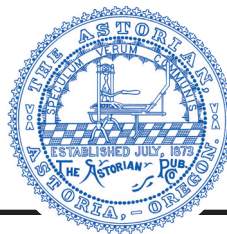


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Seeking compromisers who care about ‘The Oregon Way’

‘Compromise, compromise, compromise. Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate.’ These are the qualities that Brian Clem seeks in legislative candidates this spring – “compromisers who care about ‘The Oregon Way.’”

Clem speaks from experience. He served in the state House for nearly 15 years until last fall, was a legislative aide, ran campaigns and worked for U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden.



**DICK HUGHES**

“The country definitely has gotten more divided and Oregon has gotten more divided,” Clem said, yet “there are people who believe you should try really, really hard to get a consensus.”

He and five former Democratic colleagues in the Legislature want to support such candidates. Last week they launched a new political action committee — Oregonians Are Ready, or OAR PAC. They are Democrats, after all, so the initial goal is to back Democratic legislative candidates in the May primary who will be more centrist, more willing to compromise than their opponents.

I find this development relevant not for any ideological position but for what it says about our state, including the need for hearing rural voices in Salem. Three of the founders have links to Coos Bay, including Clem, who grew up there. They have watched as decisions made in Salem and Washington, D.C., helped turn a thriving community into an impoverished one — and have stymied local attempts to rebound.

Clem, a Salem businessman, seeded the PAC with \$500,000. The other founders are former state senator Arnie Roblan, of Coos Bay, and former rep-



Anna Reed/Statesman Journal

**Brian Clem, a former state lawmaker who represented Salem, is among several moderate Democrats behind a new political action committee.**

resentatives Jeff Barker, of Aloha; Deborah Boone, of Cannon Beach; Betty Komp, of Gates; and Caddy McKeown, of Coos Bay.

They don’t necessarily align on every issue. But, Clem said, “I think we’re all united on that Oregon has lost its way.”

All six were considered moderate Democrats. In 2016, they began to hold Tuesday night dinners with colleagues in search of middle-ground solutions on complex topics such as raising the minimum wage.

However, as the Democrats expanded their House and Senate majorities in recent years, there was less need for consensus with moderates, or with Republicans at all.

Meanwhile, primary elections draw the most partisan of voters. That is

why Democrats often go to the left and Republicans to the right instead of campaigning as moderates. Too often, legislators also lean away from the center to avoid drawing primary challengers from their Democratic left or Republic right.

The new PAC aims to support compromise-willing Democrats who face such opponents.

“I don’t believe compromise is a bad word,” McKeown said. “The fringes push ideas. But when you listen to everybody and you work with everybody, I think you come up with good legislation.”

That was a lesson McKeown honed growing up in a small town and later representing a purple district in the Legislature: Learn to work together with everyone. You must give a little

to get a little. You can’t afford to burn bridges.

Clem put it another way: Stay at the table until everyone gets what they need. Help them save face instead of rolling over them.

Clem said that in his dozen or so years chairing a legislative committee, there never was a party-line vote on a bill. He led such issues as protecting the Metolius River headwaters, resolving a Washington County land use battle, limiting class sizes in public schools, and helping residents recover from the 2020 Labor Day wildfires.

As another example of collaboration, he cited Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Happy Valley, who chairs the House Judiciary Committee. She could have rolled over Republican Rep. Ron Noble, a former police chief in McMinnville. Instead, they worked together on law enforcement reforms.

The 2011 Legislature, with the House evenly split between Republicans and Democrats, underscored for Clem the immense power of compromise and collaboration. That legislative session — in which Roblan and Rep. Bruce Hanna, R-Roseburg, served as co-House speakers — is regarded among Oregon’s most successful. Though discussions often were difficult, lawmakers reached bipartisan agreements on such contentious issues as redistricting, education reform and the state budget.

In this year’s legislative session, Clem said, farmworker overtime seemed to offer an opportunity for a similar bipartisan victory, though with significant give-and-take. That didn’t happen. House Bill 4002 passed on a party-line vote, with exception of retiring Democratic Sen. Lee Beyer, of Springfield, who voted “no.”

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Heritage fountain

Think of the cities and towns you have visited; don’t most of them have a central plaza? I grew up in Europe, where throughout history they have been important spaces for community life, and taken for granted. How much such a place would benefit Astoria has been contemplated often during my almost 30 years here.

And now we have a chance to make it happen on Heritage Square, the ideal and only possible location in our unique historic city. Yet the need for more workforce, low-income housing is undeniable, too. Our City Council’s decision to sign a development agreement means that housing rather than a public plaza could be sited there.

Both needs are indisputable; the location is debatable. Alternatives for housing locations do exist, and have been suggested. Maybe we can find room for compromise if we open our minds?

Picture an inviting space large enough for public events and celebrations with room along the periphery for coffee shops, eating places, little shops and the Garden of Surging Waves. The downtown business community would surely be in favor.

And how about an eye-catching fountain in its midst? I think it would be welcomed with enthusiasm, and inspire real community life, inclusive and not elitist social interaction in person.

Maybe there is someone with enough pocket change to make a Heritage fountain a reality? We would happily toss in some coins in honor, appreciation and love for our forever Astoria!

It’s just a thought. But maybe not just wishful thinking?

MUSCHI MAYFLOWER  
Astoria

### Best use

I’ve been reading all the news about Heritage Square with interest. We will still have the Garden of Surging Waves, but that will be all that remains of the original designs.

I support workforce and affordable housing. I support a project downtown that allows people to walk and bike to work or easily catch public transportation. Employers need housing for their employees, and people need a place to live.

I also believe the Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare proposal has merit. However, these micro units are not a good fit. They will limit the number of units available to others, whether confined to one floor or intermingled with the apartments.

I also do not trust CBH to have staff available 24/7 for their clients. They had said there would be lock-down units for

## NEWS NOTE: SCIENTISTS SAY ANTARCTICA HAS BECOME 70° WARMER



people in crisis when they opened their respite center in Warrenton years ago. We have yet to see that happen.

They said there would be counselors available to assist police officers with people attempting suicide, or in other types of crisis 24/7, and we have yet to see this consistently. I believe a commercial building or large home on a bus route would be more appropriate for supportive housing.

New housing projects are in the process, and I’m glad to see them, especially the construction near Safeway. The dream of a public square is gone. Astoria has very limited buildable land, and we must accept this need for change. But we need to make the best use of this property.

MARCIA FENSKE  
Astoria

### Think about it

Gearhart is not as divisive as you might think. Most of us who live in Gearhart agree that our volunteer firefighters are an amazing asset to our community. We also agree that our current fire station is old, inadequate and literally crumbling down, and that we need a new station.

We all agree that if the fire station bond passes, our taxes will go up. Well, yes they will. So there, most of us agree on something. So, this is good.

The issue that causes a division among

us is the construction of a new fire station and the cost of such a structure. Our mayor, Paulina Cockrum, recently asked the question, “If not now, when?”

If we wait another year, five years or more, the price of a new station will only go up, and our taxes will only increase. Meanwhile, our firefighters will still be in an inadequate, cramped facility that is literally disintegrating around them. So, this is not good.

As an aside, I know that a new station is being called a “resiliency station,” as it would also house our police department, but, hey, I live in Gearhart and, to me, it will always be a fire station. Maybe I will change my mind. Maybe not.

Our community needs a new station, whatever it’s called. I encourage the passing of our bond, for the good of Gearhart. If not now, when?

Think about it. This is good.

REITA FACKERELL  
Gearhart

### It’s just the pits

The squabble over proper usage of the hole in downtown Astoria is a simple matter. Names matter. Heritage is what you’ve received that’s come down to you from the past, and not confusing that with what the departed leave behind them for others.

So if you’re talking about heritage, and thinking about legacy, you’re thinking about who it used to belong to, and heritage focuses, instead, on the people who are inheriting it now. It’s clear to me that this is the quarrel at its root. Comprehend?

Initially dedicated to celebrate our collective legacy, the dialogue has gone to pot. Astoria’s newest extractive industry, tourism, wants the hole transformed into another visitor amenity. Or better, subsidized housing for tourism workers.

A more scrupulous segment of society thinks it an ideal location for services to the needy. You know, those leftist radicals who want to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable.

Regardless, the number of abandoned shopping carts are growing exponentially, and the comfortable fear that creating a hub for social services in the heart of Astoria will attract undesirable elements from Coos Bay to Aberdeen, Washington, and all points between.

Our local economy is based upon fish, “forests” and fantasy. Tourism is built upon a dreamscape. Mental illness and homelessness are our collective reality. We own that, too.

And the hole? I’m putting my money on tourism. For as our national history will confirm, the owners will always decide who among the needy are truly deserving.

GARY DURHEIM  
Seaside