

OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

Oregon’s economic crystal ball is coming soon

The Oregon Legislature this year came close to allowing self-serve gasoline. Perhaps it’s also time to repeal the state law that each city intersection in Oregon have at least one coffee shop.

OK, that’s the extent of my April Fools’ jokes. On further reflection, however, marijuana dispensaries appear to have overtaken coffee dispensaries in Salem. Maybe I should have used pot shops in the mock law.

Now, back to real-life politics. You might have noticed recently that your friendly neighborhood legislative candidates have been announcing campaign events to attract support and discuss issues. As part of election season, here are two Capitol issues worthy of discussion: state revenues and legislative technology.



DICK HUGHES

Money: How much and where to spend

Legislative candidates make plenty of promises about what they’ll do if elected, from bolstering state police to enhancing environmental regulation. Where, in real life, will the money actually come from? (Of course, legislators also must get a majority of their colleagues and the governor to support their ideas.)

Circle the date of May 18 – the day after the primary election – on your crystal ball. That’s when state economists will release their next forecast of how the Oregon economy and state revenues are faring. The quarterly forecasts, along with any tax changes created by a new Legislature, are the foundations on which the governor and lawmakers build the state’s two-year budget.

The Democrat-controlled 2022 Legislature embraced the economists’ previous predictions of rising revenues and spent heavily, particularly on one-time items. However, budgets tend to expand regardless of which party holds power. What differs



April Ehrlich/Oregon Public Broadcasting  
**Technology has partially evened the participation gap between Portland-Salem-Eugene and the rest of Oregon.**

is where and how they would spend the money.

When Salem Republican Gene Derfler was Senate majority leader and then Senate president 20 years ago, he was frustrated by such spending and asked the local newspaper editorial board to help rein in his GOP colleagues.

Democratic House Speaker Dan Rayfield, of Corvallis, noted this year that Republican lawmakers had an overabundance of ideas for spending on rural projects. “You’d think that Republicans would be under budget. But, boy, they came in way over budget,” he said in February.

Meanwhile, inflation is hitting government as it is businesses, nonprofits and consumers. Wild-fire season and associated costs remain unpredictable. So too is the pandemic, though it’s easing – at least for now. And as always, state government faces assorted lawsuits, some potentially with hefty price tags.

Long-term indicators suggest budget belt-tightening in the future. Legislators this year added to budget reserves. Should they have done more?

**Technology: Help or hindrance**

Senate Majority Leader Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, was a legislative aide in the 1990s. He worked for a representative who told staff to respond only to paper letters, not emails. Times certainly have changed, Wagner said, and legislative staffs are much better now.

Technology has partially evened the participation gap between Portland-Salem-Eugene and the rest of Oregon. With legislative hearings held by video conference and phone, Oregonians can participate from anywhere. They no longer must drive to Salem, wait to hear whether their name is called to testify and, if not, drive back on another day or else give up.

People can respond almost instantly as developments unfold.

But the blessing of technology also is a curse. Video meetings are sterile, lacking the visual cues to how lawmakers and the audience are reacting. Internet or phone connections fail, especially in rural areas with unreliable service. There seems to be even less engagement between people testifying and committee members than in face-to-face meetings.

Anyone can fire off an email to a legislator or committee with less time – and thought – than required for an old-fashioned typed or handwritten letter. There is little buffer.

For controversial legislation, written testimony accumulates at such a rate that one wonders whether much of it ever is read by legislators.

Within the Capitol, technology too often is talked about as good or bad. It is neither. The issue is how it is employed – and whether it’s overpromised and underdelivered.

The continuing question for legislators, individually and collectively, is how technology can expand accessibility, transparency and interaction while not replacing face-to-face contact and traditional cordial communication.

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

THE CONTINUING QUESTION FOR LEGISLATORS, INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, IS HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN EXPAND ACCESSIBILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND INTERACTION WHILE NOT REPLACING FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT AND TRADITIONAL CORDIAL COMMUNICATION.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Swiss cheese

The initial problems with short-term rentals are the nuisances, the noise, the dogs, the parties, the traffic and parking.

But move along a bit in time, and it becomes the more serious lack of people living in an area to provide needed services, paid and volunteer services, that tourists just cannot help with.

Tourists don’t volunteer at the schools, don’t help with the community events, don’t volunteer to fight fires. And neither do the short-term rental owners who live elsewhere.

A community becomes like a block of Swiss cheese, with so many holes, where once there was a close-knit fabric of people who helped each other, and knew each other. The holes don’t fill in. They stay open, empty and useless to the community where they exist.

Imagine, instead, that those holes were filled with families. Families who would become productive members of our community. They would volunteer at our schools, our community events, their child’s school.

They would live here, work here and thrive here. But when you favor investors over residents, it erodes the community. It creates those holes, and once the holes grow big enough, there is no community left.

Please, Clatsop County commissioners, reconsider your short-sighted plan to make Swiss cheese out of our small, coastal neighborhoods. At their April 13 board meeting at 6 p.m., the commissioners will consider a proposal from the county to change the zoning to allow more short-term rentals — do you want mini-motels next to you?

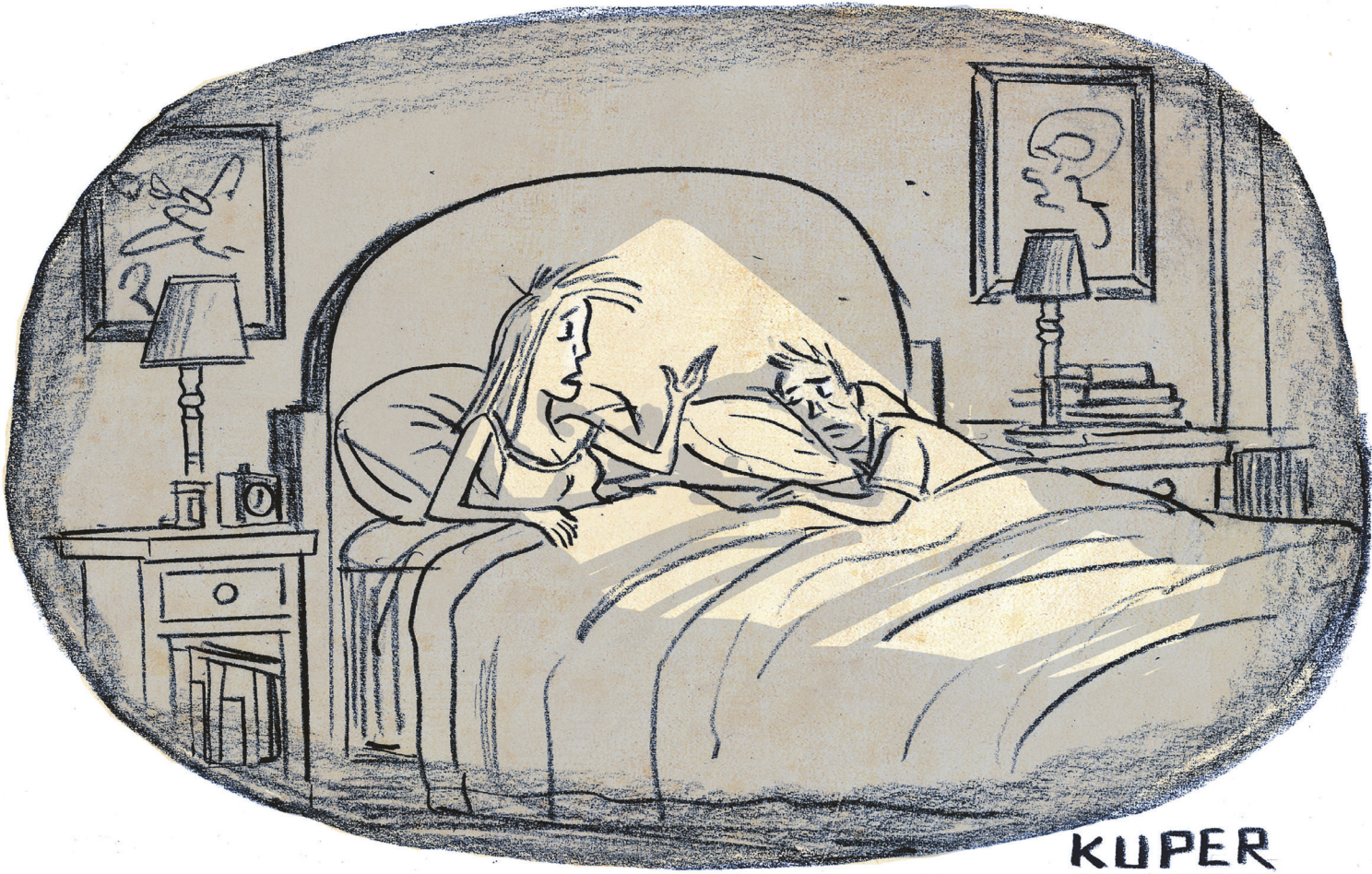
CHARLES DICE  
Arch Cape

Sideswiped

David vs Goliath: The little community of Cove Beach vs. the Clatsop County commission.

It’s amazing that the members of this community have been trying to contain illegal short-term rentals in their home by limiting numbers and working to make rules to protect those who live here, were completely sideswiped by the commissioners’ proposal to allow more short-term rentals in unincorporated areas.

Cove Beach has unimproved, narrow roads, septic systems in clay soil and a significant number of short-term rentals already in the community, which



“I’ve got to figure out how to get paid for work dreams.”

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.

includes Clatsop and Tillamook counties.

Short-term rentals are commercial businesses that sap Cove Beach of livability, security and population who volunteer for so many local needs, like fire departments, school boards, nonprofit organizations, etc.

Please let your county commissioners know that public involvement from those who live, vote and work in the county can plan their own communities, and know what the carrying capacity is of their community. Follow the money!

JOANNE CORNELIUS  
Arch Cape

Wholeheartedly

I wholeheartedly recommend Pam Wev for Clatsop County commissioner.

I particularly appreciate her interests in county infrastructure, and planning and diversifying the economy, but also in our area’s problems arising from affordable housing and the state of mental health assistance in our community.

She is approachable, easy to talk to, and I believe has brought experience and expertise to the topics under review. Her experience in local and federal govern-

ment is impressive, and her broader thinking on topics allows for future planning and execution of how education and diversifying the economy can work together.

All that, and she is one interesting woman to talk to!

KITTY PAINO  
Astoria

Valuable

I am writing in support of reelecting Pamela Wev to the Clatsop County commission. Pam’s professional expertise in economic development and land use planning is critical for the county to remain on the path of sustainable development.

Her knowledge and work experience have made her a valuable person on the commission, and she is committed to finding ways to create more housing in the county, and to address the needs of our inadequate infrastructure to ensure efficient growth here.

Please vote to keep an experienced and knowledgeable voice on our important county commission. Reelect Wev, a thoughtful, calm and experienced county commissioner.

NED HEAVENRICH  
Brownsmead