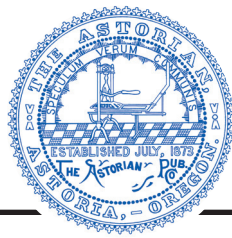


OPINION



the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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BEHIND THE NEWS

‘We’re concentrating more on education’

School districts in Oregon have flexibility in setting health and safety precautions against the coronavirus pandemic as the new school year begins.

State public health and education leaders have urged parents to get their children vaccinated against the virus. A vaccination mandate remains for school staff.

School-level COVID-19 management plans are due with the Oregon Department of Education by the end of the week and are available to the public.



DERRICK DePLEGGE

“Things are better than they have been,” Craig Hoppes, the superintendent of the Astoria School District, said. “We’re concentrating more on education and a little bit less on the health. Felt like we were a health district for a while there, because that’s what we were.”

“But now we can concentrate on education.”

Hoppes, a former principal at Lewis and Clark Elementary School, has led Astoria schools since 2008.

In an interview, Hoppes discussed the lessons from the pandemic and the toll on mental health, along with challenges like child care and housing for school district staff.

Q: The coronavirus pandemic has caused disruptions for public schools. What are the most important lessons you have learned over the past two years?

A: The importance that we’ve learned is that, from a school standpoint, you can’t replicate kids in front of adults — teachers and staff.

As much as we tried — and were somewhat successful — it’s still the best teaching when a student is in front of a teacher.

Knowing that, and learning from that, it’s changed some of the ways we do things as a school, to work more to engage kids in school, to get them in school, knowing that they can learn if they’re at school.

Q: The pandemic has taken a toll on mental health. A recent study found a significant increase in anxiety and depression among children in Oregon. What is your sense of how students have coped?

A: I can tell you that students are working hard to cope, but they are different, and what they bring to school now has been different, because most of them have been isolated for the last two years.

We’re seeing some anxiety type behaviors, not engaging behaviors. But with that, we’ve increased our counseling staff — an additional counselor in each of our schools. We have what is called a social-emotional learning coordinator, who just helps staff with students who just need more supports than what they had two or three years ago in providing some one-on-one work with them.

The district also has hired what we call a student interventionist, as the kids who are displaying anxiety type behaviors, that we can support them with plans



Lissa Brewer/The Astorian

Craig Hoppes is superintendent of the Astoria School District.

WE HAVE LOST STAFF MEMBERS IN THE PAST BECAUSE THEY COULDN’T FIND HOUSING, AND I HAD A COUPLE NEW STAFF MEMBERS NOW THAT ARE STRUGGLING TO FIND HOUSING, AND NOT JUST IN ASTORIA, WITHIN THE WHOLE COUNTY.

and work with staff to get them so that kids are comfortable in class.

They’re different. They’re just a lot more anxious than they were three or four years ago, and it’s caused us to adapt.

Q: Child care is a challenge for many parents in our community. The school district used to host the city’s child care center at Gray School. What role, if any, do you see the school district playing in reducing the shortage?

A: We have a role within our community, but it also impacts our workforce ...

During the pandemic, COVID has taken its toll on our workforce. I think it’s like that nationwide — worldwide — for education. The state provided a fund of money for school districts to spend on retention of staff members. So one of the things that we did was we provided funds for the new child care at Bumble. Some

amount of money that provides us up to seven slots of our own employee child care for the next 20 years. So, every year, we get seven slots in that child care program.

And I’m getting feedback from staff right now that that has just worked wonders for them, because they’re like other parents in our community — could not find child care.

So there’s that part — that’s a big part — because we have lost staff members over the last two, three, four years because they couldn’t find child care.

From our role standpoint, we need to be just as involved as other entities. I know the county is doing a lot of work right now on child care. Our role could be anywhere from helping with staff, helping with training for staff, as well as — if you look at all the facilities within our community — we have the largest facilities. And we have some space to help with those things.

The school district would like to, not so much the child care part, but in the next two or three years to really spend a lot of time and resources on early learning, like start our own preschool program that could have an impact on 3- and 4-year-olds communitywide.

So that would help with child care, because we know that if we get kids a little bit of a head start — not so much the role of academics in 3- and 4-year-olds; just get them used to school and working with other people and working with adults — that could have a great impact.

So our role could be more in the preschool realm.

Q: Housing is the dominant public policy issue on the North Coast. How does the lack of housing options influence the school district when it comes to staff recruiting and retention?

A: It was interesting when we started doing our hiring for this coming school year. A number of staff members we hired — for whatever reason — already lived in the community.

And I thought to myself, that’s good, because that’s one less battle we have to work with them on.

It is a challenge. Not only is it a challenge finding housing, but affordable. The amount of rent that some of our staff members are paying is pretty incredible.

We have had talks, both with the city and with Clatsop Community Action, about how we can be part of the housing issue, whether it’s providing land or just being a partner at the table when they start having those discussions.

We have lost staff members in the past because they couldn’t find housing, and I had a couple new staff members now that are struggling to find housing, and not just in Astoria, within the whole county.

So I know that when we start doing some prioritizing for the school district, that we want to make housing a priority. I don’t have any quick fixes. I just need to be part of the discussion with the city and the county going forward and be part of that.

But we have land. We have a need, just like everybody else.

Derrick DePledge is editor of The Astorian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Responsible

Sad beach walk ... beer labels and six-pack holders flood incoming tides. I’ve personally picked up 96 labels since Aug. 1.

The brewery’s building collapse on June 14 sent thousands of labels into the Columbia River. Plastic tape attaching the labels entangles with building debris in a protected plovers area, where thousands of shorebirds migrate. Labels are still washing up from Ocean Park, Washington, to Lincoln City.

This business received a substantial tax break, according to The Astorian article on Feb. 11, 2021: “Being part of the enterprise zone would save Buoy Beer and Pilot House an estimated \$734,800 in property taxes over five years.”

Tax breaks and continual expansions make me wonder how a few days of beach cleanup could bankrupt them.

Waterfront businesses should be held responsible for polluting. There is more and more of this irresponsibility. The Canary Café and No. 10 Sixth Street fire left burned debris on the dock for months. Most fell, or blew, into the river.

The Tourist No. 2 ferry is now polluting the river. Do you remember the campaign in which our wonderful city leaders promoted buying and restoring this “tourist attraction.” These promoters should help pay for cleanup.

I reflect on poet Horace’s words: “Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret ...” (You can drive nature out with a pitchfork, but she always comes back).

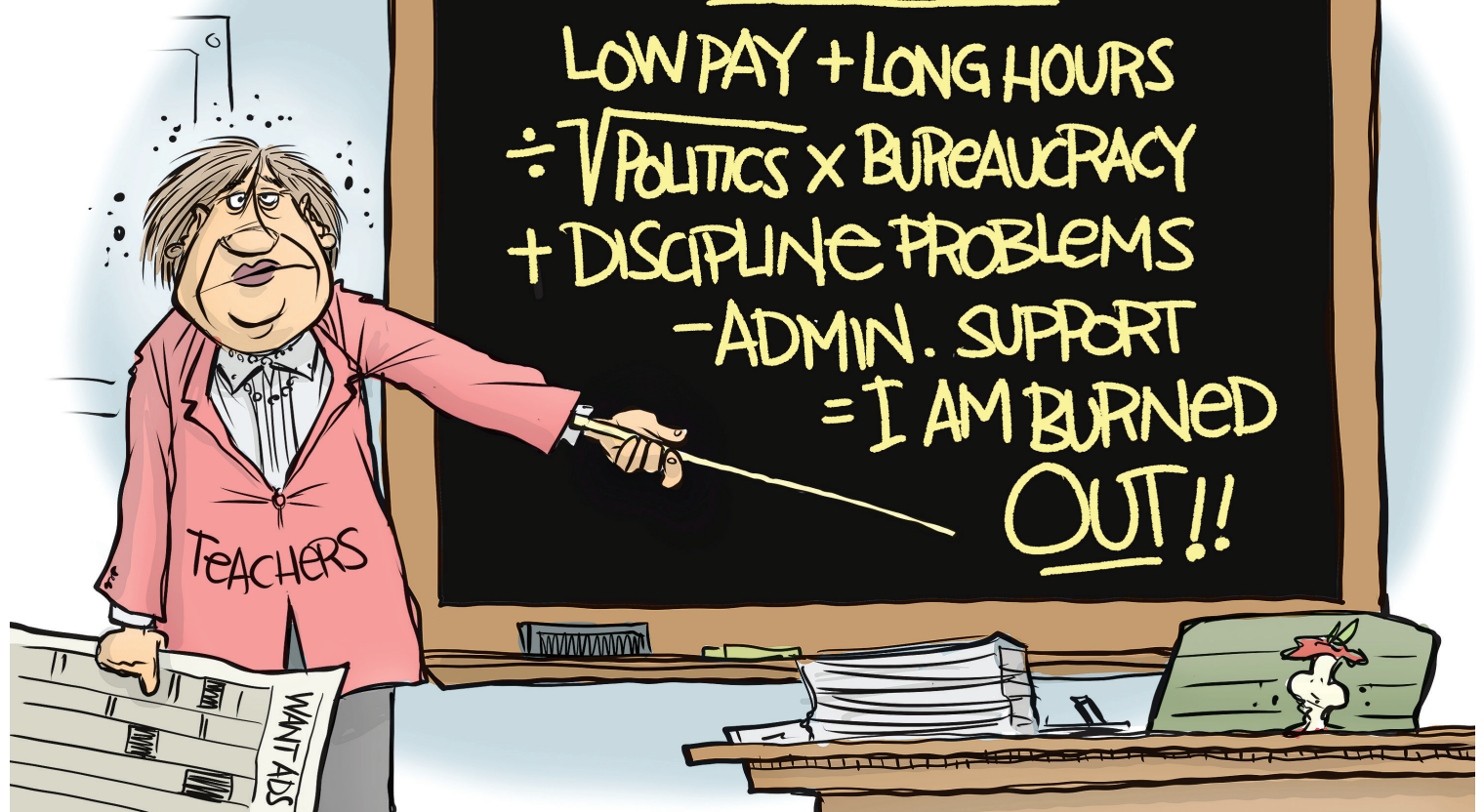
MICHELLE BRIGHT
Astoria

Perhaps

Perhaps the Clatsop County commissioners can think back in time to their high school U.S. history class when they studied the Declaration of Independence. Remember those all-important words, “unalienable rights, that among these are ... the pursuit of happiness.”

It did not read pursuit of profit by the operators of short-term rentals, nor did it read pursuit of profit by the county’s col-

JOHN COLE
TENNESSEE COOKS ST. LOUIS
CHICAGO COOKS ST. LOUIS



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

lection of \$700,000 in transient taxes.

So why are commissioners Mark Kujala, John Toyooka, Pamela Wev, Courtney Bangs and Lianne Thompson

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.

desirous of disallowing the right to the pursuit of happiness for a minority group of residents of Clatsop County by allowing short-term rental operations in the Coastal

Residential Zone, and other residential zones, in the rural land areas of Clatsop County?

County employees and the commissioners who reside in Astoria, Warrenton, Gearhart and other municipalities within the county, which restrict short-term rentals (for good reason, their citizens did not want them in their neighborhoods), experience no degradation in the quality of their life by living next door to mini motels.

Commissioners Kujala, Toyooka, Wev, Bangs and Thompson are violating the civil rights of a minority of citizens residing in select unincorporated residential neighborhoods within Clatsop County. Egregious actions, to say the least, and must, and will, be stopped.

JIM AALBERG
Warrenton