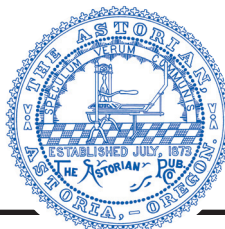


OPINION



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DeFazio proud of his legacy

To understand Peter DeFazio, political scientist Jim Moore suggests looking back to the congressman's ads when running for the U.S. Senate in 1995.

The ads were pointed, acerbic, funny — and didn't mind hitting his opponent. DeFazio lost that Democratic primary anyway to Ron Wyden, who went on to fill Bob Packwood's vacant seat in the Senate.



DICK HUGHES

That's DeFazio, of Springfield, an outspoken progressive Democrat as proud of his hard-fought losses as he is of his political victories.

The representative from Oregon's 4th Congressional District rocked the political landscape last week by announcing he would retire when his 18th term in the U.S. House of Representatives ends in early January 2023.

DeFazio will be 75 1/2 years old when he departs as Oregon's longest-serving member of Congress and the 65th-longest in all of U.S. history.

This year, he finally saw Congress pass a monumental infrastructure package — although not the one he sought. He also recently underwent back surgery, a condition exacerbated by thousands of hours on airplanes between Oregon and Washington, D.C.

"The last year and a half has been a whirlwind and I've gotten a lot of long-awaited goals done," DeFazio said during a Zoom press conference on Wednesday to discuss his retirement. "I just decided that this is the right time for me. I'm going out at the top."

DeFazio becomes the 19th House Democrat, and the third committee chair, to forgo reelection next year. A Politico story announcing his departure began: "Rep. Peter DeFazio, the Oregon firebrand who leads the House's transportation committee, will step down after 36 years in Congress, spelling more bad news for Democrats in 2022 and taking with him an encyclopedic amount of institutional and technical knowledge on infrastructure."

History and the current political climate strongly suggest that Republicans will regain their House majority in next year's election. DeFazio doesn't buy it. "I



Bloomberg

U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, a Springfield Democrat, has announced he will not seek reelection next year.

"THERE WILL BE NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT REPRESENTATIVE ... BUT I FEEL GOOD ABOUT THE LEGACY I'VE LEFT."

U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio

think the Republicans are measuring the curtains a little too early," he said, adding, "Having overconfidence on the other side of the aisle is always good."

His successor likely will be another Democrat, although Republican Alek Skarlatos is running again and others are likely to enter the race. The sprawling 4th District, which covers the southern Willamette Valley and southwest Oregon, will tilt more toward Democrats under the congressional redistricting plan that Democrats in the Oregon Legislature passed this year.

Regardless, Oregon's congressional influence will plummet.

As professor Moore, of Pacific University, points out, seniority is everything in Congress. Wyden joined the Senate in 1996, yet nearly two decades passed before he first chaired the Senate Finance Committee. DeFazio entered the House in 1987 and in 2019 finally moved up to

chair the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

At least two newcomers will represent Oregon in Congress next year — DeFazio's successor and whoever is elected in the state's new 6th Congressional District. Incumbent Democrat Kurt Schrader also could face a competitive race in the 5th District. Meanwhile, Republican Cliff Bentz is in his first year representing the 2nd District, the state's largest in geography.

DeFazio's Oregon reach will last long after his departure, from upcoming transportation, water, sewer and other infrastructure projects to the wilderness areas that he championed.

Meanwhile, woe to those communities that sat on their hands. Oregon's capital is among them.

Salem has only a pair of traffic bridges across the Willamette River, meaning log trucks and agriculture vehicles join busi-

ness vehicles, commuters and visitors in traversing downtown congestion en route to their final destinations. A third bridge, at a different location to lessen travel times and move heavy trucks out of the city center, was a priority of city and county leaders for decades.

In 2019, a divided Salem City Council killed the project. Among opponents' concerns was where the financing would come from. Shortsighted, they ignored DeFazio's ascendancy on transportation and his potential influence.

In contrast, Oregon and Washington state officials have resumed talks on the Columbia River Crossing, which would be eligible for funding through the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package that Congress passed. Oregon transportation projects already have gained \$1.3 billion from a change in federal law that DeFazio achieved in 2006.

DeFazio noted that he often worked across party lines, with Oregon's Republican Sen. Mark Hatfield to protect rivers and Packwood to ban exports of raw logs from federal forests. But times have changed.

"Half my career has been in the minority. But in the old days in the minority, particularly in infrastructure, we could work across the aisle," DeFazio said. "Now the 13 Republicans who had the guts to vote for my infrastructure bill are being threatened with being removed from their committees. They're getting death threats because infrastructure has become a dirty word because of the Republican leadership, who doesn't want anything that has President Biden's name on it to succeed. That's very, very unfortunate."

Yes, DeFazio certainly speaks his mind, some of which he eventually will put into a book. But mostly, he's looking forward to spending time with family, focusing on his health and well-being, being back in Oregon, hiking the wilderness areas he helped create and having time to ride Cycle Oregon again.

"It's time to pass the torch," he said. "There will be new challenges for the next representative and things that they're going to have to fight for, for our state. But I feel good about the legacy I've left."

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

So nice

Customer service: So nice when I run into it.

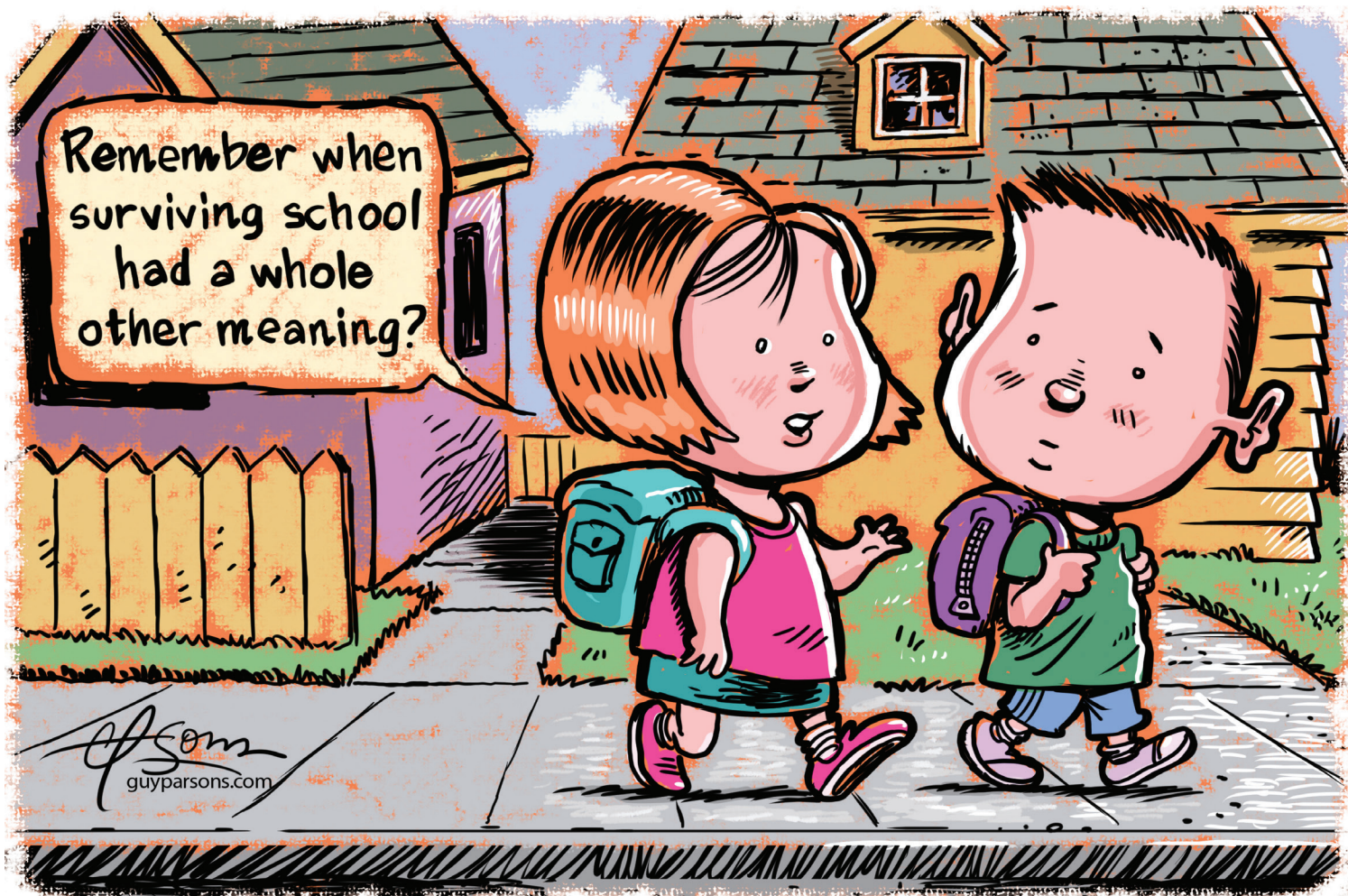
One of the tail light lenses on my Ford pickup truck was ruined, so I bought a replacement from Astoria Ford. It is a simple job, just requiring taking out two screws and switching the two light sockets.

Unfortunately, I could not get the sockets to go into the new fixture. I called the parts department, and they did some checking and could not find out why I was having this problem, and suggested that I bring the truck to them.

So, I drove out and met Dennis Wolfe in the service department. He came out and, fortunately for me, had some trouble also. However, he soon figured it out and got both in place for me, so problem solved.

icing on the cake: No one came rushing out with a minimum service form, looking for payment! Many thanks to Astoria Ford, and to their kind employee, Dennis!

CHUCK MEYER
Astoria



Independent from whom?

When was the last time you know of that a politician accepted large campaign contributions from big business and didn't provide them with payback when elected?

That's what we can expect from state Sen. Betsy Johnson, who has accepted contributions for her run for governor from the timber industry and other local businesses, and who is now calling herself an independent.

Her self-applied label will turn out to be a ruse, just like her having called herself a Democrat in the past, while voting in opposition to her party's signature issues: Mitigating the climate crisis, reining in the overexploitation of our forests, or reducing the danger of mass shootings through sensible gun control.

Johnson has been good at showing up at local ceremonies to smile for the camera, and for finding funds for local projects. If that's all you care about, maybe she's your candidate.

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.

But if you are concerned about the control that corporations have over our political institutions, if you worry about the impact on drinking water and wildlife from clearcutting and aerial spraying, or

wish the state could find ways to begin mitigating climate change, look for someone else to vote for in 2022.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

Awash in alcohol

This letter is not going to be well received, but I must, nonetheless, share my deep-felt thoughts today.

My family has been deeply impacted by alcoholism. I have a close relative who is living in a care facility, suffering from early onset dementia caused by excessive consumption of alcohol.

My father died at 64, and his death certificate states that he met his demise because of his addiction to alcohol. And the story continues.

Astoria seems to be awash in alcohol. It's a big business. It attracts tourists. It's fun! For me, alcohol in any form makes me sad.

For so many, it cannot be managed. For the individuals who can use this drug in a responsible manner, I commend you. It just isn't so for my family.

CARMEN JONASSON
Seaside