

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Oregon is too divided

Oregon is above average. Many Oregonians are not. It all depends on where they live. “The economic fortunes of our citizens vary widely depending on geography,” former Secretary of State Phil Keisling told the Salem City Club this month.

In 2020, Oregon ranked slightly above the middle of the pack nationally in terms of per capita personal income. But the economic prosperity is ill-distributed around the state. “At no time in Oregon history have the gaps between the richest and the poorest counties been as large as they are today,” Keisling said.

In his City Club talk via Zoom, Keisling discussed Oregon’s changing demographics and their effects on the state politics. The same economic, political, educational and geographic divides that afflict Oregon are present nationally. As journalist Elliott Morris recently said, “the life experiences of people in rural and urban areas are worlds apart, and politicians have exploited this divergence.”

Yet Keisling said the biggest divide may be generational: the inability to buy a house or to obtain an affordable higher education, regardless of whether a person lives in northeast Portland or in Grant County.

Across Oregon, there is a sense of

peppiness, estrangement and polarization. Keisling offered antidotes, the most intriguing one involving forests. Before I get to those ideas, let me tell you a bit about Keisling.

He remains a staunch Democrat yet not a lockstep one. He favors doing away with the traditional party primary elections, whose outcomes are determined by the older, most partisan voters in each party. These days, more voters are shunning the two major parties than are joining them. Keisling favors ranked-choice voting in elections.

As secretary of state in 1991, Keisling handled redistricting in an even-handed way, angering fellow Democrats who wanted him to take partisan advantage. This year, he said, he was “gob-smacked” that legislative Democrats redrew the 5th Congressional District so it extended from Portland to Bend.

“It is long past time to take redistricting out of the hands of partisan legislators, whether it’s Republican or Democrat, and put it in the hands of an independent commission,” he told the City Club.

“We’re at a point in our politics today that both sides are so locked into doing

everything they can to get their partisan advantage that they’re not only repelling most voters – who don’t even want to belong to these organizations – but we’ve gotten into an ever-escalating war not unlike the Soviet-U.S. arms race ... where it’s just going to get more and more brutal, difficult and senseless.”

OK, so much for his depressing, albeit accurate, indictment of current politics. Let’s get to his prescriptions.

Public policy involves focusing on two or three important things and doing them well. Keisling said that should start with improving reading proficiency for Oregon third graders, whose scores are deplorably low yet are key indicators for educational success. Overall, Oregon ranks 40th nationally for education, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The most important question that Keisling wants Oregonians to ask candidates for public office next year is, how would you improve third graders’ reading proficiency? He said success or failure on that front should be the only criterion for deciding whether the governor deserves reelection four years later.

Students who read better do better

in school, which leads to greater career opportunities, which leads to higher incomes, and which helps overcome generational, geographic and social divides. Toward that end, Keisling advocates having the state provide free preschool for 4-year-olds. Oregon trails even West Virginia and Oklahoma in that regard, despite abundant evidence showing the critical importance of early childhood education.

Keisling’s most intriguing proposal is “Trees, trees and more trees.”

Oregonians across the state are unfamiliar with one another, yet they share a common love for the outdoors. Meanwhile, millions of forest acres have never been properly replanted. Keisling proposes putting thousands of young adults to work restoring and rehabilitating the forests. That investment in a working landscape would reduce the odds of catastrophic fires and benefit the natural resources economy.

There would be another payoff, one equally valuable. By working side by side, a younger generation of Oregonians would get to know, understand and appreciate each other — before their views hardened into partisanship.

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



**DICK HUGHES**

**Former Secretary of State Phil Keisling proposes putting thousands of young adults to work restoring and rehabilitating the forests.**

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Special thanks

I would like to thank all volunteers in Clatsop County who work hard to take care of us. The COVID-19 booster shot people were wonderful. We are lucky to have the volunteers to put this together at the fairgrounds. And, a special thanks to the young man who pushed my friend in a wheelchair all over.

ARDATH FINUCANE  
Warrenton

### We wish her the best

We, the board members of Consejo Hispano, thank Jenny Pool Radway for her service as executive director for the past two years.

During that time she expanded funding and created partnerships, dramatically increasing services to Latinx communities in Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook and Pacific Counties. Most notably, Consejo Hispano was named the fiscal agent for the \$10 million Small Enterprise Fund, part of the Oregon Worker Relief Fund, established by the Oregon State Legislature for families and businesses statewide who didn’t qualify for federal CARES Act funds.

Her tenure began just prior to the pandemic, and she and the entire staff have responded creatively and exhaustively to address issues during this stressful time. As Jenny transitions to her new position as the executive director of Causa Oregon, we wish her the best.

Board member Alex Carney will serve as the interim executive director while we conduct a local and national search to fill

the position.

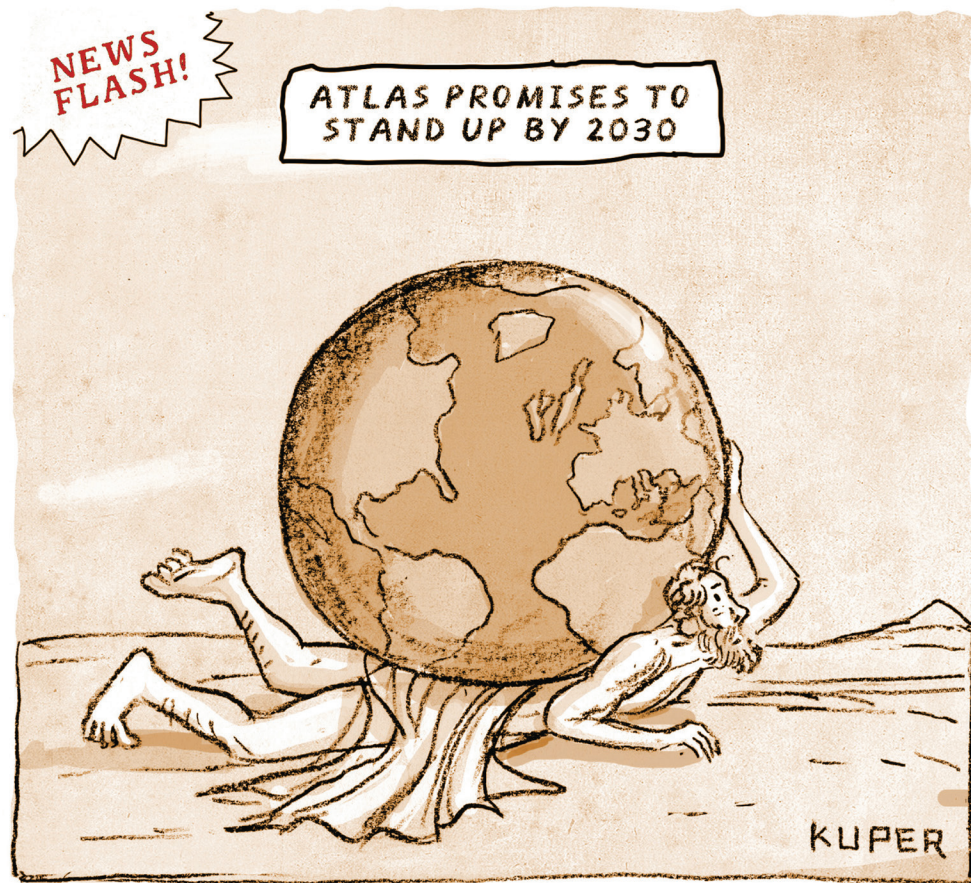
Finally, we sincerely thank the rest of the incredible staff members who have worked hard during this pandemic to provide needed services for the Latinx community in the four counties Consejo Hispano serves. Aitor Porro, Diana Niño, Minerva Moulin, Erin Buchta-Porro, Adriana Caron, Sam Seulean, Nayeli Cruz, Guadalupe Beltran, Kayla Slovak, Lisette Santiago, Rosa Arreola and Monica Moulin have truly extended themselves during these trying times to serve our community.

ROSA GILBERT,  
LYNETTE VILLAGOMEZ, SANDE BROWN, JOYCE SENIOR, KARINA REARDON, MARSHA PACK  
Board of Directors, Consejo Hispano  
Astoria

### Gracias

Los miembros de la junta del Consejo Hispano, agradecemos a Jenny Pool Radway por su servicio como directora ejecutiva durante los últimos dos años. Durante ese tiempo, amplió los fondos y aumentó drásticamente los servicios en las comunidades latinas de Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook y Pacific. En particular, Consejo Hispano fue nombrado agente fiscal de \$10 millones del Fondo de Pequeñas Empresas, establecido en Oregon para familias y negocios que no califican para fondos federales de la ley CARES.

Su mandato comenzó justo antes de la pandemia, y ella y todo el personal de Consejo Hispano han respondido de manera creativa y exhaustiva para abordar



los problemas durante este momento estresante. Le deseamos a Jenny lo mejor en su nuevo puesto como directora ejecutiva de Causa Oregon.

Alex Carney, miembro de la junta, se desempeñará como director ejecutivo interino mientras se realiza una búsqueda local/nacional para llenar el puesto.

Finalmente, agradecemos sinceramente a los increíbles miembros del personal que han trabajado arduamente durante esta pandemia para brindar los servicios necesarios para la comunidad latina en los cuatro condados a los que sirve el Con-

sejo Hispano. Aitor Porro, Diana Niño, Minerva Moulin, Erin Buchta-Porro, Adriana Caron, Sam Seulean, Nayeli Cruz, Guadalupe Beltran, Kayla Slovak, Lisette Santiago, Rosa Arreola y Monica Moulin realmente se han extendido durante estos tiempos difíciles para servir a nuestra comunidad.

ROSA GILBERT,  
LYNETTE VILLAGOMEZ, SANDE BROWN, JOYCE SENIOR, KARINA REARDON, MARSHA PACK  
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