

OPINION



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editor@dailyastorian.com

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KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

SHANNON ARLINT
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
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GUEST COLUMN

Putting The Oregon Way back into politics

Oregonians waste too much time arguing.

That is today's topic: COVID-19. But before we get to the coronavirus, let's look back to a gun control bill passed by the 2021 Legislature. Bear with me; these issues have similarities.

Almost every Oregonian agrees that firearms should be stored safely and securely. No one wants an accidental shooting. No one wants a mass shooting.



DICK HUGHES

Almost everyone recognizes that most Oregon deaths involving firearms are suicides.

Almost everyone sees that the rise in homicides and other gun violence has shaken the Portland area and other parts of Oregon.

These common understandings should lead to collaborative solutions.

So far, Oregon has wasted that opportunity. The Legislature passed Senate Bill 554, which includes a mandate for safe storage of firearms. Yet gun storage is not comparable to many government regulations in which compliance can be readily observed, such as seat belt use. It generally won't be known until after the fact, that a loaded gun was left unsecured.

That mandate in SB 554 did accomplish two things. It supported advocates' belief that they were addressing gun violence. It reinforced opponents' belief that the eventual goal was to take away their guns.

Imagine what could have happened if all sides of the gun debate instead had come together with intensive dedication to suicide prevention and voluntary safe storage of guns. They could have plowed common ground, being more effective in the long run, instead of staying entrenched far afield.

Which brings us to education and influence: People listen to folks whom they trust. When a neighbor talks about the quick-access pistol safe he's bought, you're more likely to think about getting one. When a colleague is unafraid to discuss her family struggles with mental health, the conversation can reduce the stigma and plant the seed for others to seek needed help. When friends say you're going through a rough time and



Gillian Flaccus/AP Photo

Mask mandates during the coronavirus pandemic have caused divisions.

suggest they temporarily hang onto your firearms, you may be willing to swallow your pride and accept their help.

Which brings us back to COVID-19: We seem to be at an impasse — a political and social divide.

Though the majority of Oregonians have been vaccinated and many wear masks despite the inconvenience, others do not. And the state won't come close to meeting Gov. Kate Brown's goal of administering a million COVID-19 booster shots by February.

Where can we find common ground — not because of a governor's goal but to meet Oregonians' physical, educational and financial health?

A place to start: everyday conversations.

If you politely explain why you're vaccinated or not, instead of trying to convince the other guy that he's wrong because you're right, you're setting the example. Rather than being addicted to rage, you're contributing to what was called The Oregon Way — collaboratively working toward acceptable, albeit imperfect, solutions.

On the other hand, if you're some-

one who constantly puts down the other side, instead of actually listening to the whys of their decision, I humbly suggest you're part of the problem.

For this year's political candidates, for the 2022 Oregon Legislature that convenes in February, and for everyone worried about our state's future, this becomes an overarching question for many issues, not just the pandemic: For the good of our state, how do we contribute to The Oregon Way instead of ideological wins and losses?

One start could be a unified local or statewide campaign — involving groups often at odds — in support of front-line workers: Don't take it out on them if the restaurant is short-staffed, the store runs out of goods or the retailer requires or doesn't require face coverings.

Nothing is gained by taking out frustrations on front-line workers. Instead, look to old and new examples of small steps and political changes.

• Former state Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer, and Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, were far apart on the political spectrum. Yet as legislative newcomers, they had great fun collabo-

rating on episodes of their "Behind the Scenes" video show about the Legislature.

Post now is a political consultant in Nevada but handling some Oregon campaigns. Rayfield is the Democrats' choice for House speaker, succeeding Tina Kotek, who resigned to focus on her run for governor.

• In his first town hall of the year — a virtual one for Marion County residents — U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden announced the Bringing People Together initiative. Throughout the year, he will highlight examples of Oregonians working together in the spirit of The Oregon Way. Wyden invited people to send examples. He illustrated his initiative by mentioning bipartisan issues he worked on, such as saving a timber mill in John Day.

• Rep. Marty Wilde, D-Eugene, devoted his constituent newsletter last week to good work being done by Republican colleagues. Among his examples, Rep. Mark Owens, of Crane, is introducing legislation to trim the governor's emergency powers and return some control to county commissioners, although the bill goes further than Wilde would like.

Rep. Jami Cate, of Lebanon, has proposed what Wilde called "a thoughtful bill" that would create a ballot measure to give the Legislature the ability to impeach statewide elected officials — governor, secretary of state, state treasurer, attorney general and Bureau of Labor and Industries commissioner.

Rep. Anna Scharf, of Amity, has a bill to exempt pharmacies from Oregon's controversial Commercial Activities Tax, an idea that Wilde is not yet supporting but merits discussion.

Wilde is co-sponsoring a bill by Rep. Duane Stark, of Grants Pass, to ensure patients are not charged when involuntarily diverted to a hospital outside their insurance network.

"I was pleased to see that last week's legislative days brought an unusual number of bipartisan requests for bill co-sponsorship," Wilde wrote. "In addition to signing on to those I think are good policy, I've also been advocating to my caucus to change our procedures to include more outreach across the aisle."

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Appreciated

I would like to commend the city of Cannon Beach for their response to the tsunami advisory on Jan. 15.

I had seen the news before I left for my early beach dog walk, so knew that I was in the safe timeline. As I finished, before 8 a.m., I saw the Cannon Beach police, fire and rescue, plus city vehicles, staging at many access points.

Later, as the sirens started sounding, I saw that I had text messages clearly explaining what was happening, since I had signed up for city and county alerts.

No one in my mostly full-time resident neighborhood, or the nearby RV park, made any movement out of the area, leading me to think that they were informed as to why the sirens were going off.

Thank you to the Cannon Beach police, fire and rescue, city workers and the emergency preparedness team, which includes many, many volunteers. The work done before and during this tsunami event is very appreciated.

VIRGINIA WRIGHT
Cannon Beach

Some thoughts

I was a tuberculosis nurse in my previous career and provided services to patients that were homeless and lived in downtown shelters.

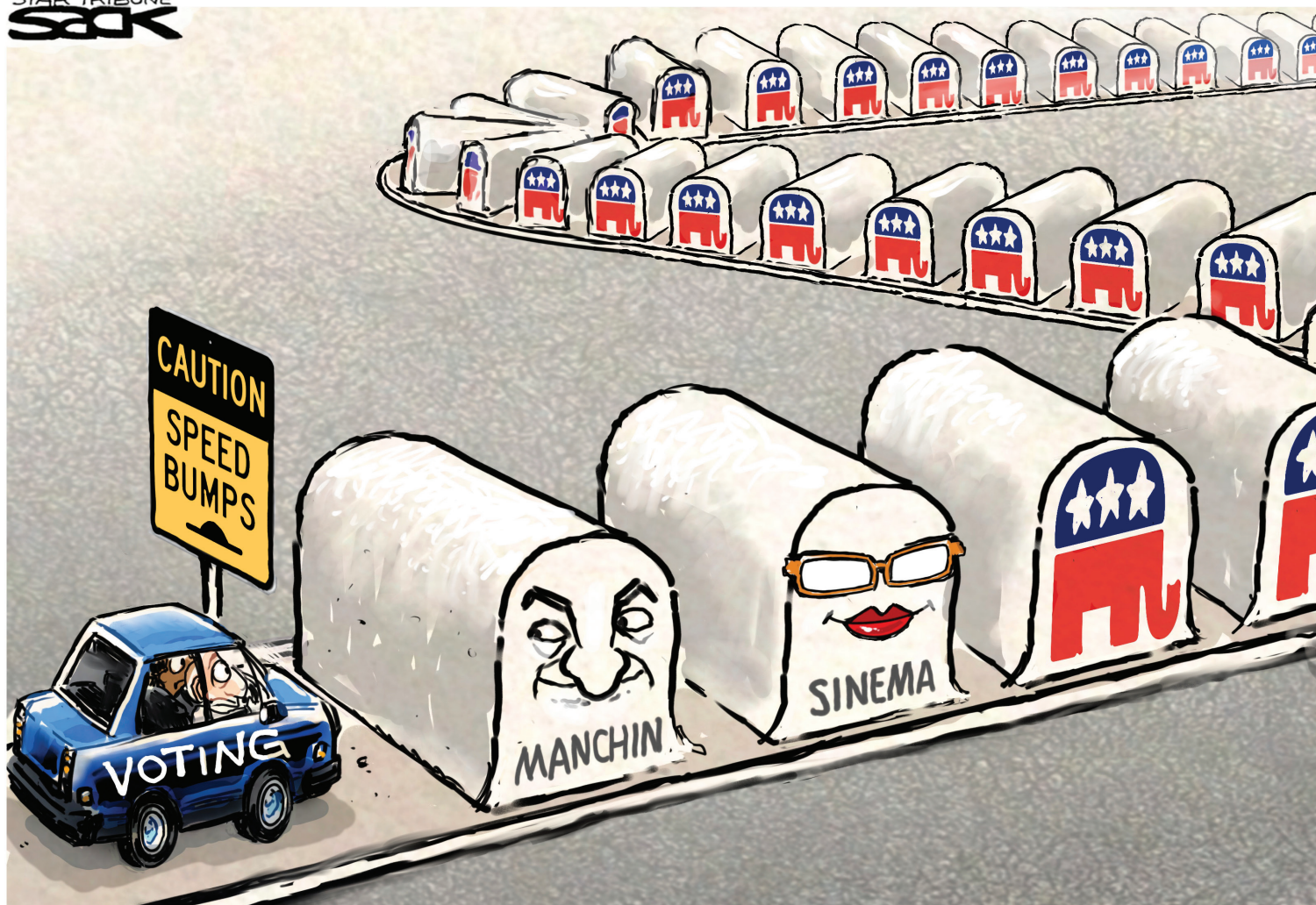
I have observed much. I have some thoughts about a mental health housing program in downtown Astoria.

Supportive housing means more than a dedicated building with services. The design of the facility, staffing patterns and program values combine to create a program that helps people succeed. Keep in mind that these residents live with challenges that would seem overwhelming to the average person.

In order to increase their opportunities for success, residents in supportive housing require consistent access to supportive services. At minimum, the following should be required for the safety of the residents, staff, citizens and visitors.

- State-licensed mental health and substance use disorder treatment.
- On-site health care services.
- Daily meals and weekly outings to food

STAR TRIBUNE
S&K



banks.

- Case management and payee services. Case management staff need to be present 24 hours a day to handle urgent situations.
- Daily medication monitoring.
- Supervised community activities and programs.

It is uninformed to move forward with this project without assessing this proposed mental health program. I am disappointed that objection to this project is being spun as one is against homelessness, low-income residents or mental health services. I can assure you, this is not the case.

Proper location of mental health housing services needs to be discussed and analyzed for the safety of patients and the community. Downtown Astoria might not be the best location. Informed choices based on data are best.

LAURI KRÄMER SERAFIN
Astoria

'Can we all get along?'

On May 1, 1992, with Los Angeles in flames, Rodney King, who had been badly beaten by police, who were acquitted of wrongdoing, stepped to the microphone and asked, "Can we all get along?" King's righteous plea was a call for ending divisiveness, a call seldom heard today.

So what are we to think of those who brought the Linn County timber lawsuit, fomenting divisiveness, as it becomes likely that they will lose their case in appellate court?

Linn County Commissioner Roger Nyquist now says the suit is about the widening rift between the state and people in the counties who are losing "a way of life" in "A billion-dollar battle over more than timber" (Jan. 11). The plaintiff's attorney, John DiLorenzo, goes extraterrestrial with

his divisiveness, saying the two sides are "residing on opposite planets."

Divisiveness has a familiar ring in the post-Trump era, and clearly not all county commissioners or their lawyers are above it. We can expect that when the appellate court rules against the plaintiffs, we will hear some version of the divisive "Big Lie."

Those who sow the seeds of divisiveness need to be reminded that there are good people everywhere. By getting along, we become stronger and find more righteous solutions to perceived problems.

The billion dollars, and more, for timber county services, should be coming from the fair taxation of the timber industry that initially funded the lawsuit, and has been fueling the rural-urban divide for decades.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria