

# PERSPECTIVES

Monday

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## Many factors to weigh in the better-school equation

Public schools in Oregon need a change. It seems many Oregonians feel this way, because there are two measures on the November ballot specifically addressing schools. We've all experienced or heard about bad teachers, and we know of good teachers as well, but the system needs a shake-up. The question is, what sort of shake-up? We'd prefer moving away from standardized tests and the demand for quality without funding, and instead focus on the ability of students to think and learn, and the innovation and expertise of teachers who are well-trained, well-paid and monitored for performance.

Measure 1 makes the Legislature provide funding for any school quality goals they establish, and we think this is a wise step. High quality schools and teachers require a little more money. Our students deserve the very best teachers, devoted to their task. The next generation is our most valuable resource, and spending on schools yields less crime, lower law enforcement costs and a better economy.

Measure 95 is more contentious. The law would provide a shake-up by basing teachers' pay on job performance, instead of the current system, which gives teachers raises for seniority and for continuing education. This is a worthy goal, but how job performance is defined and how much teachers are currently paid must be considered. And Measure 95 does exactly what Measure 1 wants to prevent: It sets a school quality goal, but provides no money to achieve it. The state estimates Measure 95 will cost public schools \$46 million in the first three years. That money could be spent on education rather than standardized testing.

Measure 95 doesn't specify

how to judge teachers' performance, but Oregon is fond of standardized testing, which is used for the school report cards. Using these tests to measure a teacher's performance would be just plain wrong. Standardized tests only reflect a student's abilities at one moment, they don't take into account cultural and economic factors and they don't reflect the classroom environment in which teachers must work. Under Measure 95, what will happen to teachers in communities with a high percentage of students with family, economic or behavioral problems? Teachers won't want to work in those communities and they'll be unfairly punished for problems beyond their control.

The measure might motivate teachers to work harder with the problem students in order to bring test scores up. But a heavy reliance on standardized tests generally makes teachers teach to the tests, which means children's education is limited to a very narrow set of facts and exercises. In that setting,

teachers don't have extra time to focus on the disadvantaged students, and they don't have time to worry about teaching kids to think. Pounding a specific list of facts into a child's head doesn't necessarily result in an educated student. Teaching kids takes time, money and a more complicated and subtle evaluation process than a multiple-choice exam. And for real motivation, why not give bonuses to teachers who go above and beyond the call of duty?

Teaching is the most valuable service we can provide for the future. Teachers should be paid more, and they should be held to a high standard of excellence. But the teachers' union in Oregon seems to have a knee-jerk reaction to any proposal to monitor or base pay on teacher performance.

Maybe this resistance comes because teachers are paid so little. According to the Oregon School Boards Association, the average salary in Oregon is \$37,403, and the national average

is \$40,582 — and this is with at least a bachelor's degree. If Americans value the education of their children, they should be willing to pay a premium for good teachers, especially if stringent performance standards are enacted.

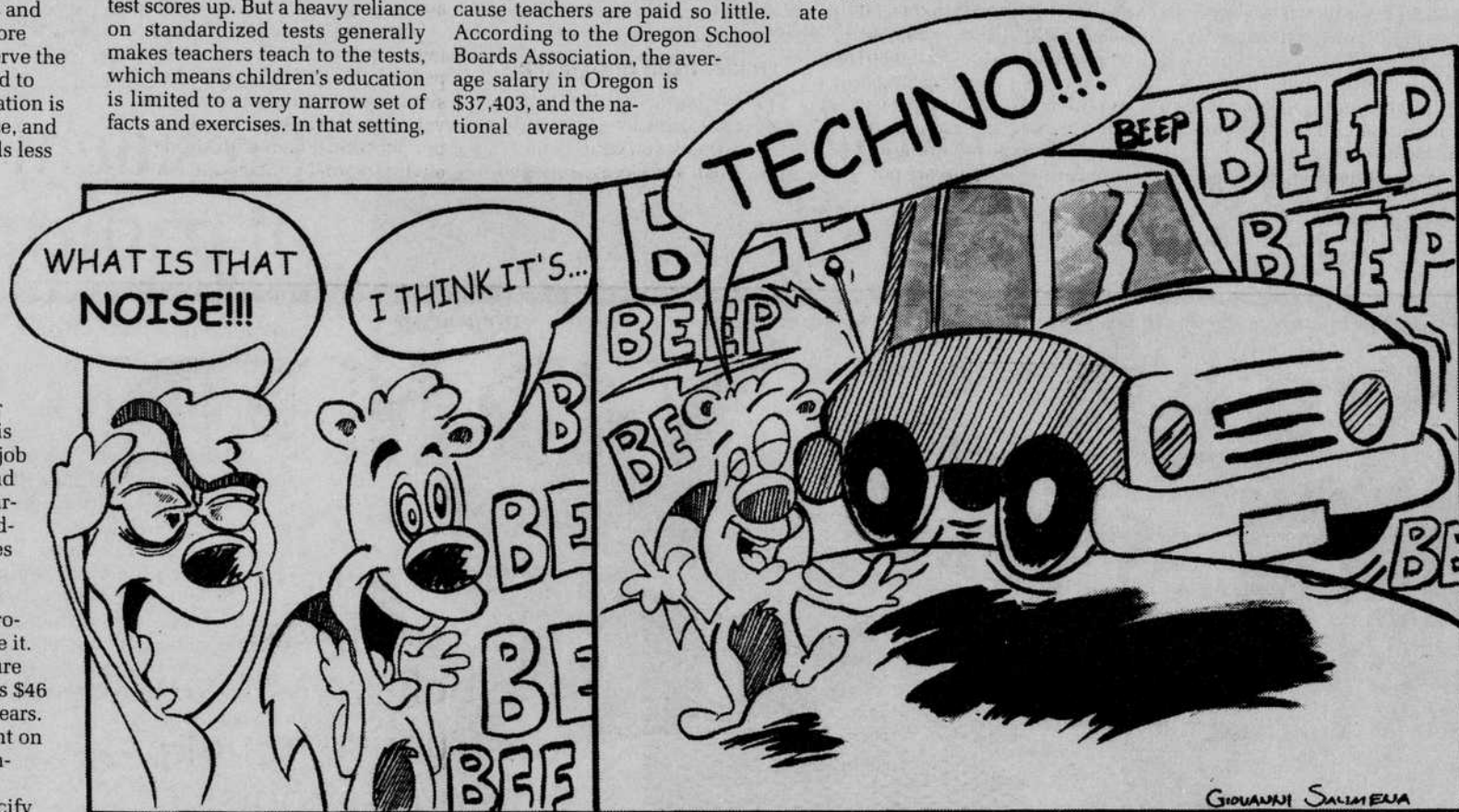
But the union might simply be unwilling to allow serious evaluation of teachers, and it needs to lower that wall. Pay should be tied to performance — as well as education, training, skills and past performance — if that performance can be measured adequately.

There are many factors in the better-school equation, however. If we had a simultaneous commitment from parents to be more involved in their children's schools, from unions to be open to new ways of thinking about teacher salaries, from teachers to re-evaluate

their teaching methods, from the taxpayers to provide enough funding so that the best and the brightest choose a teaching career, and from the Legislature to ensure that the methods of evaluating teachers and students actually reflect learning, then we would really be shaking up the system.

Measure 95 gives teachers some tough challenges, but it doesn't provide the right solutions. Measure 1, on the other hand, is moving in the right direction by requiring the Legislature to provide money when they demand quality. Vote yes on Measure 1 and no on Measure 95.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.



Giovanni Salimena Emerald

## A historical interpretation of the Second Amendment



**CAPTAIN SENSIBLE**

**PAT PAYNE**

Well-regulated militia, being necessary for the security of a free state, the right to keep and bear arms shall not be abridged." Of all the words that our founding fathers inscribed in 1787, these twenty-four may have been the worst chosen. This is the Second Amendment to the Constitution.

When you read a law, it's not enough to understand just what the individual words mean: That's why the National Rifle Association cites only the second half of the amendment. You also have to read for context: When was the

law written? What was the state of the nation? The world? What were the particular viewpoints of the writers? What had recent history taught them?

Pro-gun advocates, in particular, read the Second Amendment to the Constitution as if it were written in a vacuum, like it was a gift to future ages written by infallible men. It wasn't. The founding fathers were writing from their experiences fighting in the American Revolution.

The founders were wary of standing armies. Great Britain had sent troops to fight in the Seven Years War against the French in Quebec. The war left England indebted, so the king decided the colonists could be taxed for their share. When Bostonians refused to pay taxes to a government in which they had no say, British troops were sent to occupy it. There, the soldiers stole, drank heavily, demanded quartering

from private citizens and fought with the colonists, culminating in the Boston Massacre in 1770.

The Continental Army was a force formed solely for revolution. The citizen recruits brought their own weapons to fight with. They had drilled to handle these weapons safely and knew how to care for them. The Continental Army was dissolved in 1783. It was thought that a civilian militia, made up of part-time soldiers, would be all that the nation needed to resist an invasion.

This is why the Second Amendment was written the way it was. In effect, the founders stated: We will give you the right to bear arms. In exchange, you will aid the government in wartime by fighting for the national defense.

This system worked well at first. However, the British attacked the United States again in 1812, and the system broke down. The troops fell before a battle-

hardened and well-equipped British force. The British almost won the war and would have conquered the United States if not for Napoleon's return in 1814. After the conflict, the citizen militias were scrapped and a new United States Army formed in its place.

As it is, the Second Amendment should have been declared null and void at this time, when there was no longer a call for "a well-regulated militia."

Furthermore, the founding fathers had no conception of technological advances in the centuries to come. There had been only one rapid-firing weapon by 1750 (James Puckle's multi-barreled musket of 1709 was pitched as an anti-boarding weapon for the Royal Navy — it was rejected). It wouldn't be until the Civil War in the 1860s and the advent of Gatling's gun that rapid-fire weapons came to the battlefield. Simply put, in the days that the founders were writing the Bill

of Rights, there were no differences between civilian and military firearms. Today, anyone can distinguish between a Winchester hunting rifle and a Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifle. But how do you foresee something that won't exist for 200 years? Would they have approved of the average citizen owning an AK-47? I don't think so.

Therefore, here's a strict interpretation of the amendment as it should be today: You have the right to bear a single-shot, lead-ball, muzzle-loading, black-powder, flint-lock rifle to use as part of a citizen militia in defense of the nation ... but since citizen militias don't exist anymore (and those tanked-up rednecks in Michigan and Montana don't count), you really don't have that right at all.

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