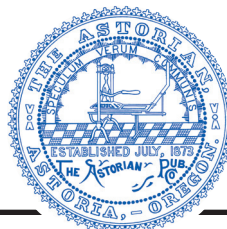


OPINION



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GUEST COLUMN

Legislature had a different tone this session

Here are three takeaways from the 32-day session of the Legislature that adjourned March 4.

Tone was different

There was more behind-the-scenes collaboration between the state Senate and the House, as well as between key Democrats and Republicans, despite their public partisan differences.



DICK HUGHES

Few people might have noticed that new state House Speaker Dan Rayfield frequently was on the House floor, talking with individual legislators from either party about issues while someone else presided at the rostrum. His “I’ll come to you” approach

was a marked difference from his predecessor, Tina Kotek.

From the beginning of the session, Democrats and Republicans commented on the new atmosphere with Rayfield, D-Corvallis, as speaker and Rep. Julie Fahey, D-Eugene, as the new House majority leader. They clearly were trying for a less contentious relationship, though not always successfully. Both Republican leaders also were relatively new – Sen. Tim Knopp, of Bend, and Rep. Vikki Breese-Iverson, of Prineville. Senate Majority Leader Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, has been in that job less than two years.

Longtime Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, praised the caucus leaders. He was onto something in his end-of-session media availability when he said those personalities drove the Legislature’s success: You must have the right people in the room – people who know how to fight for their side but who also can come back together and work cooperatively.

To slow the supermajority Democrats’ agenda, Republicans had insisted that bills be read aloud word-for-word before being voted on. When that happened this year, Democrats abandoned



Faith Cathcart

Farmworker overtime was the session’s most controversial issue.

their past tactic of publicly accusing Republicans of obstructionism. Instead they acquiesced to the bill reading as a legitimate form of political protest, although Courtney made sure senators knew how much time was being wasted.

No one paid attention as the sterile computerized voice read a bill. At one point, House members interrupted a reading to let colleagues know that treats honoring Dairy Day were available out-

side the chamber.

The Democratic leadership in both chambers adjusted schedules so their priority legislation could be completed while still reading bills. That proved unnecessary once Republicans were unable to block the session’s most controversial bill, House Bill 4002 mandating overtime pay for farmworkers. At that point, Republicans agreed to end the bill readings so the session could end soon.

Agricultural overtime fight was a repeat of redistricting

Key protagonists were the same – Rep. Andrea Salinas, of Lake Oswego, for the Democrats and Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, of Albany, for the Republicans.

Public hearings on HB 4002 were more compressed than for last year’s special session on redistricting, but the testimony seemed equally rehearsed on all sides, and the eventual outcome largely predetermined.

When the session began Feb. 1, House Democrats probably had the votes in hand to pass the bill, whose coalition of traditional Democratic interests included unions, conservation groups and Latino organizations. Yet some Democratic legislators who voted for the bill said they were torn between fairness for farmworkers and the economic hardship for family farmers.

It was surprising to hear Courtney later say that he had not realized how much the Republicans disliked HB 4002.

Governor leaves on a high note

This was Gov. Kate Brown’s last regular legislative session before leaving office, and she pretty much got what she wanted. She entered with a careful agenda that had bipartisan support.

The challenge is for her administration to handle the money that the Legislature allocated for different programs – job training, housing, homelessness, child care and more.

Lawmakers long have wanted greater oversight of agency spending and performance. The well-documented problems with pandemic-related unemployment benefits and rental assistance are among the latest examples.

At their media availability last week, Democratic leaders Wagner and Fahey said they are committed to ensuring taxpayer dollars are spent appropriately. Stay tuned.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fueling around

The day President Joe Biden took over for President Donald Trump, he inherited a stable geopolitical world, a nation with a recovering economy from the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccines that helped keep the virus from going further into the American population and gas priced at less than \$2.50 a gallon.

In just over a year these things have changed mostly due to unforced errors on the part of the Biden administration. One of the first things Biden did as president was to open the door for Russian oil sales to America when he hobbled the nation’s domestic energy supply.

And, it was only after bipartisan agreement in Congress that Biden was forced to halt energy sales from Russia. How much thought did it take to figure if America was sending billions of dollars to Russia through oil sales that some of that money was going for Russia’s invasion into Ukraine?

President Trump in 2018 told NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg during a meeting that the Western alliance, particularly Germany, is “totally controlled” by Russia through oil and gas deals. He added, “So we’re supposed to protect you against Russia, but they’re paying billions of dollars to Russia? I think that’s very inappropriate.”

What is sad is that even as Americans quit buying Russian oil, other nations like China will be happy to buy all the oil and natural gas they can. They need cheap energy to make cheap products for Americans to purchase.

And so it goes ...

MATT JANES
Jeffers Garden

Transparency

I have been going to Gearhart City Council and Planning Commission meetings since about 2002 because I wanted to know what is going on in my city.

Transparency? Not once have I ever felt the city government was keeping something from me, or any of the public. I have always been able to ask questions, or get any information. I can meet with the mayor and the city manager at any given time. All I have to do is make an appointment.

Since I have been going to these meetings, there have always been notices regarding the upcoming meeting, including when and what was on the agenda. Each was posted on the bulletin board at

City Hall, the post office and the grocery store for everyone to see.

And now, anyone can go to the city’s website and get just about anything needed. Or they can join the city blog and get notices for all city meetings, along with all the information the councilors and commissioners get. Plus, if you can’t find it, ask!

I was just at City Hall a few days ago, and asked for Planning Commission meetings for 2005 and earlier, and they helped me out. I also went over to the fire station for a walk through to see some of the things that are out of code. Fire Chief Josh Como and one of the firefighters took me around. Any questions I had were answered.

Transparency! They listened to anything I had to say, with interest.

THOMAS THIES
Gearhart

Doesn’t make much sense

As a 27-year resident of Gearhart, I understand and appreciate the responsibilities the paid and volunteer firefighters are willing to assume. I think the need for a fire station with more space, that is better constructed, is obvious. The police chief and officers must think so, as well.

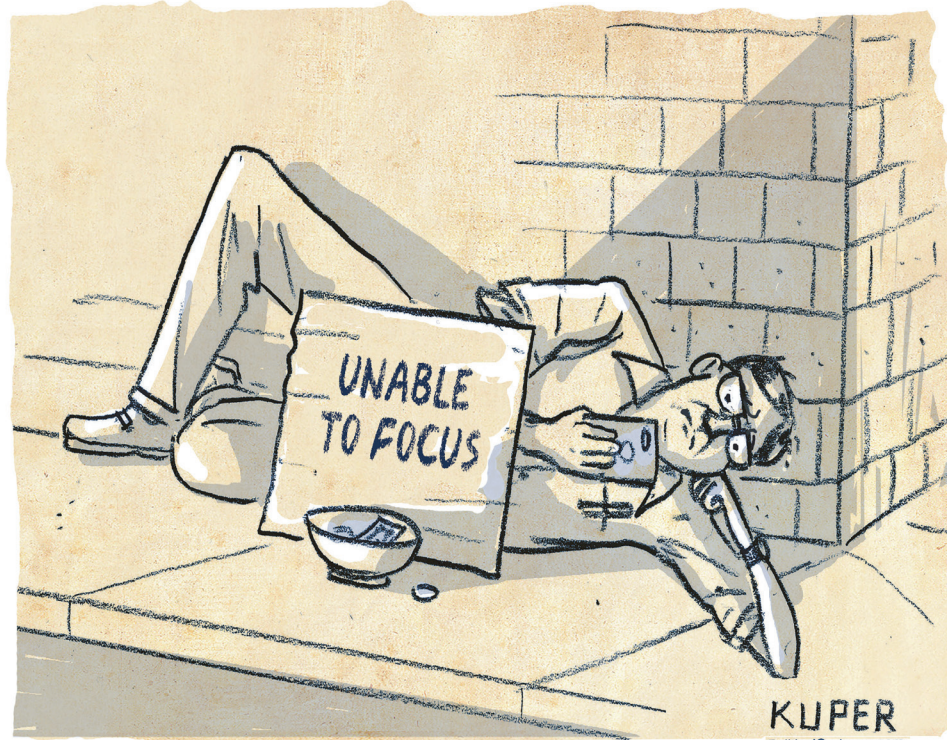
I have two difficulties with the ambitious plan proposed. First, in most communities an effort is made to place equipment and staff in a central location for quick response time. Annexing land to the north and locating firefighters, police officers and their equipment there seems like a bad idea to me.

Rebuilding the current fire station, perhaps expanding it, and relocating City Hall, seems to be more sensible. In addition, the resilience part of the relocation proposes that the building provide for emergency response when needed, with the focus being on the tsunami that might come tomorrow, or might come in 800 years.

Camp Rilea is a short distance north, and a regional center for emergency response. I have no doubt that with their training, the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department will respond as well as it can in a disaster.

It can’t replace Camp Rilea; their first responsibility will be saving their families, and helping their neighbors. They might not be able to get to the station, in any case. It will be some distance from most of Gearhart. Whatever the cost, which is considerable, it doesn’t make much sense to me.

JIM CASTERLINE
Gearhart



KUPER
PoliticalCartoons.com

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.

Saving lives

As a bone marrow transplant recipient and advocacy ambassador for the National Marrow Donor Program/Be The Match, I understand that working with Congress on policy is critical to ensuring that all blood cancer and disease patients have access to a transplant if needed.

In 2012, I was the recipient of an anonymous donor bone marrow transplant. My donor won me “more” of whatever I might need more of — as a result I want to ensure that every patient who needs “more” has the opportunity.

I recently participated in a virtual fly-in and met with U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley to advocate for increased funding for the C. W. Bill Young Cell Transplantation Program. Every three minutes, someone in the U.S. is diagnosed with blood cancer, and 70% of patients don’t have a fully matched donor in their

family.

The nation’s registry is how those patients find donors who can save their lives. Fully funding for fiscal year 2022, and increasing funding by \$5 million for fiscal year 2023, will help expand the Human Leukocyte Antigens Today program, which offers HLA typing at the time of diagnosis.

This can shorten the time to transplant for patients whose most valuable resource is time. In pilot phases, HLA Today has especially helped ethnically diverse patients, who are historically recommended to transplant at lower rates than white patients.

I want to thank Senators Wyden and Merkley for their support. This funding plays a major role in helping to continue matching donors with patients and saving lives.

CYNTHIA SPECKMAN
Manzanita