

KeizerOpinion

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To the class of 2015

Some say if you do what you love you'll never work a day in your life. Some say there is no substitute for hard work and passion. There have been many wise words spoken at graduation ceremonies for hundreds of years. What words of advice would work best on you, member of the class of 2015?

No demographic is monolithic—no group of people is exactly the same. It is impossible to describe you and your peers of the class of 2015 with any one word, except connected (via social media), otherwise there are as many views on life as there are members of your class. Many can be similar but they are not exactly alike. You may be part of a large demographic slice of population but each of you is as individual as a snowflake.

That is important to realize—you are not who people say you are. You don't have to fit neatly into a hole that someone else drilled. In your high school career it was vital to fit in which meant being like everyone else. Being like everyone else in your post-high school years is not as important. Whether the near future holds for you employment, military service or col-

lege you will make more of a mark by being true to yourself.

We are shaped by our backgrounds but how we grow from there is what life is all about. Ask any older people you know and ask if they have changed since their high school days, almost universally the answer will be 'yes.' Your high school years are not a predictor of your future.

Regardless of what your next step will be, take a piece of advice from the ancient Greek Hippocrates, one of the founders of modern Western medicine: do no harm. It is a simple yet powerful pledge and a good code to live by. Life is competitive and unfair enough, it won't be better if you are mean to, uncaring for or intolerant of others. You, members of the class of 2015, can do anything and you'll go further and accomplish more by doing no harm to others and no harm to things (such as the earth).

Follow your heart, your head and the world will come with you. Don't get a job, do what you love instead. Be kind and don't let others define you. That's your job.

—LAZ

We get a kick out of Oregon

By DON VOWELL

The Oregon "kicker" law was forefront in the news recently. The lead editorial in today's morning paper is headed "Don't let Democrats steal your kicker." We could talk about the kicker refund without willful stupidity and name-calling.

Without taking a keep it or a give it back stance we should stop seeing it as a result of overtaking. It is instead caused only by an inaccurate forecast. These are revenues collected as required by law at existing tax rates set by publicly elected legislators and contested initiatives. The kicker law puts the Office of Economic Analysis in the impossible position of forecasting two years into the future what collection of those revenues will total. Could you do that? If the collected revenues exceed those projections by more than 2 percent then everything over that forecast is returned to taxpayers.

This law could only be fair if it worked both ways. We all step right up to claim our refund when tax revenues exceed that forecast but are not much for volunteering to pay a little extra in years where actual revenues collected fell short of the estimate by more than 2 percent. "We were undertaxed" is a letter to the editor you may never see.

The piece in the morning paper suggested that even if it's an awkward vehicle the kicker law is about the only method we have for restraining legislative spending. Not so. We could reign in spending by expecting less. The services we provide to Oregon's growing population relentlessly increase in cost. Once you have chosen what services and functions Oregon will provide, the costs are fixed. You cannot change them by keeping the kicker. That is simply welching on a deal.

Romans 13:7 – "Give everyone

a box of soap

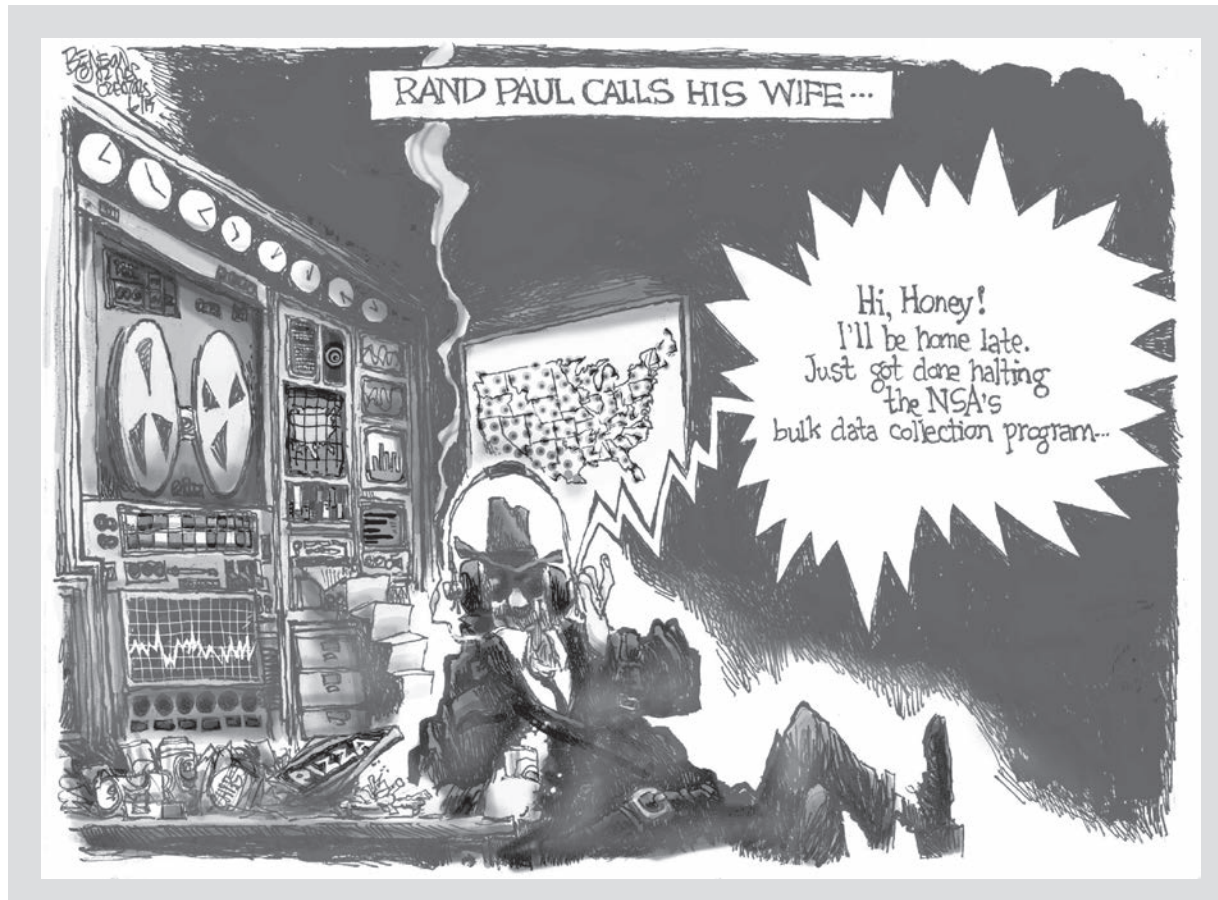
what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if honor, then honor." This is not meant to condemn any who feel that the kicker should be returned to taxpayers, just offers me

a different perspective about civic virtue. America's personal tax rates are not particularly onerous by world standards, especially when considering the advantages and just plain good luck to be living here. When we speak about the "Greatest Generation" as they lived in the 1950s they accepted a tax rate that built this nation. We still ride their coattails, grousing about the looming cost of repairing and replacing the infrastructure they generously provided.

Corporations are happy enough to recognize the privileges and benefits of doing business in our free and wealthy nation while denying that nation the means to support itself. In reading about questions of morality or patriotism in regard to shifting corporate headquarters overseas to avoid taxes the most common defense of that avoidance is that America's corporate tax rates are among the highest in the world. That won't wash when you can easily find a list of this country's Fortune 500 countries that paid no taxes at all.

I have always wondered what government, state or federal, would look like if our tax bill included a form we filled out directing how our payment would be divided up. We prioritize as we see fit, choosing how much of our payment goes to welfare, fish and game, bicycle lanes, policing, support for art, pension funds, and on and on. Until that day, we could just ask the Office of Economic Analysis to make their best estimate, add 5 percent and give it to the governor. Problem solved.

(Don Vowell gets on his soapbox regularly in the *Keizertimes*.)



Our hesitant talk on mobility

By MICHAEL GERSON

For both parties, the emerging theme of economic mobility is often a reluctant, second choice.

Deep down, many Democrats would prefer to focus on economic inequality. But while Americans have theoretical concerns about the income gap, they are consistently skeptical about government's role as leveler. Explicit talk of redistribution doesn't get a politician very far.

Deep down, many Republicans would prefer to focus on economic growth. But this abstract goal does not touch on the economic concerns of most Americans, including stagnant wages and difficulties getting (and affording) education and skills. In recent presidential elections, Republican talk of entrepreneurship and risk taking has been disconnected from working-class struggles and middle-class fears.

So both parties are led, along different routes, to talk about mobility and equality of opportunity. This embrace is largely rhetorical. When Democrats refer to stalled mobility, they are generally still talking about inequality. When Republicans embrace mobility, they often mean cutting taxes and reducing regulations.

But it would be a mistake to use "rhetorical" in a dismissive manner. As any speechwriter knows, a change of language can help drive a shift in policy. The challenge, as Yuval Levin of *National Affairs* puts it, is "to use the move toward mobility rhetoric to drive a substantive move."

The parties have backed into America's most urgent domestic priority: Resisting the development of a class-based society in which birth equals destiny. This division runs like an ugly, concrete wall across the American ideal. On one side are the wealthy and educated, living in communi-

other views

ties characterized by greater family stability, economic opportunity and neighborhood cohesion. On the other side is the working

class, living in communities featuring economic stagnation, family instability and neighborhood breakdown. The best advice for success? Be born on the right side of the wall. That is not a very American-sounding answer.

The entry-level commitment for Republicans in this debate is a recognition that equality of opportunity is not a natural state; it is a social and political achievement. Economic growth is important—but its benefits are only shared if people have the knowledge and human capital to succeed in a modern economy. This preparation requires active, effective, reform-oriented government at every level—and forbids an ideological appeal that is merely anti-government.

Democrats lay claim to the mobility issue by arguing that extreme inequality undermines mobility—an assertion for which the economic evidence is mixed. In this view, the job of helping the poor is inseparable from cutting the 1 percent down to size. At a recent economic forum, a fellow panelist, a prominent liberal economist, admitted that wage subsidies such as the earned-income tax credit are the most direct and efficient way to help low-income workers. But she still advocated a raise in the minimum wage, precisely because Walmart would be punished in the process.

If this attitude is viewed as the starting point of the mobility debate, Republicans will sit it out. Democrats who insist on this approach are

sabotaging the possibility of political progress. The public goal that liberals and conservatives might share is not the equalization of wealth; it is the equalization of opportunity. And that is difficult enough. After decades of economic growth and rising productivity, after decades of social spending, now about \$1 trillion a year (at all levels of government), mobility in America remains stalled and lags behind that of France, Canada and much of Scandinavia.

The presidential field is just beginning to engage these issues. Hillary Clinton is tacking sharply to the left—she would "topple" the 1 percent—with all the disarming authenticity of Mitt Romney declaring himself an "extreme" conservative. But she will surely shift rightward on equal opportunity in the general election, and probably in the most politically obvious and heavy-handed manner possible.

On the reform Republican side, Jeb Bush talks of "the right to rise," has promised a "new vision" of urban renewal and has locked down a strong team of policy advisers and experts. But they have yet to be utilized in any serious, or at least public, way. Sen. Marco Rubio is the most natural fit for a Republican mobility message, which is illustrated by his family story. He is easily the most policy-oriented of the current Republican field, having proposed measures on college affordability, pro-family tax reform, and welfare reform that consolidates a number of benefits to the working poor into a more generous wage subsidy.

Perhaps the greatest need in American politics: a presidential candidate who passionately advances a vision of mobility instead of settling for it.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

Ethics commission needs bigger teeth

Recent revelations by *The Oregonian* strongly suggest that the state of Oregon has been mainly wasting precious tax dollars on the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. It takes the commission about a year to investigate an alleged ethics violation, the current maximum fine for ethics violators is \$5,000, but that in half the cases violators got off with a mere warning and when fines have been imposed they've been a fraction of what the law permits. In fact, the median fine in recent years for perpetrators misusing their public office has been \$75.

Of the 27 ethics violations the commission issued last year, that could have added up to penalties of \$260,000, the commission collected \$7,900. Is that what you expected from a commission charged by the law we passed by a huge majority in 1974: the one that was supposed to create an ethics watchdog to keep an eye on Oregon's public officials? After all, when the commission was created by voters following the Nixon-Watergate debacle, it was supposed to do a lot to shape up any Oregon office holder who would behave like the former president.

The commission has largely been able to fly below the radar for years. However, with the public's attention riveted on the ethics complaints against then-Governor John Kitzhaber over the business deals manipulated by his fiancée, Cylvia Hayes, the commission was, of course, called upon to investigate. Unfortunately, it has been found to be true that, over the last 15 years, the commission has often done nothing more with ethics violators than verbally reprimand the

perpetrators.

gene h. mcintyre

Kitzhaber and his attorneys were well-aware of the commission's penchant for making it

easy on ethics' violators in Oregon. Publicly Kitzhaber promised that he and Hayes would help the commission delve into their case but privately Kitzhaber and one of his attorneys knew how weak the commission's knees were.

Willamette Week found out through leaked Kitzhaber emails that he would convey to the commission that he and his attorneys were ready to take them to court and believed they had a good chance of prevailing. Their end game via threats was not to have the complaints dismissed but to negotiate a settlement in which they'd fess up to a minor mistake or two and thereby have the matter white-washed into obscurity.

In fact, the commission's leader is famous for negotiating deals where violations became pooh-poohed. Most recent cases have been negotiated down to small penalties or no penalties, although when the commission was created in post-Watergate America it was charged to keep Oregon's government officials in line. This has not been the case over the past decade and a half.

Nowadays, reveals the record, those government officials at cross-purposes with the state's ethics are typically assigned to an online education video which, as one might suspect, has been a whole lot less than effective and about which there is little

or no knowledge of viewer-assigned completions. Further, violators in six of every 10 cases face the horrors of a warning not to behave that way again. The guiding direction of the commission at present is that wrongdoers receive a tutorial approach rather than prosecution for their waywardness that has come about from their law-breaking activities.

Many Oregonians think that the state does not get the fixed attention of violators unless their conduct results in a sanction. That's the way the ethics commission carried out its business before the last decade or so; it was based on the principle that significant fines are the best way to keep public officials honest while media reporting helps a whole bunch, too.

It has been reported that Governor Kate Brown recognizes the value of reform in the ethics commission and will get it to operate again like it formerly did. She proposes doubling the maximum penalty to \$10,000 for intentional violations and shortening the time to 35 days to determine whether an investigation should proceed. If Brown has her way in this matter, an additional \$500,000 for staff and computer technology will be invested in the ethics effort.

This citizen agrees with Brown for the need to reform the commission and also appoint a new chairman. Otherwise, like the commission of the last ten years or more, it'll be more wrist slaps with the opportunity to watch a video on how to behave ethically when that has already proven to be far less than effective.

(Gene H. McIntyre's column appears weekly in the *Keizertimes*.)



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