

**GUEST EDITORIAL FROM
THE OREGONIAN/OREGONLIVE**

How Oregon handled its issues in 2018

From its start, 2018 was a year of playing defense in Oregon. From the January referendum on a Medicaid funding package to the November ballot measure seeking to strip Oregon of its sanctuary state status, leaders focused on shoring up support for maintaining Oregon policies more than breaking new ground.

Still, Oregon made some incremental progress in addressing its most urgent problems in education, homelessness, revenue and PERS reform and disaster preparedness.

Below are the notable successes or failures in one of the areas we highlighted for our 2018 editorial agenda — one of the issues we consider the most critical for Oregon leaders to address.

Defuse Oregon's ticking time bombs

This agenda item packed a lot of topics under one roof, in part because Oregon has a number of issues threatening to hurl the state into crisis. We focused on two — the fiscal and the physical — with the need for revenue and pension reform and the need for preparing Oregon for a massive earthquake.

Improving Oregon's financial stability: Despite record-breaking revenue, Oregon never seems to have enough money. That concern — and fears over how leaders look to fill that hole — drove some of the biggest questions asked of Oregonians in the past year.

Voters, so far, have answered with confidence in leadership. Oregonians overwhelmingly endorsed Measure 101, a referendum on new health care taxes to fund Oregon's Medicaid expansion. While imperfect — small businesses, individuals and K-12 districts pay a new health care premium tax while many large corporations don't — voters approved the two-year fix, buying time for state leaders to look into a more equitable solution. In November, voters again sided with leadership by rejecting two ballot measures that would have made it more difficult for lawmakers to change the tax system or raise revenue.

It has certainly helped that Oregon's economy has continued to grow, even if the rate of growth has slowed. But concerns over a possible recession in coming years, the call for billions more in education funding and the need to pass another Medicaid-funding bill are setting the Legislature up for a heavy lift for the long legislative session next year.

The challenge of raising money becomes only more difficult when you add in the rising costs of pension benefits to state agencies, school districts, city governments and other public employers. Required contributions to feed the unfunded liability of the Public Employees Retirement System are expected to surge for the next several budget cycles with agencies paying \$4 billion collectively for 2019-2021.

Getting Oregon better prepared: Nearly a year ago, Oregonians learned that the state agency tasked with preparing for and responding to natural disasters was, well, totally not prepared. Even the building where first responders were supposed to gather after a massive Cascadia quake wasn't properly reinforced to survive such an earthquake.

A scathing Secretary of State audit of the Oregon Emergency Management Department also found the agency was understaffed, lacked comprehensive planning across state agencies and needed better standards to measure progress.

While much work remains, the agency recently delivered a more detailed and decisive manual that lays out how the state will address specific tasks at pre-determined times following a natural disaster. In the past, the information was formatted more as a to-do list.

Also, in her recently released budget, Brown set aside \$12 million to create an earthquake early warning system. For years, countries around the globe have used such alerts, which could provide Oregonians valuable time to seek shelter, escape unsafe buildings or drive away from bridges and overpasses. Unfortunately, the system won't be operational until 2023 — at best. Legislators must still vote on the proposal, which would be funded through bonds. Hopefully lawmakers will push quickly to get this needed system in place.



Your views

Ebbert: Intended constitutional safeguards must be reinforced

To the Editor,
In spite of the intended constitutional safeguards, the U.S. is not immune to autocracy. Whether it is a gift of tax dollars to the filthy rich; locking up migrant asylum seekers in unheated warehouses and kidnapping their children; revoking laws intended to provide the safe water we drink, the air we breathe and safe working conditions; withholding disaster relief from a non-voting community; or nepotism in the White House — this administration has made immorality the new norm. Corruption and tyranny are obvious from the number of close advisers who have been indicted, already pled criminally guilty or left this administration. This president presents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Kim Jong-un of North Korea as dictators to emulate; Erdogan of Turkey and Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia as allies. These are not democratic nations or leaders and they disregard any appearance of human rights.

Have we learned anything from 2018, this year of attacks on our American values and democracy? Has this president forced us to look more closely at our candidates' backgrounds to see if the beliefs of the American people are shared? More stringent controls are required when our values and democracy are being challenged by this president and his administration.

The Constitution created three branches of our government that were intended to provide checks on any excesses perceived within a branch. When the U.S. senate instigated the so-called "nuclear option," allowing a simple majority to approve nominations, this

revoked the constitutionally provided safeguards. All three government branches are now reliant on the majority party. No longer is there a check on government actions. The majority party controls all nominations regardless of the individual's character or qualifications including lifetime appointment of federal judges. Our government is being remade reflecting the radical right agenda.

This senate has given us a lifetime to live with some of these appointments, but we could and should correct this "nuclear option" immediately and reinforce the intended constitutional safeguards.

David Ebbert
Enterprise

Boe: Is becoming more like Portland a good thing?

To the Editor:
Max Denning's article "The urban-rural divide..." (The Observer, Dec. 29, 2018) was particularly bleak about the prospects of Oregonians ever coming together in a meaningful way. What unites Oregonians today is mostly the Ducks, Beavers and Trail Blazers. Divides similar to Oregon's are readily seen in other states, and indeed the nation. Charles Murray was prescient in describing the nation as coming apart.

So Eastern Oregon will become more diverse, and more tied to technological advances, making it more similar to Portland. I doubt if most Eastern Oregonians would regard becoming more like Portland as a good thing. Maybe Portland should become more like the unwashed out here in the wilderness.

What do the authors cited mean by "diverse"? What sort of technological advances are they referring

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to? They mention a rural economic revitalization, brought about by state government, as a way to make Oregon less divided. But that assumes that the divide is economic rather than cultural.

Years ago, the saying was "Don't Californicate Oregon." Well, that horse left the barn a long time ago. Factors that led to the current dystopia that is California are easily seen in Oregon, but the authors cited make no mention of them.

At some point the middle class and some of the upper class will likely be leaving coastal and urban Oregon in significant numbers, moving to Eastern Oregon or (more likely) states with more hospitable economic, cultural and quality-of-life climates. Which, of course, would leave a pretty much seamless state from the Columbia River to San Diego.

Steve Boe
Ukiah

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