

OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

There is no back to normal

It was supposed to be over long ago. Only a month or two. Then life would be back to normal. Back to eating in open, pleasantly staffed restaurants. Back to hanging out with family and friends in real life instead of over the internet. Back to sitting at office desks and wearing proper business attire. Back to attending sporting events in person without donning masks and showing proof of vaccinations.



DICK HUGHES

Instead, the COVID-19 pandemic rolls on — like a roller coaster with its ups and downs, bringing out the best in Oregonians. And sometimes the worst.

We laud health care workers for their skills and endurance amid long hours. Then a few of us turn around and question whether these dedicated medical personnel did all they could to prevent our loved one's demise from COVID-19.

We finally appreciate that store clerks are essential workers. Yet if a store runs out of goods, some of us turn surly, or worse. We unload our wrath on clerks, expecting them to exert a mystical power that undoes the global supply chain bottlenecks.

We love being back in eateries and drinking establishments. But some of us ignore the national labor shortage and blame the existing workers if short staffing delays our meal. Indeed, blaming seems ever more popular, pushing aside gratitude.

Amid all this, we give mere lip service to honoring our democracy, as our minds fall victim to loudmouth extremists across the political spectrum.

Yes, we long for a return to normal. But that normal no longer exists, and never will. There is no going back. The pandemic has inexorably altered how we go about our daily lives, from how



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Vaccines against COVID-19, while imperfect, have proved effective.

we shop to how we worship and how we obtain health care.

There is nothing to be gained by pining for the past. But there is room for gratitude. In fact, there is much for which to be thankful, although not always at first glance.

Let us start with the reality that being governor amid a pandemic has proved

a thankless job. Yet two dozen men and women already are running in hopes of winning that job. Some are well-qualified, giving Oregonians a wide range of choices among political insiders and outsiders in next year's elections. There will be change, but how much? As the two main political parties turn ever-more-partisan, will this be the era

when Oregonians go independent?

And while the labor shortage has created havoc, the income gap among Oregonians has narrowed a bit. As employers have increased pay, especially at the bottom rungs, workers earning less than \$20 an hour are experiencing real economic improvement despite inflation.

Along with an economic reckoning has come a refocus on family. Some employers have adjusted their work requirements and schedules to make them more family-friendly, the jobs more appealing and, ultimately, the workers more productive and loyal. Meanwhile, there is continued progress toward increasing access to decent, affordable child care throughout the state and the nation, enabling more parents to enter the workforce.

Schools have innovated. Distance learning was difficult for many students and underscored the divide between the broadband haves and the have nots. Yet some students flourished with distance learning, underscoring the need for a rich array of teaching methods.

Health care providers have expanded doctor visits by telephone and video, cutting the wait time for many appointments. Yet access to care remains an issue. Vaccines, while imperfect, have proved effective. New medicines may further reduce the severity of COVID-19 symptoms — if Oregon can get those prescriptions to newly diagnosed patients in time.

We could go on and on.

Our resilience has been tested. Our nerves have been frayed. Yet our nimbleness and creativity have been unleashed.

And there's even a chance that we can learn to be a bit nicer to each other, despite our personal frustrations and political differences. For that, we give thanks.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fallacy

A recent letter, "Begging" (Nov. 20), suggests that The Astorian will be automatically compromised by obtaining government tax credits.

It conceives of the government as monolithic, and having one will. The overheated fulmination, whose author seems not to know the parlous situation of print journalism, but rather to prefer The Astorian to wither away with his own take on honor, appears to be unduly grounded in the fallacy of the "deep state" and its dictatorial nature and power.

Anyone familiar with bureaucracies in the free world knows that different departments — even different units in the same departments — function symbiotically at best. They are frequently antagonistic, if not inimical to one another: That is why they function less optimally for us than we might like. The U.S. government and its bureaucracies do not act as one person, with one ideology.

Again, there are many ways of whistleblowing on bureaucrats who act out of line, including dictatorially. Witness the myriad stories of Trump administration dysfunction, whose functionaries became tattlers. One would imagine that any newspaper would be at the head of the line of whistleblowing, should abuse occur.

The U.S. isn't post-Weimar Germany, the USSR-becomes-Russia or China; its bureaucracy is made up of freer thinking individuals who have the means to highlight abuses of power. Long story short, The Astorian getting government tax credits is hardly going transform it into the bullhorn for the deep state which, of course, only exists in the minds of the willfully ignorant or paranoid.

BRIAN LAVELLE
Astoria

Dubious document

Planning Commissioner Robert Stricklin's refusal to knuckle under to the Clatsop County Board of Commission comes at a time when the board "is asserting more control over the Planning Commission," according to The Astorian (Oct. 30).

Stricklin's dismissal from the Planning Commission is a troubling development, with potentially serious consequences for the county.

Stricklin is widely known as a fair-minded, forthright and savvy citizen, who has devoted much of his time to helping the community with regional planning issues.



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.

When someone with his expertise and service record calls foul on the board for asserting what he has described as their "command-and-control" stance vis-à-vis the Planning Commission, we all should listen.

The board decided to require Planning Commission members to sign a document defining their role as "assisting the board ... in order to enhance and augment (the board's) goals as identified in the adopted strategic plan."

The document is clearly at odds with

the Planning Commission's traditional role as an independent citizen body whose bylaws define that role "to make recommendations to the board," not enhancing and augmenting the board's goals.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

Predatory capitalism

All seniors: Ads for Medicare Advantage Plans are all over TV. These

plans are private insurance plans that are allowed, by law, to be sold under the Medicare Advantage label. Advantage plans may offer benefits for hearing, vision and dental coverage, as well as lower cost, to make them more attractive.

Elimination of traditional Medicare is the long game plan for private insurance companies. When enough eligible senior Americans sign up for Medicare Advantage, Medicare will be eventually bankrupted by the ever-shrinking pool of Americans who sign up for Medicare. Already, about 40% of seniors have opted for these plans. At 50%, Medicare is doomed.

Eventually, Medicare will approach insolvency, and be unable to pay claims. Our legislators will complain that another "government program," another "bloated bureaucracy," has failed. They will shout "Medicare is a failure! It must be struck, root and branch, from American law!"

When Medicare is finally gone altogether, expect that Medicare Advantage coverages will decline, and prices will rise. American predatory capitalism at its finest. Yay!

TERRY McCLURE
Astoria