

# OPINION



# the Astorian

editor@dailyastorian.com

Founded in 1873

**KARI BORGEN**  
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Editor

**SHANNON ARLINT**  
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**JOHN D. BRUIJN**  
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## GUEST COLUMN

# Legislation can move at a glacial pace

Good ideas can take years to become law. A prime example is the recently passed federal infrastructure package, which will send billions of dollars to Oregon.

"This will deal with problems I've been talking about forever," said U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, a Democrat from Springfield.

Another example: It took 20 years for DeFazio to unlock the federal Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, where billions of unspent tax dollars piled up. Last December, Congress finally acted. That money now will go to port maintenance in Oregon and other states, including badly needed



**DICK HUGHES**

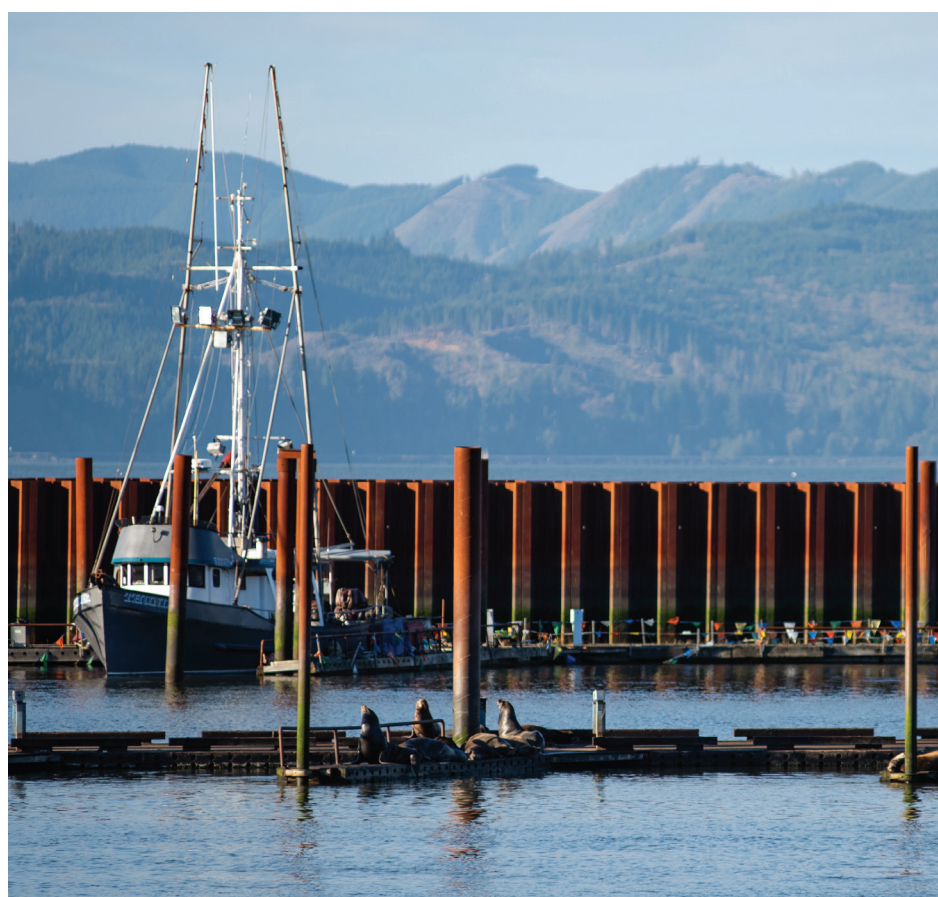
dredging and jetty repairs.

State legislation can follow an equally torturous path, as good ideas — or bad ones, depending on your perspective — take years to gain momentum.

Such is the story of our vote-by-mail system, which was blocked at times by influential Democrats or Republicans, depending on which party held power. The 1981 Oregon Legislature approved the first test of mail balloting for local elections. However, it wasn't until 1998, after a veto by Gov. John Kitzhaber and other legislative defeats, that Oregon voters overwhelmingly passed a ballot measure expanding vote-by-mail to all elections.

Why does public policy take so long? That is life in America. The 19th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1920, finally granting women the right to vote, but only after an effort that took nearly 100 years.

As society evolves, so do political and public sentiments. Some ideas need to marinate and achieve the appropriate balance, if there is one. Others linger almost on life support until opponents give up, move on or are outmaneuvered. Such was the fate of the Oregon School for the Blind in Salem after decades of discussion about its cost, educational approach and deteriorating facilities. Should it shut down? Should it be moved across town to the Oregon School for the Deaf campus?



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**A federal infrastructure package could send billions to Oregon.**

As far back as the 1980s, closure-oriented legislators were no match for one watchful woman who resolutely lobbied against such talk. By 2009, the tide turned. Despite some residual opposition, the Legislature defunded the 137-year-old residential school, whose population had declined to about two dozen blind or visually impaired students. The school facilities occupied a prime site in central Salem adjacent to Salem Hospital, which then bought the property for expansion.

This year's Legislature followed similar paths, passing policies that previously produced scant progress. With only 11 dissenting votes, legislators approved a rewrite of the official state song, "Oregon, My Oregon," to eliminate language deemed racist. State Rep. Sheri Schouten, D-Beaverton, was derided when she first raised the idea. Not this year as part of the national reck-

oning on racial justice.

Another instance is that departing Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer, succeeded in undoing a 2005 law that required prescriptions to buy cold or allergy medications containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine.

One of the most controversial bills this year — requiring safe storage of firearms and banning almost anyone from carrying them in the Oregon State Capitol — finally made it through the Legislature, albeit on a near party-line vote. Senate Bill 554 was anathema to gun-rights advocates, yet their subsequent efforts to refer the bill to voters fizzled. So did recall attempts against Republican senators accused of abetting the bill's passage by not walking out.

As for DeFazio's infrastructure legislation, he set the stage only to see some key parts watered down or discarded in negotiations among President Joe

Biden's administration, two recalcitrant Democratic senators and 10 Republican senators.

With Gov. Kate Brown in attendance, Biden signed the roughly \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act last week. It has parts but not all of what DeFazio envisioned, especially in climate protections.

"This is not the bill I would have written," DeFazio said in a Zoom press conference with journalists this month. "Good legislation takes time."

During the tenure of President Barack Obama, a fellow Democrat, DeFazio worked toward an even more ambitious infrastructure plan. DeFazio said the Obama administration killed it, fearing the federal gas tax might rise for the first time since 1993.

Subsequently, Republican President Donald Trump talked with DeFazio and others about a \$2 trillion infrastructure package. Yet two weeks later, according to DeFazio, Trump said he wouldn't work with Democrats if they were going to investigate him. Still, the House passed DeFazio's INVEST in America Act, although it never became law.

Now that Oregon governments know the infrastructure money is on its way, some transportation, sewer, drinking water and other projects can get underway next year.

**A bottom ranking for Brown:** Oregon has the least-popular governor in the nation, according to a ranking from Morning Consult. Credit goes to John Horvick of Portland-based DHM Research for spotting this.

Republican governors dominate the higher rankings. Vermont Gov. Phil Scott tops the chart with a 79% approval rating. At the other end is Gov. Brown, a Democrat, at 43%. Scott, a Republican, does well because he has solid support among Democrats and independents in his state.

The rankings for Oregon's neighboring governors are California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, at 56%; Idaho Gov. Brad Little, a Republican, at 55%; Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, at 55%; and Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak, a Democrat, at 50%.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Well, actually

The Astorian has repeated an error it first misreported 10 years ago. The Nov. 16 "Water Under the Bridge" column reprints a report from 2011 ascribing the song "Little Boxes" to Pete Seeger.

Actually, "Little Boxes" was written in 1962 by Malvina Reynolds, and covered by Seeger in 1963. The Daly City subdivision described in the song is still visible from Interstate 280 south of San Francisco.

MICHAEL FALLERT  
Warrenton

### Wow

I read with amusement and bewilderment in the New York Post, an article written by Jack Morphet on Nov. 7, stating that "President Joe Biden let out a long, loud fart while speaking with the Duchess of Cornwall at the COP26 summit." Wow, is this presidential? Do we have a commander in chief or a commander of farts?

As reported, Camilla Parker Bowles "hasn't stopped talking about" the 78-year old's "long fart." An informed source on site stated the pair were making small talk at the global climate change event in Scotland when our president broke wind. The source described it as "long and loud and impossible to ignore." It must have made quite an impression on the British monarchy!

President Biden was having quite a day, as earlier he appeared to nod off during the opening remarks at the climate change conference, while the speaker was warning that global warming threatened "our ability to grow food, and even to survive."

Unfortunately, the Democrats are using climate change, racism and COVID-19 to destroy our country and keep us all afraid of the next big disaster to strike us. Their goal is to control us, and remove our freedoms, and they will succeed if you allow them! Please, do not be like Sleepy Joe!

GREG KENNEY  
Astoria

### Fragile

Thank you for helping me prove my point, Robert Liddycoat, with your letter "Distrust" (The Astorian, Nov. 9).

While we citizens bicker amongst our-



**"Relax, we'll be addressing this by 2030."**

## 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

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selves about who, where, how and why our beliefs and our loyalties to freedom lie without listening to one another, the moguls who make money from that hate and discontent make more money.

A free democracy is exactly like a mar-

riage. It has good and bad times. There are spikes and valleys of emotions. But at the end of most every day, you learn to agree to disagree and say, "I love you," because you know that is the right thing to do. Our society is behaving like a spiteful divor-

ing couple. Each side, red and blue, want their partner to suffer and be left on the curb.

Any media that promotes proven facts to be false, and uses gossip as evidence of proof, is undermining the integrity of that free democracy. Everything worth having is worth working extremely hard to obtain, but even more difficult to keep.

It is time for this "blue said, red said" crap to stop, and seek counsel. A third and more independent party may be able to help a strained relationship learn to listen to others. It would at least get some adults in the room.

One thing I'm sure of is too many Americans have lost their perspective of what is at stake and, in today's social atmosphere, how fragile free democracy truly is right now!

TROY HASKELL  
Astoria