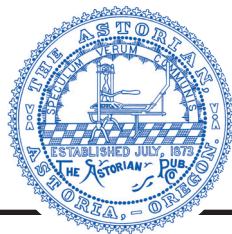


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Few policymakers engaged in long-term solutions

Oregon remains a curious state as we enter 2022.

Most of the state comprises a mix of small towns, rural areas and frontier landscapes. Yet a new governor can be elected, a statewide ballot measure passed or state legislation enacted without these rural residents having much of a say.

Amid that dominance of urban voters and big-city political interests, not to mention the economic stagnation felt in wide swaths of rural Oregon, is it any wonder that rural residents feel aggrieved and left behind? Yet for the state to prosper, rural Oregonians are just as



**DICK HUGHES**

critical, just as relevant, as their urban cousins.

Oregon seems unable, or unwilling, to address these paradoxes. Most Oregonians share the same core values, including family, good health, educational and economic opportunity and a deep love for our landscape. Yet we, copying the rest of the country, have settled for a political system that focuses on short-term, partisan wins and losses instead of long-term, mutual goals that serve the common good.

This arrangement primarily benefits politicians and special interests who have a vested interest in gaining short-term victories — getting elected, building resumes and reaping donations. How do we turn the conversation toward bringing Oregonians together, regardless of place or politics? How do we collaboratively create and commit to long-term strategies that invest in an economically, environmentally and socially healthy Oregon instead of short-term fixes that pick winners and losers?

Few policymakers seem engaged in those questions. But some Oregonians are trying to change that dynamic. One is former Gov. John Kitzhaber. I spoke with him last week and asked permission to share some of his recent writing that had resonated with me.

“We have allowed ourselves to become increasingly defined by our



John Locher/AP Photo

Roseburg banded together after a mass shooting in 2015. But the community, like many in the rural parts of Oregon, has seen societal rifts.

*WHEN KITZHABER AND I TALKED, OUR CONVERSATION WAS NOT ABOUT PARTISAN POLITICS. NONE OF THIS ‘WHO’S RIGHT AND WHO’S WRONG.’ RATHER, IT WAS ABOUT HOW CAN OREGONIANS REESTABLISH A SHARED IDENTITY SO WE CAN COLLECTIVELY BEGIN TO TACKLE THE BIG ISSUES.*

differences and, as a result, our politics have become reactive and deeply transactional,” Kitzhaber wrote in a not-yet-published essay. “Each legislative session and budget cycle seem to operate almost in isolation from one another — from what came before and what must come next — with the only certain thing linking the policy and budget decisions of one session with another being the intervening, and increasingly toxic, election cycle.”

In a newspaper guest opinion, Kitzhaber wrote about the societal rifts that have emerged in once close-knit communities such as Roseburg, where he was an emergency room physician for years:

“(T)he problem is rooted, at least in part, in the long-term economic challenges faced by many rural communities, and in a sense of isolation from the political power centers in the more urban parts of the state. Economic struggle and isolation have been the daily experience of many people in rural Oregon, and they preceded the pandemic by many years. Add to this the intersection of state mandates with a group of people who do not react well when ‘told what to do’ by someone from outside — and you have the formula for anger, frustration and division.”

In a piece this week on LinkedIn, he wrote: “Unbundling the complexity

of the health care system starts with a question. Are we trying to ensure that everyone has access to health care? Or are we trying to ensure that everyone is healthy? This question is foundational because how we answer it defines the rest of the conversation.”

Kitzhaber’s point was that the health debate primarily has been framed around lack of access to care instead of the greater question of how to ensure Americans are healthy. Access is but one aspect.

Such too-narrow questions are found throughout politics and public policy. For example, the Legislature’s perennial school-budget debate revolves around whether a certain dollar amount is deemed adequate — not whether the money is being spent effectively and in the most essential long-term areas. When there are so many immediate needs, it is difficult to find the political fortitude for making long-term strategic investments.

Yet there are successes. One dear to my heart is the Marion County program that prepares individuals to make a successful return to society upon release from prison or jail. The county initiative has strong support from local business leaders and politicians because of its demonstrated return on investment. Helping people find housing, employment and other supports is less costly and more beneficial to the community than if the individuals reoffend and return to prison.

When Kitzhaber and I talked, our conversation was not about partisan politics. None of this “who’s right and who’s wrong.” Rather, it was about how can Oregonians reestablish a shared identity so we can collectively begin to tackle the big issues. From political campaigns to legislative discussions, how can we insert the question of, “What should Oregon look like in eight or 10 years, and what concrete steps are necessary to get there?”

I don’t pretend to have the answers. I hope they will arise through small conversations that become big conversations. ... Conversations by Oregonians who put shared values ahead of politics.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Good ol’ days

Does anyone else remember the good ol’ days, when things like lying, cheating and stealing were considered wrong? Even bad!

Now it seems lying is simply expressing an “alternative fact,” cheating is just being smart at “gaming the system” and stealing is as common as clicking “agree” or “accept.”

So this “new reality” is called what? Oh yeah — freedom!

**DONNA LEE ROLLINS**  
Astoria

### Pain-free life

The recent guest column from U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and David Russo regarding the NOPAIN Act, “Give patients a choice on pain management” (The Astorian, Dec. 28): Excellent ... as far as it went.

Perhaps their idea is based on the book and TV series “Dopesick.” Everyone involved with opioid pain management needs to read or see it. It is totally frightening.

I have taken opioids for pain all my life. But never, ever more than prescribed, and never any addiction. I am writing to the family physician, hoping that group will try to understand that people like me rely on opioids occasionally.

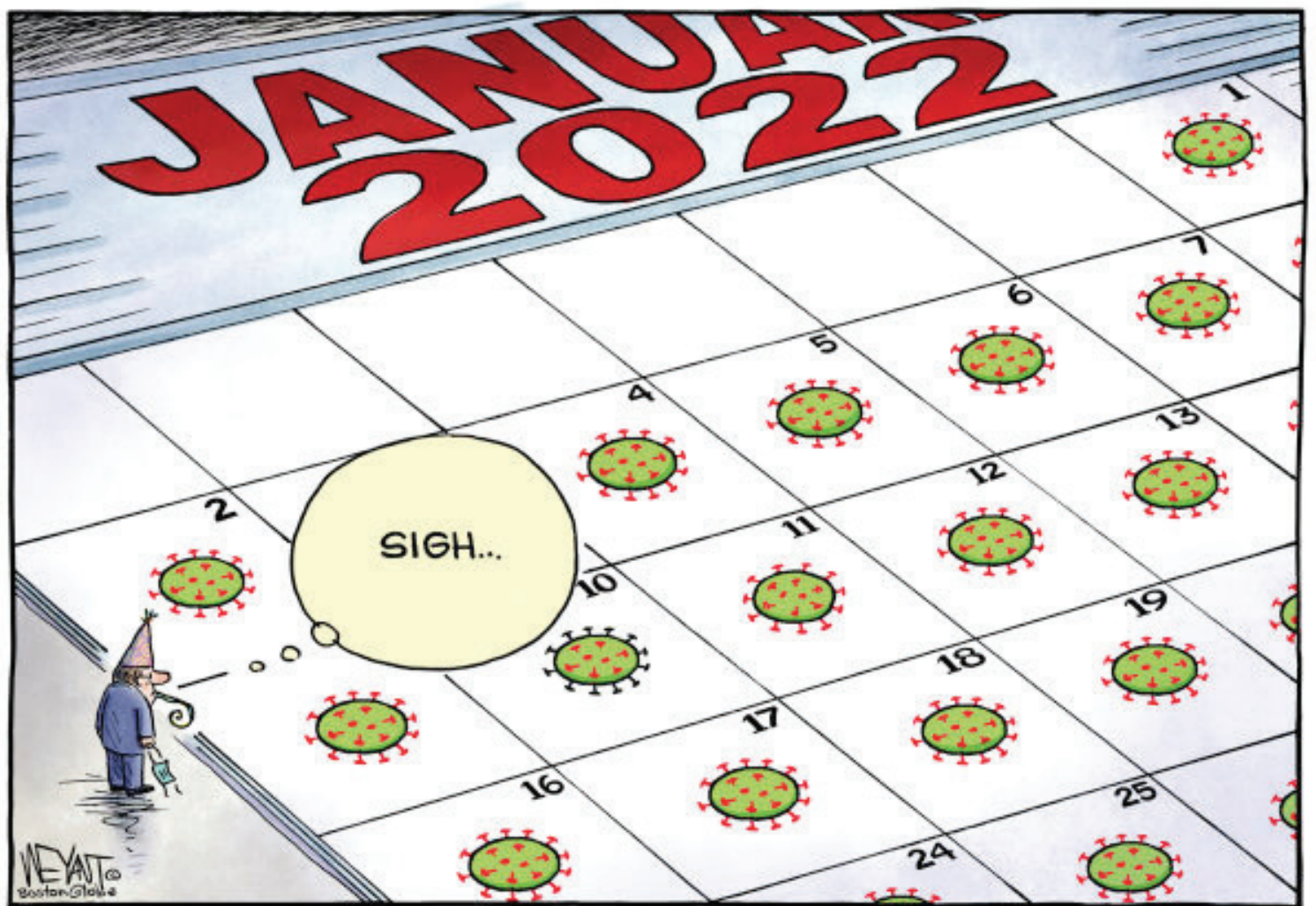
My doctor trusts me. I have an open prescription for 12 Vicodin tabs per prescription. It will last me two months plus.

I am 82 years old. I play bridge twice a week, and need a half a tablet of Vicodin per session. The chairs at the senior center can torture an aged back. No, Advil will not produce pain-free sitting.

I’m an avid gardener. By 3 p.m. when I quit, I need a half-tab of Vicodin if I am to have comfort throughout the rest of the day. If I am to enjoy a relatively pain-free life, I need this opioid. I would gladly try other painkillers, and I’ve let my doctor know that. He has yet to suggest an alternative.

If we can draft legislation to eradicate OxyContin use and addiction and suicide, I am its biggest supporter. But take care of us, too.

**DAVID TENNANT**  
Astoria



## 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.

### Wacko mess

Due to a lot of incorrect information about the placement of waste/fill by Big River Construction on our lot at the corner of S.W. First Street and S.W. Alder Avenue in Warrenton, we

would like to offer anyone having questions the ability to contact us about the wacko mess that occurred.

We believe flooding would still have occurred had absolutely nothing been done on our lot.

We would like to thank Big River

Construction for standing ready for placement of a pipe to control the flooding. Big River was exceptional in trying to help us on this mess, for which they had absolutely no responsibility.

The one correct thing was that Patty and I will not be building the eight to 13 units in Warrenton we were working on for the near future.

We also would like to thank all the people who have contacted us with support during this mess. Thank you to the longtime customer of mine who told me he didn’t need to know any details, because he knew from our past business dealings that I always try to do the right thing.

Please feel free to contact us at rick@eyeofnewt.net, we have nothing to hide.

**RICK NEWTON**  
**PATTY CAPLES**  
Warrenton