it was, I really don't, whether Congress or whether it's the Legislature."

Courtney, 78, is the longest-serving presiding officer in Oregon history. He is a moderate amid a Senate Democratic Caucus that is increasingly liberal and tied to urban Oregon.

With the Oregon Capitol now reopened to the public, Courtney and I sat down last week in the basement press room for a wide-ranging conversation. He reflected on this year's legislative session, rued the expanding role of the executive branch, channeled former Republican U.S. Sen. Bob Dole, of Kan-



Molly J. Smith/Statesman Journal

State Sen. Peter Courtney, a Salem Democrat, is president of the Senate.

sas, about societal changes, lamented a "me first" attitude in American society and decried the recent losing streak by his beloved Boston Red Sox.

This year's Legislature might rank among the most fractured in state history. Courtney described the session as yielding wins for Democrats, but not victories for the legislative process.

Statistically, it is accurate to say that most bills passed on a bipartisan basis. That is because most are run-of-the-mill measures. Senate Bill 762, on wildfire prevention and recovery, was the rare contentious legislation that in the end gained broad support. Meanwhile, many Republican bills were sidelined without getting to a vote.

Senate Democrats often were divided internally between moderates and the increasingly influential progressives. Sen. Brian Boquist, of Dallas, and Sen. Art Robinson, of Cave Junction, broke from Republicans and formed the Independent Caucus. The remaining Senate Republicans also were split, with some favoring walkouts and others not. If Courtney worked collaboratively with Senate Republican Leader Fred Girod, of Lyons, each would run into trouble with one side of their caucus.

The Oregon House had its own issues.

Going into the 2021 session, Courtney recognized Senate Republicans' lingering anger over a lot of things. Still,

he was rattled when they didn't show up one day for a floor session, depriving the Senate of a quorum to conduct business.

"I then realized everything I worried about could happen. And the Democrats in my caucus, many of them didn't care. They just said, 'We'll do this and we'll do that.' Well, you couldn't do it because they wouldn't be there to let you do it. i.e., put a ballot measure on getting rid of the quorum," he said.

Courtney is all about team; and to him, the team is the full Legislature. He mourns the lack of loyalty to the team, whether in college sports or politics, and the accompanying decline in respect for traditional institutions.

"If you're more important than the team, then the thing comes apart. And right now, the team doesn't mean anything except 'me.' Every part of your life, you're part of a team, even your marriage you're part of a team. And if you don't approach it that way, then in effect you destroy the most important things in the way we live and how our society needs to function," he said.

"Increasingly, there's no loyalty to the team. There's no respect. Many people think, 'Well, I really don't need the team, I am so significant, my ideas are so good or I've got so much talent.' It's very dangerous."

As examples of past legislative leadership, Courtney cited Democrats Vera Katz and Hardy Myers, of Portland, and Republicans Nancy Ryles, of the Beaverton area, Paul Hanneman, of Cloverdale, and Ray Baum, of La Grande.

However, now Courtney foresees the executive branch — the governor — continuing to amass power through executive orders and strong agency heads but at the expense of the legislative branch.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

At it again

The Port of Astoria is at it again. According to Frank Spence, Port Commission president, the public couldn't possibly understand "in-depth" the "dangers" to Port infrastructure presented by the reintroduction of sea otters on the Oregon Coast.

No, we are the same blind and inept folks who couldn't understand the need for a liquefied natural gas plant in our county, or the need for a log loading dock in our midst.

Let me say this in plain language. The Port has demonstrated, once again, that by endorsing the letter drafted by the West Coast Seafood Processors Association, without calling for public input, they are acting strictly according to self-interest, transparency be damned.

Ironically, it was money that led to the extinction of sea otters in Oregon 150 years ago, when they were hunted for their pelts. It's money again that is behind the effort to prevent their reinstatement.

The general public has been supporting the effort by members of the Siletz tribe to reinstate sea otters. Among the various ecological benefits they would bring are that a stable sea otter population could significantly improve the abundance of salmon.

Otters eat sea urchins. Without the otters to reduce their population, the urchins, which eat kelp, have drastically reduced Oregon's kelp forests. Without the kelp to hide them, salmon fry are more vulnerable to predators, causing fewer to achieve adulthood.

I challenge the Port to hold a public meeting to discuss the "dangers" otters present to Port infrastructure.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

Daily assault

Are you troubled that a violent mob tried to stop Congress from performing its constitutional duty of counting the electoral votes on Jan. 6?

Alarmed that an ex-president continues to lie, declaring without any evidence that he won an election he lost by seven million votes?

Concerned that Republican-led states are changing laws to make it more difficult for citizens to vote, claiming to prevent fraud, where no fraud has been shown to exist?

Feeling unnerved those same states are also making laws that will give oversight and certification of ballots to partisan political parties, taking that power away from independent civil servants?

Are you perhaps angry, distraught or fearful that our most fundamental dem-

ocratic institution of free and fair elections, and the peaceful transfer of power, is under daily assault?

Well, there is something you can do, and it will take less than five minutes of your time. Call Sen. Jeff Merkley, and thank him for being a lead sponsor of S.1, the For the People Act.

This Senate bill sets federal guidelines across the land to protect voting rights, enhance voting security, end gerrymandering, address dark money in politics and enforce ethics laws.

Then call Sen. Ron Wyden and make sure he, too, knows you support S.1. They have to hear from us.

Don't look back in four years and wonder, "what just happened?" We cannot allow our democracy to fall on our watch.

Call your senators today.

ERIC HALPERIN
Gearhart

Brokenness

It seems as though we are living in a time of brokenness. Many of us are facing some sort of brokenness: Loss of loved ones, loneliness, depression, sickness, separations, broken promises.

So is there a solution for brokenness? In the old English nursery rhyme: "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall/ Humpty Dumpty had a great fall/ All the king's horses and all the king's men/ Couldn't put Humpty together again."

So is there a way to put our brokenness

together again? Yes! Our creator says: "I make all things new;" "I will heal all your diseases;" I will redeem your life from the pit;" "I will heal your broken hearts;" "Call on me and I will answer."

As a mariner, I've experienced my share of brokenness, and I found that I can't sail any ship alone. I need to take on board the master pilot, who guides me through all brokenness. Faced with brokenness? Why not try it!

JAMES BERNARD
Warrenton

Downward spiral

This letter is in response to Joshua Marquis' letter, "Junkie's paradise," printed July 31.

Marquis, thank you for your service as district attorney of Clatsop County for a number of years. In my opinion, you did a very fine job, working to uphold the law in this county, making this county a better place to live and raise kids.

I have a lot respect for people like Marquis, who have seen firsthand the negative effects of bad legislation, and are speaking up about it. Nice job, Marquis. Thank you for your voice!

I hope that you inspire more people who are seeing this downward spiral firsthand to speak up, as well.

SETH WHITSETT
Warrenton



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.