

OPINION

theAstorian

editor@dailyastorian.com

Founded in 1873

KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

SHANNON ARLINT
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

GUEST COLUMN

Legislature honors Courtney’s longevity

If ever there was an issue that is neither Democrat nor Republican, urban nor rural, it is the issue of preventing animal abuse.

So said state Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, on Wednesday as he urged his colleagues to pass his Senate Bill 1504 banning any greyhound racing in Oregon.



DICK HUGHES

He received unanimous support. The “debate” mostly was senators showering praise upon Courtney, the longest-serving legislator in state history.

Courtney, 78, will retire in January.

“I guess we’re here doing a reverse Shakespeare. We’re not here to bury the Senate president; we’re here to praise him,” said Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland.

“The state’s a heckuva lot better because Peter Courtney has been here,” said Sen. Fred Girod, R-Lyons.

“He has deep respect for our differences and deep respect for our similarities,” said Sen. Kate Lieber, D-Beaverton.

Yet if ever there was an issue that was almost wholly Democrats vs. Republicans, urban vs. rural, it came the next day. Again, Courtney was at the center. The Senate passed House Bill 4002, phasing in overtime for agricultural workers, on a near-party-line vote and sent the measure to Gov. Kate Brown.

Courtney presided over a lengthy, intense, back-and-forth debate in which he heard himself criticized by Republicans for not ensuring a more collaborative outcome. Then he was the wrap-up



State Senate President Peter Courtney is retiring.

speaker for the advocates, all of whom were Democrats.

Courtney found himself on the opposite side from senators who the previous morning had extolled his leadership — Girod; Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield; Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena; Republican leader Tim Knopp, of Bend, and others.

Legislators, Courtney said, generally don’t like to make decisions. And for him, this at least was a start on agricultural overtime, even though he doesn’t know how it ultimately will play out for workers or the industry. He defended the bill as “a very good beginning,” full of checks and balances, and “not an irresponsible piece of legislation.”

Senate Republicans had insisted that the overtime bill be read word-by-word before the debate, as they had for the greyhound legislation and other bills as a way of slowing the Democratic behemoth that controls the Legislature. But

later Thursday, the Senate and House Republicans dropped the bill-reading requirement, easing the path toward adjournment on Friday.

The week’s back-and-forth illustrated the swings and trade-offs of politics.

Courtney is Oregon’s longest-serving Senate president, first elected in 2003 when the chamber was evenly split between Democrats and Republicans.

The late Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem, convinced her fellow Republicans that they could trust Courtney in a power-sharing arrangement. He’s been the presiding officer ever since — a moderating influence against the more liberal House to the chagrin of liberal Democrats in both chambers.

This is his 38th year in the Legislature, having started in the House when Democrats were in the minority.

In contrast to Courtney’s long tenure, three Democratic women in the House

announced they could not afford to seek reelection due to the low pay for a job that supposedly is part time but really isn’t.

Karin Power, of Milwaukie, Rachel Prusak, of Tualatin, and Anna Williams, of Hood River, collectively have served 14 years in the Legislature.

In a joint statement, they wrote: “Balancing our work, multiple day jobs, families and our service has become unsustainable. How much of a check on power can we be if we earn a base salary of less than \$33,000 a year? How can we adequately oversee a state budget of more than \$25 billion, with dozens of different state agencies?”

Among the bills dying in the session’s final days was one that would have raised the pay to more than \$63,000 and added a monthly child care stipend for eligible parents.

This is a challenge for the Legislature’s future. Increased pay would attract more candidates of low and moderate incomes, instead of having to rely on other jobs or family finances. Yet legislators’ awareness of issues is enhanced by their firsthand knowledge of the working world, as well as other community issues.

There likely would be less divisiveness within the Legislature if there were more Democrats with retail, manufacturing and other business experience and more Republicans with backgrounds in social services and the public sector. As with any organization, the Legislature needs enough turnover to stay fresh instead of insular, but not so much turnover that it loses touch with itself and repeats past missteps.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Appropriate locations

Neither intolerant nor uncaring, those who ask to pause the process for Heritage Square are not hysterical or heartless. Most of us have had mental illness or addiction in our families, raised children alone and know what low income means.

It is not that we lack compassion or concern for those less fortunate, we are just asking to consider appropriate locations. The last open space in downtown historic Astoria is worthy of Heritage Square to honor those who settled and worked here.

The benefits of open space are amazing, creating economic, social and environmental value for residents and visitors, and value for the future of Astoria.

Perhaps you missed the “silver wave” of protesters waiting in the cold for an hour at the door of City Hall when you voted “yes.”

Perhaps you didn’t read the hundreds of names on the petitions turned in to City Council, names gathered in just five days, of people concerned about the “rush to sign up the developers.”

Perhaps you didn’t know all the masked people in the council chambers, standing in the hall, and watching on Zoom, who were just asking to pause the decision until there could be a more deliberate study on how multistory buildings in Heritage Square would affect our city, our downtown businesses and parking. There are other locations better suited for this development.

Two things my Dad said when things didn’t make sense: “Follow the money” and, “you can’t fight City Hall.” I hope the latter isn’t entirely true.

LaREE JOHNSON
Astoria

Brave, beautiful and brilliant

It is incredibly brave to open a new restaurant in the middle of a pandemic. We had our first meal at The SEA Crab House last night, and it won’t be our last. It was excellent!

We love the location of this eating establishment, being right on the water. It’s beautiful, and they have added booths for privacy and comfort. We always enjoy sitting in a good booth.

Our server was charming, attentive and helpful. We started with the delicious lavender cosmopolitan. When we go to a new place we tend to order what is “safe” on the menu.

The SEA Crab House has an interesting menu with opportunities to build a boil of your favorite choices. We decided to try the clam chowder, which was different from any we have ever had, and it was delightful. The focus was not on potatoes, but on the clams. Yum.

CASLEZARTOONS.COM
JOHN COLE
OTHER NAMES: TREASURE
SEPARATION (APLOGIES TO SCHULZ!)



I enjoyed the oysters on the half shell, and appreciated our server’s offer to bring them with cocktail sauce and horseradish. So good.

Next we had the Caesar salad and the codfish basket. The fish and chips were different than any in town, and we really liked the mix of spices used. We finished our meal with the blueberry cheesecake, also delightful.

We are so happy to have another wonderful eating spot right on the water, where you can enjoy your meal and enjoy the great Columbia River at the same time. Brilliant!

MARY HADREAS
Astoria

A different perspective

A recent article reported on county commissioner dissatisfaction with a Southwest Coastal Citizen Advisory Committee appointed to assist Clatsop County with its comprehensive plan update (The Astorian, Feb. 24). Committee members are portrayed as outliers and rule breakers for voicing community concerns about certain land use issues and offering proposals to address them. As a member of this committee, I would like to

offer a different perspective on our work.

The county has a history of disliking, disregarding and dissolving citizen advisory committees.

The current committees were set up in 2019 and will be dissolved when the comprehensive plan update project is completed. All six committees have recommended there be a permanent committee for each planning region to represent the region in land use matters and facilitate communication between the county and community members. The Planning Commission voted to accept this recommendation, only to have it summarily rejected by commissioners.

Regarding short-term rentals, half of the rentals in the unincorporated parts of the county are located on a few residential streets in the Southwest Coastal region. Communities like Arch Cape and Cove Beach want more regulations, more enforcement of existing regulations and a phase-out of rentals where the present zoning doesn’t allow them or where the infrastructure in these rural areas can’t support them.

Our committee spent hundreds of hours on this ambitious project, including holding three community town halls to solicit input from residents, property owners and others.

This work product deserves a fair hearing on the merits, not a dressing down for speaking up.

LINDA EYERMAN
Arch Cape

Final abandonment

At 84, we, too, are weary of looking at the pit where Safeway used to be, but we think that using the space for low-income housing is the final abandonment of hope for a real town, one with a plaza, a place for rest and the enjoyment of meeting others for conversation.

If the proposed development happens, it will cap a long sequence of defining misjudgments, among them a lack of support for a highway bypass, the abandonment of an arts commission with the power of design review, the commitment of a formerly empty block near the river to a bus terminal rather than a park, and the surrender of the goal of a new library.

Astoria could have been a much better place — and it might still in some respects be improved — a town where you’d want to live rather than just visit.

ROBERT and KERSTIN ADAMS
Astoria