

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

Too much at stake to bog down session with usual silliness

The 2017 Oregon Legislature will convene Wednesday amid acrimony, political silliness and dire predictions.

This is all part of the ritual dance that launches each legislative session, as the Republicans and Democrats, House and Senate, and individual lawmakers jockey for political leverage.

Gov. Kate Brown and legislative leaders from both parties predict this could be the most difficult legislative session in years, as lawmakers struggle to balance the state budget and develop a transportation package.

At some point — probably late spring, if this session follows the usual pattern — legislators will begin the difficult compromises on the budget and other contentious issues. No one wants a repeat of the era in which the Legislature repeatedly was called back to the Oregon Capitol to revise the state budget.

As state Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, said last week, “I think everybody just needs to take a deep breath.”

Legislators can speed the political process by abandoning some of their political silliness, especially in the House, where Republicans are threatening to slow daily business.

Democrats outnumber Republicans 35-25 in the House and 17-13 in the Senate. Those numbers give Republicans little influence except on tax measures, which require a supermajority for approval.

That is why Republicans may demand that the House devote far more time to publicly reading legislation aloud, word-for-word. That would slow the legislative process to a crawl, ensuring fewer bills become law, which some Oregonians might see as a blessing. But that threat also gives Republicans a bargaining chip: Give us more of what we want and we won't slow the process.

Whether that is obstructionism or pragmatism is in the eye of the beholder. House Republican Leader Mike McLane of Powell Butte had

2017 Oregon Legislature

House and Senate committees start meeting at 8 a.m. Wednesday. The House and Senate will convene floor sessions at 11 a.m. Online: Go to oregonlegislature.gov to watch meetings, to read bills and to contact legislators.

a fair point when he noted that the Democratic leaders in Congress also employ such “obstructionist” tactics because their party is in the minority.

Congress is an awfully low bar for comparison. Oregonians expect more of their Legislature. That includes having the majority party make concessions to work well with the minority party, and vice versa.

Republican leaders have admitted that the 2017-19 state budget will be untenable without more revenue. Democrats need Republican votes for any tax increases, which require a supermajority for passage. In return, Democrats should accept the need for continued reforms to hold down the cost of government, including the Public Employees Retirement System.

Some people want to delay PERS discussions, possibly until a special session. That is a very bad idea. Special legislative sessions come with no guarantees.

Likewise, the 2017 Legislature should meet both Democrats' and Republicans' needs in putting together a transportation-finance package. There is widespread agreement that Oregon must reinvest in its roads and bridges, and make its public transit systems more effective. But the majority Democrats should heed Republicans' desire for flexibility in the state's low-carbon fuel standards for vehicles — a flawed program that Democrats rammed through the 2015 Legislature.

Those are real issues. The sooner that legislators can get past the acrimony and obstructionism, the sooner they can make progress on those real issues.

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Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of publisher Kathryn Brown, managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, and opinion page editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

Fog of Trump

Normally, at the end of a new administration's tumultuous first week, it's the pundit's job to sit back and chin-stroke and explain everything that the president and his aides are doing right or wrong.

In the Donald Trump era, though, there's a distinctive problem: Before he can be defended or criticized, we have to figure out what's actually happening. And for several reasons, that's going to be harder in this presidency than ever before.

First: This is clearly going to be an administration with multiple centers of gravity, with more fractiousness and freelancing than in the relatively tight ships that Barack Obama and George W. Bush ran. The Trump White House has a weak chief of staff surrounded by rivalrous advisers. The Trump Cabinet is not necessarily on the same ideological page as the president's inner circle. Trump himself is famous for agreeing with the last person who bent his ear. So there is no trustworthy voice providing public clarity — least of all poor Sean Spicer — in cases where multiple balls and trial balloons are airborne.

Second: The establishment press, as I warned last week, is being pressured to lead the resistance to Trumpism, which makes it more likely to run with the most shocking interpretations (muzzled bureaucrats! mass resignations!) of whatever the White House happens to be doing. At the same time, the Trump inner circle clearly intends to lean into this phenomenon, to encourage the press-as-opposition narrative, seeing mainstream-media mistakes as a way of shoring up its own base's loyalty. And then the technological forces shaping media coverage also encourage errors and overreach — a dubious story or even a misleading live-tweet of a press conference can go around the online world long before the more prosaic truth has reached your Facebook feed. (A self-serving suggestion: In such a climate, the discerning citizen may come to appreciate anew the tortoise-like pace of print journalism.)

Third: Trumpism is an ideological cocktail that doesn't fit the patterns we're used to in U.S. politics, and Trump has arrayed himself against bipartisan habits of mind on all sorts of issues. This means, as The Week columnist Damon Linker notes perceptively, that he's guaranteed to do things that seem “abnormal” and that take both the press corps and D.C. mandarins aback — like, say, actually enforcing already on-the-books immigration laws. The trick for the public will be figuring where what's “abnormal” is obviously “alarming” and where it makes more sense to wait and see. Which will be hard for reasons one and two, and also because ...

... Trump himself is a loose cannon whose public interventions tend to make his own



ROSS DOUTHAT
Comment

policies harder to interpret. Is his administration planning a trade war with Mexico, as his tweets suggest, or just pushing a wonky border-adjustment tax that's been part of GOP proposals for a while? Are we actually considering reviving waterboarding, or is that just an empty executive order left over from the Romney transition that James Mattis and Mike Pompeo have no intention of operationalizing? Is the administration about to embark on a racially coded war against

phantom voter fraud based on random anecdotes and conspiracy theories ... or is this just a “Twitter promise,” not a real one?

Of course, time will bring a certain clarity. We'll find out whether Trump's refugee and visa freezes from Muslim countries are actually temporary, a means to stricter screening, or whether they become permanent. We'll move from speculation to reality on Russia policy. We'll find out how far the president intends to run with the voter-fraud nonsense. We'll see how often his angry tweets and behind-the-scenes obsessions cash out, and how often they're just a way of venting.

But if the fog lifts in some cases, it's likely to chronically shroud the policymaking process on issues (health care, taxes, infrastructure, more) where Trump needs his congressional allies to have certainty about their shared objectives. And it threatens to descend more dramatically — with Stephen King-style monsters screaming in the mist — with every unexpected event, every unlooked-for crisis, in which what the White House says in real time will matter much more than it does right now.

I ended last week's column with a warning for the press corps about their potential contribution to a climate of political hysteria. But this column's warning is for the president and his advisers, some of whom clearly like the fog and seem to imagine that it will help them govern just as it probably helped them win.

They shouldn't be so confident. For legislators, too much fog is paralyzing. For voters, it's a recipe for nervous exhaustion. For allies, it's confusing; for enemies, it looks like an opportunity.

Trump is not a popular president, he has not actually built an electoral majority, his team is not particularly experienced. If he can't provide clarity and reassurance and a little light around his agenda, it will be very easy for a fog-bound presidency to simply run aground.

Ross Douthat joined The New York Times as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009. Previously, he was a senior editor at The Atlantic.

YOUR VIEWS

Trust us, we have a plan — or do we?

I hear that the community is finally going to get the details from our public works director on the Eighth Street Bridge project. The Westgate overpass and the viaduct on Eastgate are still missing streetlights because either the high cost of the designer light poles or “light pollution,” both claimed by Public Works. The plan for the bridge includes the installation, near the bridge, of those same designer light poles as there are on Main Street. Common sense says, how about completing the area's most frequently traveled areas first?

Then there's the “tunneling effect” created by the planned street trees. Since the new bridge will create a new high-speed arterial street, ripe for development of the picturesque hillside building lots, this “tunnel” of trees will create a calming effect, slowing expected heavy traffic to an acceptable flow. The Public Works Department is promising to maintain these trees, trimming branches and raking leaves, accepting responsibility for repair of sidewalks and streets damaged by the trees as they've

done on Main Street. I'd suggest they get that in writing. Remember, the author of this plan will not be the public works director in 20 years, when the damage is really being done.

In a recent conversation with our new mayor, I questioned the wisdom of approving a change in the previously approved plan to replace the townhouses in Pendleton Heights with multi-unit apartment buildings, as proposed by the contractor. The change, adding 100 new units, would add to the already congested traffic on Southgate. City Hall has consistently denied this would adversely affect traffic flow. Perhaps a chat with the outgoing mayor, having witnessed the congestion first hand, would change their mind.

In other news, I thought the city had a change of heart when I saw a road grader plowing snow. It turned out to be ODOT. As the public works director explained, the city has no plan or equipment to plow streets. Wal-Mart, Safeway and Melanie Square have plans to combat the snow for continued retail operation. After all that City Hall invests in the downtown area, they have no plan for the business area

or school bus routes. Maybe I'm dating myself, but I remember when they at least plowed Main Street and others. I wouldn't call this progress.

Just maybe it's time for a plan. Perhaps it would have saved me from a fall and a trip to the doctor.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

Solutions for the dispatch center

The Umatilla Dispatch “Funding Agreement” as defined in Sheriff Rowan's memo to the Dispatch Advisory Committee (all public employees) dated March 23, 2016, is unjust, not equitable and ill-conceived. That memo applied to tax year 2016-2017.

History: Years back, Pendleton and Hermiston did their own dispatching. Next, using county tax revenue, the sheriff's office did the dispatching. Shortly thereafter the sheriff's office received the 911 funds amounting to \$463,258 in 2016-17 and is projected to receive an estimated \$502,000 in 2017-18. The above-mentioned memo indicates the sheriff's office requested from Hermiston \$303,486; Pendleton, \$308,419; Umatilla, \$63,869; Standfield/

Echo, \$33,485; Pilot Rock, \$20,417; and fire districts, \$189,389, plus \$975,056 from Umatilla County (paid out from Umatilla County tax revenue).

Therefore:

- Rural Umatilla County, Athena/Weston, Ukiah and Helix pay nothing in addition to normal county taxes and 911 charges.
- The five major cities pay normal county taxes and 911 charges plus \$729,676.
- The fire districts are charged on per call basis.
- The total Umatilla Dispatch budget is \$2,559,908, or \$36.53 per citizen. A family of four would pay \$146.12 for dispatch alone — considerably more than the surrounding counties.
- The charges are computed on

net assessed tax value, which has absolutely no relationship to the number of calls received for service.

Suggestions/recommendations:

- In tax year 2017-18, established a Umatilla Interagency Dispatch Center to be funded and managed in a fair and equitable manner by those who use the services.
- Place all the CSEPP equipment donated to Umatilla County in the center.
- Strongly consider charging by the call — that's the service being offered.
- Add total cost of dispatch to the sheriff's budget (indirectly the Umatilla County Budget), to be approved by Umatilla County commissioners.

John Taylor
Pilot Rock

LETTERS POLICY

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