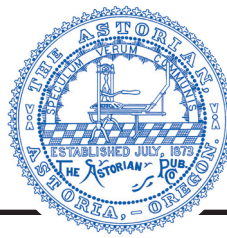


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Put the interests of people above giant corporations

**P**aying taxes is our civic duty. The government's duty is to make it as easy and inexpensive as possible for us to pay our taxes. But for too long, Congress has failed to uphold this responsibility, favoring instead corporations that profit from our need to file tax returns.

A bill recently introduced in Congress would fix this problem. U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer and U.S. Rep.



**JUAN CARLOS ORDÓÑEZ**

Peter DeFazio have co-sponsored the Tax Filing Simplification Act, which would create a simple and free way for Americans to file their taxes. All other members of Oregon's congressional delegation should jump on board this common-sense

reform.

Right now, it costs the average taxpayer about 13 hours and \$240 every year to file a federal tax return, according to Internal Revenue Service figures.

People bear these costs and hassles even though, for many of them, the IRS already has all the information on hand to figure out their tax bill. Do you get a W-2 from your employer showing how much you got paid? So does the IRS. Do you get a 1099 form from the bank telling you much interest you earned? So does the IRS. The reality is that people often spend time and money simply to tell the IRS what it already knows.

For some families, the harm is greater. The cost and complexity of tax filing deters many Americans strug-



Keith Srakocic/AP Photo

**The Tax Filing Simplification Act has been introduced in Congress.**

gling to get by on low wages from filing a tax return. While their low incomes may mean they aren't required to file a tax return, it also means they lose out on tax credits designed to help their families make ends meet. In doing so, they miss out on several thousand dollars that would make their lives and that of their children a bit easier.

The problem of families not claiming tax credits, even though they qualify for them, is worse in Oregon than just about every other state.

The Tax Filing Simplification Act would require the IRS to give people easy access to wage and other data needed to file a tax return that the

agency already has in its possession. Such a system of prefiled tax returns is not new; other countries already do it this way, making filing taxes a zip for their people.

There's more. This legislation would also allow taxpayers with simple returns to choose to have the government fully prepare their tax returns. And it would direct the IRS to create its own free, online tax preparation and filing service. Yes, free.

Why doesn't our country make it free and easy for people to file their tax returns? Because a few big corporations profit from the current, dysfunctional system.

In 2002, the Bush administration proposed creating a free tax filing system, but a massive lobbying campaign by Intuit — owner of TurboTax — killed the idea. Instead, the IRS agreed to allow a handful of corporations, in theory, to provide free tax filing software to as many as 70% of tax filers.

In practice, few people access the free service. In 2021, less than 3% of tax filers used the free service. Intuit, for one, made it so that users could not find the free service, while steering low-income taxpayers to its paid service. Earlier this year, the company paid \$141 million to settle a claim it had deceived users with promises of free tax filing — a slap on the wrist for a corporation that hauled in billions in profits over that period.

Ultimately, the deal between the IRS and the corporate tax preparers collapsed after the IRS put in place measures to rein in the corporate shenanigans. H&R Block pulled out of the deal in 2020, followed by Intuit's exit in 2021.

It's long past due to put the interests of the American people above those of a few giant corporations profiting from our civic duty to pay taxes. The Tax Filing Simplification Act would save people money and hassles, while enabling many low-paid families to claim tax credits that improve their well-being.

It's great that some members of Oregon's congressional delegation are already fighting for this common-sense reform. The rest of the delegation should get on board.

*Juan Carlos Ordóñez is the communications director of the Oregon Center for Public Policy.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Selfishness

“Perhaps” Jim Aalberg doesn't understand the Constitution in his Aug. 20 letter.

The constitutional “pursuit of happiness” is now what the Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) groups are using to kill short-term rentals? How incredibly laughable and ignorant.

Is the Constitution only for your pursuit of happiness? What about my pursuit to retire in Astoria and need to find a way to keep my house for the next eight years? Does my pursuit to be financially stable and “happy” matter?

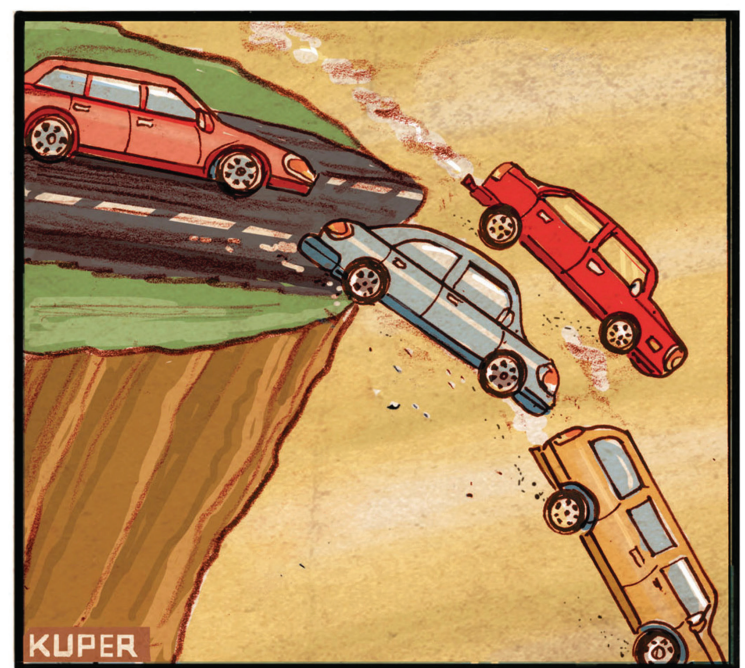
What about the thousands of families visiting the coast; does their “pursuit of happiness” matter? Are the only people who have a constitutional right to pursue their happiness already living on the coast? Let's call this for what it is; selfishness. You want exclusive access to exclusive beaches without paying for it.

There are properties for sale that can get you there, but it's going to cost you. I bought next to 408 state-owned acres, down a dead-end road, for a reason. I put aside my wishes of a view or waterfront so I could have privacy and quietness.

If you want an empty house next to you, then buy it and let it sit empty. Don't sit back and quote the Constitution and claim a three-day Vrbo client ruins your “pursuit of happiness.”

There are bad neighbors, too, and guess what; they are permanent! I don't blame the NIMBYs for wanting their piece of heaven to themselves; honestly, I would, too. Just please stop being intellectually dishonest.

CHRIS DeLONG  
Astoria



### Point blank

Regarding the Clatsop County commissioners' legal briefing on short-term rentals, they have been told now by two expert land use attorneys, point blank, that:

1. The STR permits issued anywhere in the unincorporated county, other than Arch Cape, were issued illegally.

2. The commissioners can let these permits expire, and not renew them, to come back into compliance.

3. They have spent three years, and wasted hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars, to avoid acknowledging their mistake in issuing these STRs, and in trying to cover it up by passing Ordinance 22-05.

4. They will continue to waste hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars continuing to fight for the outside business interests who want STRs, versus what the residents, citizens and voters of the unincorporated areas of the county clearly want, and need.

5. The easiest solution to immediately solve this problem once and for all is to: Repeal Ordinance 22-05 at their next commissioner meeting; and adopt the STR ordinance proposed by their own Planning Commission — made up of local, voting, resident citizens expressing their communities' capabilities — several months ago. Job done!

## 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

Additionally, the county commissioners express at length the amount of tax dollars that come into their coffers from STRs, but we don't hear how many of your tax dollars have been spent in the past three years to come up with Ordinance 22-05, and cost of enforcing those who ignore the so-called “best practices” — basically ignoring those in communities inundated with high percentages of STRs.

JOANNE CORNELIUS  
Arch Cape

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.

### Led the fight

For 20 years, Americans have led the fight against preventable disease. In the wake of COVID-19, our support matters even more.

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed global health systems to the breaking point and set back our fight against preventable diseases. For the first time in decades, 2020 saw dangerous declines in progress against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria as the pan-

demically jeopardized access to testing and treatments.

Without bold action from world leaders, we could be on track to reach another concerning “first” — failing, for the first time since its inception, to fully replenish the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the most important resource we have in the fight to end these diseases.

U.S. leadership plays a critical role in the Global Fund's continued growth and success. In 20 years, Americans' support for the Global Fund has helped save 14 million lives, creating healthier societies and better futures for people and families around the world. Oregon alone has helped save 142,005 lives, provide anti-retroviral drugs to 74,462 people, treat 16,068 people for tuberculosis and distribute 640,412 mosquito nets.

Oregon's hard-won progress is now at risk. At its replenishment conference later this year, the Global Fund needs to raise \$18 billion to recover gains lost to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The U.S. has proposed a \$2 billion per year pledge. U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley must finish the job and get the fight to end HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria back on track.

MICHAEL KALKOFEN  
Beaverton