

OPINION



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GUEST COLUMN

Legislature returns with 'wacky' reputation

The Oregon Legislature came back to Salem last week and quickly fulfilled its increasingly wacky reputation.

On the opening day of the 2022 session, the state House was testy, the Senate more collegial.

The contentious issue of farm-worker overtime, which I discussed in last week's column, illustrates how the political mood differs in the Senate and House. Sponsored by urban Democrats, House Bill 4002 resides in the House Business and Labor Committee, chaired by state Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene.



DICK HUGHES

But let's start in the Senate, where lawmakers got down to business right away while folks in the House were milling around.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, said that if overtime is to be mandated for agricultural employees, it must be done right. He gave a remonstrance — a brief floor speech — in which he thanked Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, for meeting with agricultural producers from Hansell's Senate district to discuss the issue. Hansell pledged to work collaboratively toward "victory" and quoted Courtney:

"It really resonated with me and the (producers) that you said, 'When it comes to legislation, you can have a win or you can have a victory. A win is when one party crams something down and it's not bipartisan when we end up with a vote. A victory is when we work on good policy to bring (people) together and we have a bill that will be supported on both sides of the aisle and also in both chambers.'"

Advocates are using the courts, the Legislature and the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries to push for agricultural overtime. In the House, rural Republicans pushed back in their remonstrances.

Rep. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, said the latest work group on the topic fell apart because the advocates were not motivated to find a legislative solution. Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, R-Albany, read an editorial from the Capital Press and echoed a colleague's call for an honest, intellectual conversation.



Gov. Kate Brown gave her final State of the State speech via YouTube.

In a lengthy, heartfelt remonstrance that covered several topics, Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Happy Valley, said farm-workers deserve better treatment and vowed that the Legislature would provide it.

Here are more tidbits from the first week's wonders and wackiness:

The State Capitol finally was open to the public for a legislative session. Sort of.

For the first time, metal detectors greeted anyone entering the Capitol, although Bonham reportedly came through a different door and accidentally evaded them.

Masks are required in the Capitol due to the public health protocols, which led to disagreements between anti-mask protesters and Oregon State Police. On Wednesday, officials disputed media reports that individuals who claimed religious exemptions were allowed in without masks.

An email to the "Capitol Community" from Legislative Administration and the state police said: "There is no religious exemption to the masking requirement, and no one claiming solely such an exemption was permitted to enter the Capitol."

A small number of people, however, requested accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

House Republicans questioned the mask mandate, especially that they had

to wear one even while speaking. The Oregon Capital Chronicle reported that Rep. E. Werner Reschke, R-Klamath Falls, "stood off the House floor without a mask and popped his head in to vote. But he avoided the kind of showdown that ended a December special session, when Courtney had a Senate Republican escorted from the chamber by (Senate staff) for not wearing a mask."

That senator, Dallas Heard, of Roseburg, was not in the Senate on opening day.

The public could watch the opening session from the House gallery. In the Senate, due to COVID-19 concerns, Courtney reversed course and closed the chamber to the public.

For the same reason, legislative committees are operating remotely via video conference and phone. The legislative IT system remained intact, but the Capitol Wi-Fi network used by the public crashed early in the week.

Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, was elected House speaker with only one vote to spare. Democrats and Republicans alike then gave him three standing ovations, including one after his poignant speech that detailed his rough growing up.

Courtney has been giving extensive media interviews about this being his final session as Senate president before retiring. Yet the usually voluble politician abstained from an opening day

speech.

One sign of the changing of the guard emerged later in the week when Courtney removed himself from one of his longtime passions, the Oregon State Hospital. He appointed Sen. Kate Lieber, D-Beaverton, to replace him on the mental hospital's advisory board.

The Legislature has so many new members that two newly appointed senators lead committees. Sen. Rachel Armitage, D-Warren, is co-chair of the Joint Committee on Information Management and Technology. Sen. Janceen Sollman, D-Hillsboro, who served in the House, is co-chair of the General Government budget panel.

COVID-19 concerns hung over the Capitol throughout the week. Courtney canceled the Senate's second floor session, scheduled for Thursday. Two senators came anyway — Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, and Fred Girod, R-Lyons — since the Oregon Constitution required Courtney to go through the motions of starting and adjourning the floor session.

Gov. Kate Brown delivered her final State of the State speech Thursday live on YouTube instead of the traditional appearance before a House chamber packed with representatives, senators, judges, past governors, other luminaries, the public and journalists. She also did not hold a press conference afterward, either online or in person, to take questions.

Brown took the high road in her half-hour speech, never referring to her critics. But they tuned in, filling the accompanying YouTube chat with often-snarky comments about her mask mandates and other perceived missteps.

Finally, for a humorous and effective explanation of this year's "short" legislative session, check out "Chef Grayber." Rep. Dacia Grayber, D-Tigard, created a faux cooking video on Twitter that explains: "For the long session, we prefer to slow-cook our bills at a steady temperature. For the short session, however, we'll be using a pressure cooker."

She demonstrates a recipe that starts with great ideas and includes a bit of negotiation, some healthy collaboration, a bit of legal vetting, a dose of debate and a dash of compromise.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pipe down

Regarding "Running for governor with Portland in a nosedive" (The Astorian, Jan. 27): You can say what you want, but my wife and I go to Portland by train three or four times a year.

Except for around the Greyhound station and a few boarded-up places downtown, we love it up there, and are planning on retiring up there in a couple years. And, it seems like housing prices have stabilized.

We are of modest means but it looks like we will now be able to afford a condo up there. There are even affordable condos in the Pearl District now, although we may end up near Portland State University.

Even if you have lived in Portland before, you don't now, and maybe you and the other people outside of Portland ought to pipe down. Let Portlanders take care of Portland.

JOHN COLLET
Albany

Degrade

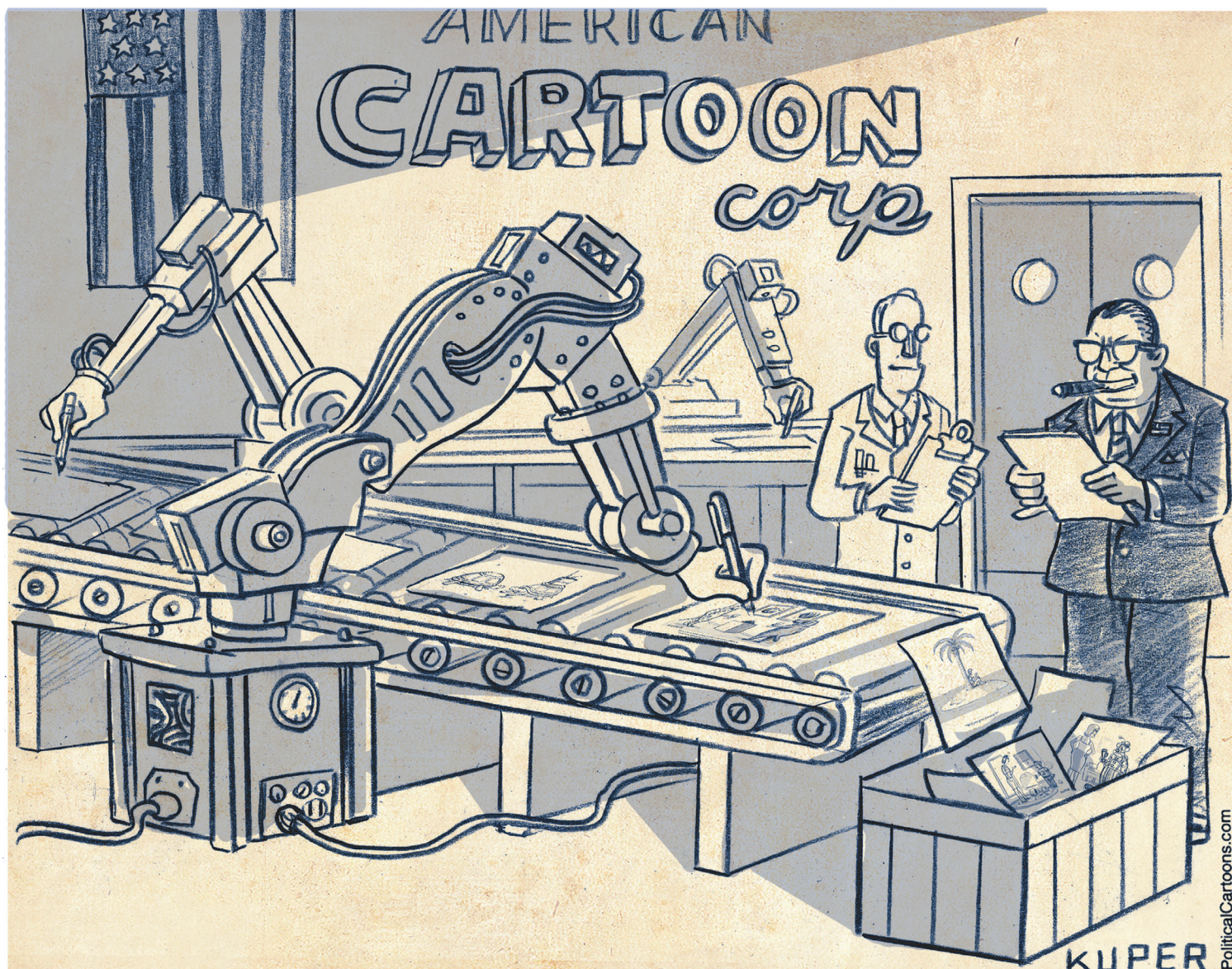
Many years ago, the city of Astoria decided to buy the old Safeway parking lot. Concerned community members were assured that the lot would be used to create a downtown community gathering space.

The members of this community embraced that vision, and considerable private and public resources were expended in creating the Garden of Surging Waves.

The space known as "the pit" has been left as a conspicuous and literal hole in the ground. Over the years, various proposals have been made regarding how to best use this space. The most recent proposition is what I wish to address in this letter.

The current proposition before the City Council appears to approve giving this land to a private developer who will work with local agencies to create a complex with subsidized housing and perhaps some office space.

This housing was initially proposed under the phrase "workforce" housing, but appears to be unlikely to address the issue of workforce housing, and is more accurately described as low-income housing.



"No nudity, no foul language, no commentary, no science, no history, no opinions--they're perfect!"

I am unable to find any engineering, economic impact, or feasibility studies related to this proposal. I am concerned that the proposed use will degrade, rather than elevate, that block, the Garden of Surging Waves and the downtown core.

MARY ANN MURK
Astoria

Inaccurate comparisons

We can learn much from studying the past. Unfortunately, it's easy to make inaccurate comparisons to current events,

as a reader did in a recent letter to the editor ("Desensitized," Jan. 29).

During this pandemic, the enemy is COVID-19, not the people working to protect us and stop it from spreading. Their mission is to save lives. Vaccines, masks, treatment and accurate information exist to protect us.

The Holocaust was genocide. The German government's mission in World War II was to kill people, Jews especially, and others, as well.

Several governments around the world, organizations and individuals, including our former president, continue to hide the

truth and promote lies about COVID-19.

Their disregard for the well-being of others mirrors the priorities of demagogues and their accomplices throughout history. Their mission is to accumulate wealth and power for themselves, even if that means sickness and death for others.

Whose mission do you embrace?

My heartfelt thanks to everyone working to prevent the lethality and spread of COVID-19, and to everyone following COVID-19 guidelines to safeguard the rest of us.

Laurie Caplan
Astoria