

GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD

Gov. Kate Brown leaves vital issues unaddressed

Give Gov. Kate Brown credit for laying out an ambitious agenda for her next four years in office — and, without the prospect of another re-election campaign in two years, her inaugural speech on Monday in Salem filled in some of the details the governor in the past has been reluctant to divulge.

Among the highlights:

- She wants legislators to raise at least \$2 billion in taxes from businesses to add more money to the state's education system. The effort to do that likely will be the centerpiece story of this legislative session.
- She's supporting what likely will be a controversial cap-and-spend plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This likely will be another of the biggest stories of the session.
- She wants to spend \$400 million on a variety of housing initiatives, including a proposal for a \$20 million bonding package to speed the construction of 200 units of permanent housing for the chronically homeless.
- She wants legislators to pass a \$700 million tax package to fund Oregon's expanded Medicaid program; this is of note in part because it was the state's decision to expand Medicaid years ago that helped lead to the budgetary shortfalls that have been dreary constants in every recent session.
- She said she would push for laws mandating employers provide paid family leave.
- She plans to advocate for some type of campaign finance reform, and will ask lawmakers to refer a measure to voters that would amend the Oregon Constitution to allow limits on contributions.

It's an ambitious agenda, and it won't get through the session unscathed. But Democrats hold super majorities in both chambers of the Legislature, which allows them to pass legislation to increase taxes without the benefit of a single Republican vote. How much of her political capital will Brown, a Democrat, be willing to spend to keep those majorities in line?

To that end, it's interesting to see what Brown didn't mention in her speech, or the items that got short shrift.

For example, Brown didn't talk at all about gun control, even though the session will be dealing with a dozen or so bills that deal with firearms in some way — including the controversial Senate Bill 501, which would require permits for all gun owners in Oregon.

Although she talked about finding ways to give schools additional money to help offset their increasing premiums for Oregon's public-pension system, she didn't talk at all about the underlying problem — the multibillion-dollar unfunded liability facing the system.

And she didn't offer any details about what she thinks the best way is to overhaul the state's tax system to raise additional revenue. Otherwise, that ambitious list of goals isn't much more than a wish list.

Training shutdown

One of the stories to track in this legislative session will be how lawmakers work to improve the workplace climate in the Capitol, which was recently rocked by a state report concluding leaders haven't done enough to address pervasive sexual harassment.

One of the ways legislators hoped to tackle the problem was by scheduling a training session by a federal agency on how to build respectful workplaces. That training was expected to begin Tuesday but got off to a poor start: It was canceled because of the partial federal government shutdown.

Legislative leaders said they would reschedule the training, even if it requires disrupting the schedule of the legislative session, which begins Jan. 22.

In the meantime, the irony of the situation wasn't lost on legislators such as Sen. Sara Gelsler, D-Corvallis, who tweeted: "Irony is when the Oregon Legislature's new and improved workplace harassment training is canceled because of the Trump federal government shutdown." And we'll leave it at that for today.



Your views

Christie: OTEC should provide electricity, not political patronage

To the Editor:
Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative is a nonprofit corporate utility incorporated in the state of Oregon as a consumer cooperative. Its purpose, as stated in the Articles of Incorporation, is to be a cooperative electric utility providing the essential public service of helping its members to have access to the electrical energy that is so necessary to their lives.

The purposes of the cooperative are stated specifically in the Articles of Incorporation:

1. To benefit primarily residential and small farm consumers of electric energy.
2. To generate, manufacture, purchase, acquire and accumulate electric energy for its members only and to transmit, distribute, furnish, sell and dispose of such electric energy to its members only, and to construct, purchase, lease as lessee and in any manner acquire, own, hold, maintain, operate, sell, dispose of, lease as lessor, exchange and mortgage plants, buildings, works, machinery, supplies, apparatus, equipment and electric transmission and distribution lines or systems, necessary, convenient or appropriate to accomplish any or all of the purposes of the cooperative. . . .
5. To assist its members to wire their premises and install therein electrical and plumbing appliances, fixtures, machinery, supplies, apparatus and equipment of any and all kinds and character, and, in connection therewith and for such purposes, to purchase, acquire, lease, sell, distribute, install and repair electrical and plumbing appliances, fixtures, machinery, supplies,

apparatus and equipment of any and all kinds and character. . . .

Notice there is no reference to a philanthropic or charitable purpose that is unrelated to providing essential electrical energy to members. OTEC was formed to provide its members with the benefits of electrical energy, not to become a philanthropic foundation serving the special interests of nine directors. Charitable foundations adequately fulfill that function. When OTEC takes the membership's money to give to individuals for purposes that are unrelated to the provision of essential electrical energy, such as monetary awards or trips to Washington D.C., it begins to look more like political patronage, wherein favors are given in return for political support.

For more information about OTEC see <https://bakercityorg.blogspot.com/>.

Christopher Christie
Baker City

McHaddad: United Way of Eastern Oregon celebrates 2018 Union County giving

To the Editor:
It is no secret that poverty is a problem in Union County. Federal agencies reported a poverty rate of 13.3 percent in 2017, as well as an average monthly unemployment rate of 5.3 percent.

Thankfully, Union County residents stepped up to take ownership of their community in 2018, helping United Way of Eastern Oregon raise more than \$40,000 for organizations supporting regional hunger relief, child welfare, and sexual assault

Write to us

LETTERSTOTHE EDITOR

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. Letters are limited to 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's address and phone number (for verification purposes only). Email your letters to news@lagrandeobserver.com or mail them to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850.

awareness/prevention efforts. We celebrate contributions from around Union County, including employees of local business and government agencies; Avista, Bi-Mart, Boise Cascade, La Grande Amusement and U.S. Bank; and community members.

In 2019, UWEO hopes to build new relationships with businesses and workers in Union County to expand our employee giving and donation efforts. If every employer in Union County donated \$100 annually and every worker donated \$1 per month, United Way of Eastern Oregon could give more than \$159,000 to charities in Union County every year. When you give to United Way, your contribution stays local, and 100 percent goes to your designated charity without losing a cent to "overhead costs."

Visit www.uweo.org for more information about how you or your business can partner with us to support Union County charities in 2019.

Alex McHaddad
Executive Director, United Way of Eastern Oregon

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