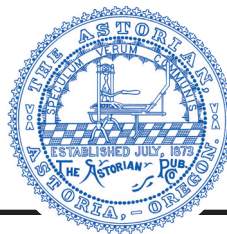


OPINION



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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
Systems Manager

GUEST COLUMN

Why I oppose mink farming

Born and raised on a small farm in Twin Falls, Idaho, I'm probably the last person you would expect to be working to end mink farming in the U.S.

My grandfather, a kind, generous man, raised mink in Idaho for the first two decades of my life. Some of the top mink producers in Utah share my last name, and we are likely descended from the same family of Mormon pioneers who settled in Utah.

When I wasn't dealing with the mink, I spent the better part of my days feeding and tending our cattle and horses, fixing fences, irrigating pasture and stacking hay. I raised rabbits and showed them and my two pet goats in 4-H at the local fair. In high school, I studied agriculture and joined Future Farmers of America, where I showed beef steers and dairy heifers and competed on the FFA meat, dairy and livestock judging teams.

I talked about the principles of responsible animal husbandry with the best of them.

With an upbringing steeped in animal agriculture, it's fair to ask how I can now be asking Congress to shut down the mink farm and to turn the page on an industry that's been around for more than a century.

In large part it's due to what I observed and participated in as a child on those operations. I spent most Thanksgivings as a child and youth on my grandfather's mink farm to help with the pelting of thousands of mink; I spent most of that time killing the animals — setting a baking timer when mink were stuffed into tiny gas chambers, then pull-

ing their bodies out when the timer rang a full seven minutes later.

My grandfather expressed sincere affection for his mink and did all he could to provide them with the best life possible. But it was clear to me, a kid who took to heart the idea of proper animal husbandry, that mink farming was nothing like other forms of animal agriculture.

Unlike the easy, bucolic lifestyle of our cattle and horses, who spent their days grazing and relaxing on spacious, open pastures — and who are domesticated animals — I witnessed a wild species farmed in miserable conditions.

What I remember above all else was the extreme aggression exhibited by the mink. I learned as a very young boy not to put bare hands too close to the cages, because if the mink were able to get a finger in their teeth through the wire mesh, they'd bite and not let go. When they escaped, they'd give chase to anyone trying to catch them. My routine included collecting mink killed and cannibalized by pen mates and tending to the ones with bloody, open wounds caused by fights.

We were forbidden to go into the mink yard when the mothers were giving birth, because the slightest disturbance would cause them to kill and cannibalize their young. You just don't see that kind of bloody horror in other forms of animal agriculture. It violates everything we say in agriculture about proper husbandry.

As an adult, I have supported humane, sustainable animal production methods. As a professor of law, I teach a



A mink looks out from a pen on a farm in Denmark in 2020.

class in animal agriculture law and discuss aligning the values of animal agriculture with those of consumers. But it was clear to me as I grew into a man that a wild, solitary, hyperaggressive species like mink should not be raised by the thousands in cramped, barren cages.

So why act now to end mink farms? In large part because we have learned that unlike other animal species, farmed mink have the ability to catch COVID-19 from humans, then transmit variant forms of the virus back to their human caretakers. This led to other nations, including Denmark, the world's top mink producing nation, to bring mink farming to a quick and unceremonious end.

My grandpa did the best he could to tend to the mink, but no amount of

good animal husbandry can stop violent and endless agitation and aggression on mink farms. That's why it's time for Congress to complete its work and phase out mink farming and bring an end to the animal suffering and risk of contagion they present.

Americans don't need or want mink coats any longer, and the pelts being produced in the U.S. are sold to wealthy Chinese elites. Why would we allow China to import these products and outsource the animal cruelty and the viral risks built into the heart of this industry? We shouldn't, and that's why the end of mink farming in the U.S. can't come soon enough.

Scott Beckstead, of Sutherlin, is director of campaigns for the Center for a Humane Economy.



SCOTT BECKSTEAD

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Wrong place

I don't believe there is a single resident in Astoria who is not distressed over the plight of homeless people living on our streets, and we are looking to our city leaders to find solutions.

The proposed four-story building at the corner of 11th and Exchange streets is a huge investment in the wrong place. The only people who will benefit from this multimillion-dollar project are the architect and developers from Portland.

The citizens of this town have always wanted a plaza to celebrate Astoria's historic significance, and to honor all the pioneers who saw a great future for our region, hence Heritage Square.

Don't change development codes that will rob us of the opportunity to some day have a city square that will be the pride of all. I have heard the excuse that this town cannot afford a plaza, but remember that this audacious little town has rebounded from devastating fires that destroyed the entire business district twice.

One other thing to ponder is that in 1951, our myopic city planners were ready to tear down the Flavel mansion to make room for a parking lot. Thank goodness, concerned citizens came to the rescue of this irreplaceable landmark.

Listen to your citizens, and keep the option open for future Astoria residents to celebrate its glorious past with a downtown plaza. Keep Heritage Square.

LARRY ALLEN
Astoria

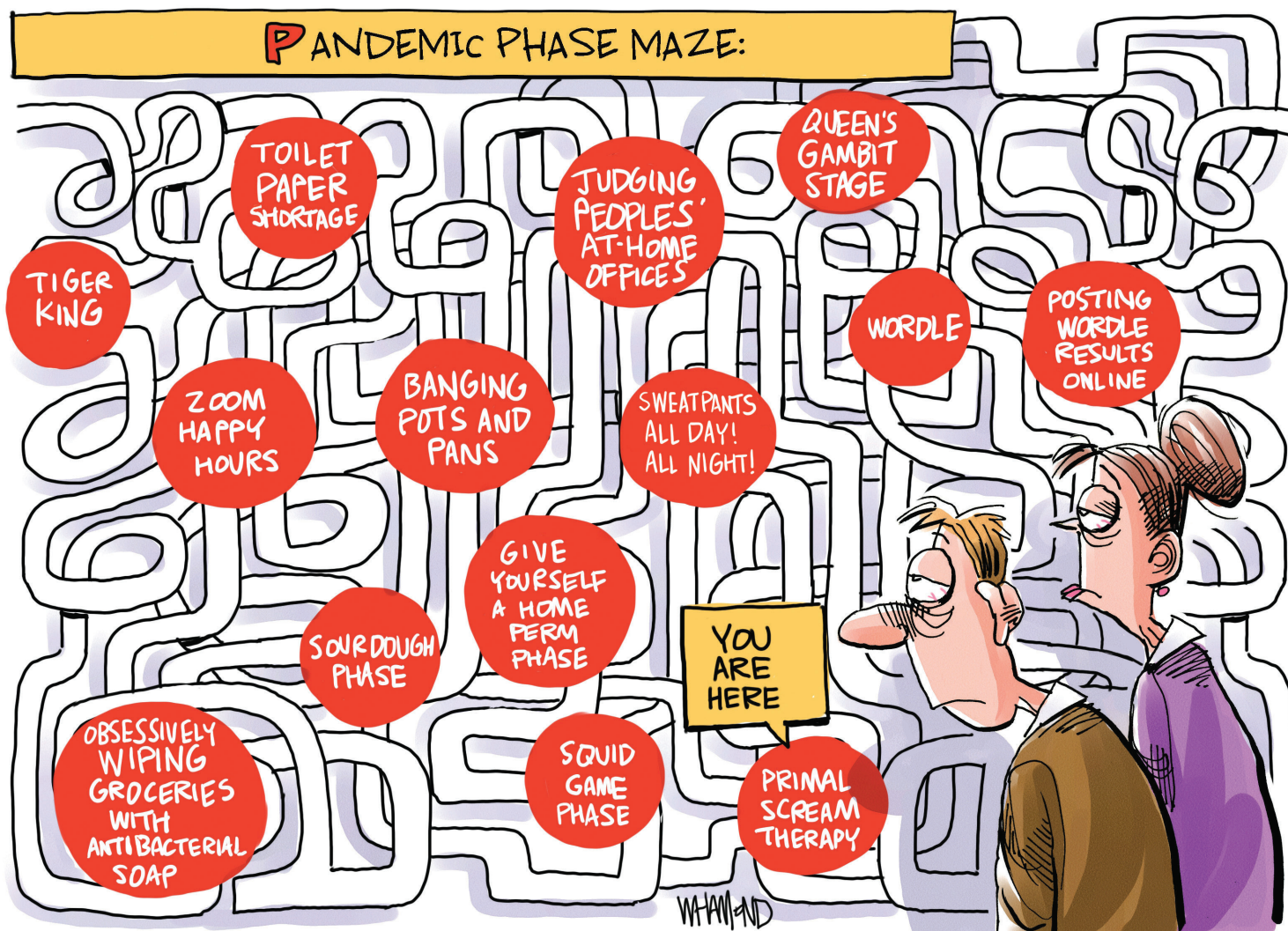
Unmistakable cruelty

For 25 years, I was the elected prosecutor in the Clatsop County. I prosecuted many cases of animal cruelty, and I know it when I see it. Unfortunately, mink farming still exists in a few Oregon counties, including Clatsop.

Mink farms constitute unmistakable cruelty, and our county was long one of the two main counties in the state with these awful production facilities ("House bill would ban mink farming," The Astorian, Feb. 12). Mink are wild, solitary animals, and on mink farms, they are put in cages where the animals routinely fight. Cannibalism has been widely documented on them.

There is no domestic market for mink pelts. It's purely an export market, mainly to China. That it's all done to send luxury garments for rich Chinese to go to state-sponsored dinners compounds the moral problems associated with them.

The case is clinched when one understands that mink are uniquely susceptible



LETTERS WELCOME

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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.

to COVID-19. They have contracted it by the millions on fur farms in North America and Europe, and they spill it back to people. That's a risk not worth the pitifully small economic activity associated with mink farms.

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed an amendment to ban fur farms. The Senate is not on the record yet, but it would be wise to align itself with the House.

JOSHUA MARQUIS
Director of Legal Affairs,
Animal Welfare Action
Astoria

One and only location

It is clear the Astoria City Council is intent on shifting the focus of Heritage Square from what started out to be a public gathering space to instead become affordable housing, along with a significant live-in facility for Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare. There will be no "square" at all, but rather it will be developed with entirely different priorities.

It is abundantly clear that our fair city is in dire need of affordable housing. It is equally clear that Clatsop Behavioral

Healthcare is in dire need of a housing facility to accommodate our community's mental health care needs. I fully support those needs being aggressively and effectively addressed.

What is not at all clear is why these needs must be accommodated at the one and only location where it is feasible to locate a public square. The city, after acquiring the former Safeway block, undertook a comprehensive public outreach process to develop a plan based on copious input from a very engaged community. After all, we are the oldest town west of the Rocky Mountains, and we still do not have a public gathering place, a central, open, people-friendly space in our beloved downtown.

We are now looking at something completely unrecognizable from the original intent for Heritage Square — a concept that was met with great enthusiasm by the public.

We are sacrificing an opportunity for a public square downtown simply because the funding mechanisms that have been seized upon are aligned to support affordable housing and mental health care.

Is this really the best we can do?

ED OVERBAY
Astoria