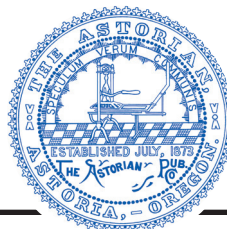


OPINION



the Astorian

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BEHIND THE NEWS

‘The best experience I have is around knowing the process’

Rachel Armitage embraces her role as a placeholder. Armitage, of Warren, made it clear during her campaign for the appointment to fill the state Senate District 16 vacancy left by Betsy Johnson that she would not run in the Democratic primary in May.

Instead, she has supported Melissa Busch, a nurse who lives in Warren. Some Democrats had wanted the appointee to also be a candidate — a potential launching pad that could have given the party a better chance of holding the seat in the November general election. Busch was the top choice when



DERRICK DePLEDGE

Democrats met earlier this month in Seaside to make recommendations to county commissioners to replace Johnson, who resigned to focus on her independent campaign for governor.

“I think, ultimately, that piece of the question was for the county commissioners to decide,” Armitage said of the commissioners from Clatsop, Columbia, Multnomah, Tillamook, Washington and Yamhill counties.

Armitage, who was sworn in as the new senator on Friday, served as a legislative aide in Salem in 2016 and 2017 and is a graduate of the Emerge Oregon program for future Democratic women leaders. She is also a leader in the state Democratic Party’s Womxn’s Caucus.

Armitage works with alumni from Reed College in Portland on fundraising. She is pursuing a master’s degree at Reed in liberal studies.

In an interview via Zoom, she discussed her experience and her policy priorities.

Q: What factors drove your interest in the appointment?

A: I remember working in the Legislature as a staff member and how much I

enjoyed that work. It was deeply fulfilling for me.

So making the decision to go for this appointment as a placeholder for a year felt like a really good opportunity to do it again, and get back to doing something that really lit me up, that I really enjoyed.

Q: Some Democrats had wanted the appointee to also be a candidate in the May primary, but you’re not running. Does this leave the party at a competitive disadvantage against state Rep. Suzanne Weber, the likely Republican nominee?

A: No, I don’t think so.

I think, personally, with my campaign background, I think it’s better for the party to have one person that they get behind. I think primaries are great. So, of course, if somebody wanted to hop in the race I certainly wouldn’t oppose that.

When it comes to having a strong Republican and strong Democrat, I think it’s usually helpful for both sides if we can get to that conversation as quickly as possible.

Q: You have not held elected office before, but you have served as a legislative aide in Salem. How does that experience prepare you?

A: The best experience I have is around knowing the process, being able to advocate for bills and legislation that’s particularly helpful for this district, or advocate against things that could be particularly harmful.

Knowing when to submit an amendment, things like that.

The short legislative session moves really quickly, and so being able to know the process and insert myself fast is definitely my biggest strength.

Q: What are your policy priorities for the short session of the Legislature that starts in February?

A: I haven’t been assigned to my committees yet, so that’ll say a lot about what my priorities end up being, just

because those are the topic areas that I’ll be exposed the most to.

Based on what I’ve heard from my conversations with PCPs (precinct committee persons) and county commissioners, I think housing is a huge issue. And that will be something, whether I’m on the housing committee or not, that’ll be an issue I’m paying really close attention to. Particularly pieces of legislation that make it easier to build more workforce housing in this district.

I also will likely be keeping an eye on the Private Forest Accord legislation that’s going through (between forest, conservation and fishing interests) — that’s something I definitely am really, really excited about and will be paying attention to very closely.

Other topics I’ve heard a lot about include child care — I’m hoping to get up to speed this week on some of the priorities around child care that are going through the Legislature. I think that’s really important in making sure families can get back to work.

And then I also know, because I’ve been talking to various legislators working on education, that there are going to be some interesting bills going through about mental health in our schools, which I think is really critical at this time.

There will certainly be more priorities than that, but those are ones I’m immediately looking forward to.

Q: How will you measure success?

A: I think in those areas, if there are bills that come out that work well for this district, and that local leaders are telling me will work for this district, that I certainly will count as a measure of success.

I also will consider every closed constituent case — where folks are calling our office and needing help — anything we can resolve or close for the people of this district, I will absolutely count as a success.

But, I think to a certain extent, you



Rachel Armitage, of Warren, was appointed to fill a vacancy in state Senate District 16.

will have to follow up with me later. I think there are things that will come out of the session and will come out of the interim time that could be really good and really helpful for this district that we don’t even know about yet.

Q: What do you want people on the North Coast to know about you?

A: Even though I personally live in Warren, I represent this whole district.

I really care about people who live on the North Coast. I care about the issues that impact them. And I am just as much their state senator as I am the state senator of this side of the district. And that goes for folks in Tillamook County, as well.

Please call me. Please email me. Follow me on Facebook. Get in touch.

I would also add that this is a really exciting time as far as being able to testify on various issues, because a lot of those committee meetings will be virtual. So I really look forward to staying in touch about how people can connect with the work that’s happening in Salem in that way, as well.

Derrick DePledge is editor of The Astorian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Seems to suggest

Editorial cartoons often provide laughs and insight. The editorial cartoon in the Jan. 18 edition of The Astorian instead provides shocking snark.

The cartoon seems to suggest Martin Luther King Jr. and Black Lives Matter contradict each other. Rather than honoring King’s decades of advocacy for racial justice, peace and economic opportunity, the cartoonist uses a popular quote to distract us from King’s accomplishments and the truth of American history.

It’s necessary to repeatedly declare that Black lives matter because many people, possibly including this editorial cartoonist, judge people first or solely by their skin color and ignore the actual humanity of the person.

That is tragic, unjust and immoral. Black Lives Matter reminds us that people with dark skin matter just as much as those of us with white or other colored skin.

This cartoon’s quote is only a tiny sliver of all that King said and did to challenge systemic racism. The cartoonist twisted its meaning to mock King and his purpose.

King was 39 years old when he was assassinated by a white supremacist frightened by King’s belief that all humans deserve to be treated with dignity, respect and justice.

“... King’s political trajectory and the essentially radical nature of the civil rights movement confirm that in the United States, progress is not guaranteed, justice is not part of its natural life cycle. Both are only ever the product of enduring social movements, labor movements and struggle.” — Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

America can and must do better.

LAURIE CAPLAN
Astoria

Keep the focus

In regard to former Astoria Mayor Arline LaMear’s opinion piece in The Astorian, “Heritage Square project is critical” (Jan. 15), she surveyed ideas about Heritage Square during her term, and networks were established among the participants.

Present Astoria city councilors need not tinker with building codes to accommodate developers. The consensus among business owners, taxpayers and elected officials in our county is for workforce housing. Keep the focus.

Certainly Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare meets that criteria.

JUANITA PRICE
Astoria

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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.

Natural process

Clatsop County certainly experienced some emergency incidents with the

recent weather conditions. The washout at milepost 10.7 on Oregon Highway 202 has impacted many county residents, as a prime example.

Unfortunately the article on Jan. 15 on the county’s emergency declaration was accompanied by a photo of the successfully restored Walluski wetlands. The partially submerged trees captioned in the photo have been dead for some time, a natural process as the wetlands restores itself. This was a federally funded project reported on in your paper in 2018.

It would appear your staff lacks understanding of local history and natural processes as they go about their reporting of our area.

We have been decadeslong subscribers to The Astorian. I assume many of your subscribers are also in this demographic. Valid photographs accompanying your articles are appreciated. Cheers to accurate timely local journalism!

MARK and GERI FICK
Astoria