OUR VIEW

Time for new state audit law

Oregon law requires most government bodies — everything from counties to cemetery districts — to file audit reports each year with the Secretary of State's Office. Cities and counties that fail to get their reports done on time face the prospect of having the state withhold 10 percent of the money it sends them until the paperwork is complete.

There's good reason for that. Municipalities spend taxpayers' money, and taxpayers need to know that their dollars are being used for legitimate purposes.

While withholding funds may well light a fire under noncompliant communities, it may not be the best way to push them to get the auditing job done.

The problem is that the cities and counties that missed or ignored deadlines are generally not places like Multnomah County or the city of Bend. Rather, they are communities like Chiloquin, with fewer than 1,000 residents, and counties like Baker, with just over 16,000 residents. Small, in other words, in population if not area.

There is no question that the audits matter. In 2002 former Deschutes County Sheriff Greg Brown pleaded guilty to embezzling more than $575,000 from his office and from the much smaller Sisters-Camp Sherman Rural Fire Protection District, where he served on the governing board. The thefts were discovered after an audit raised questions about the sheriff's office books.

Size is no excuse when it comes to obeying the law. It can, though, make compliance more difficult. Leaders of small government bodies and in sparsely populated counties may find the state's auditing requirements difficult to meet, confusing and expensive.

Despite the 2015 law providing the possibility that state money can be withheld, some smaller towns and counties continue to have problems complying with audit requirements year after year. The goal is to properly audit the spending of taxpayer money. It may well be that the Oregon Legislature should consider adding another more positive tool, one that offers help rather than a smack on the head.

Write to us

MY VOICE

My Voice columns should be 500 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships.
We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere.
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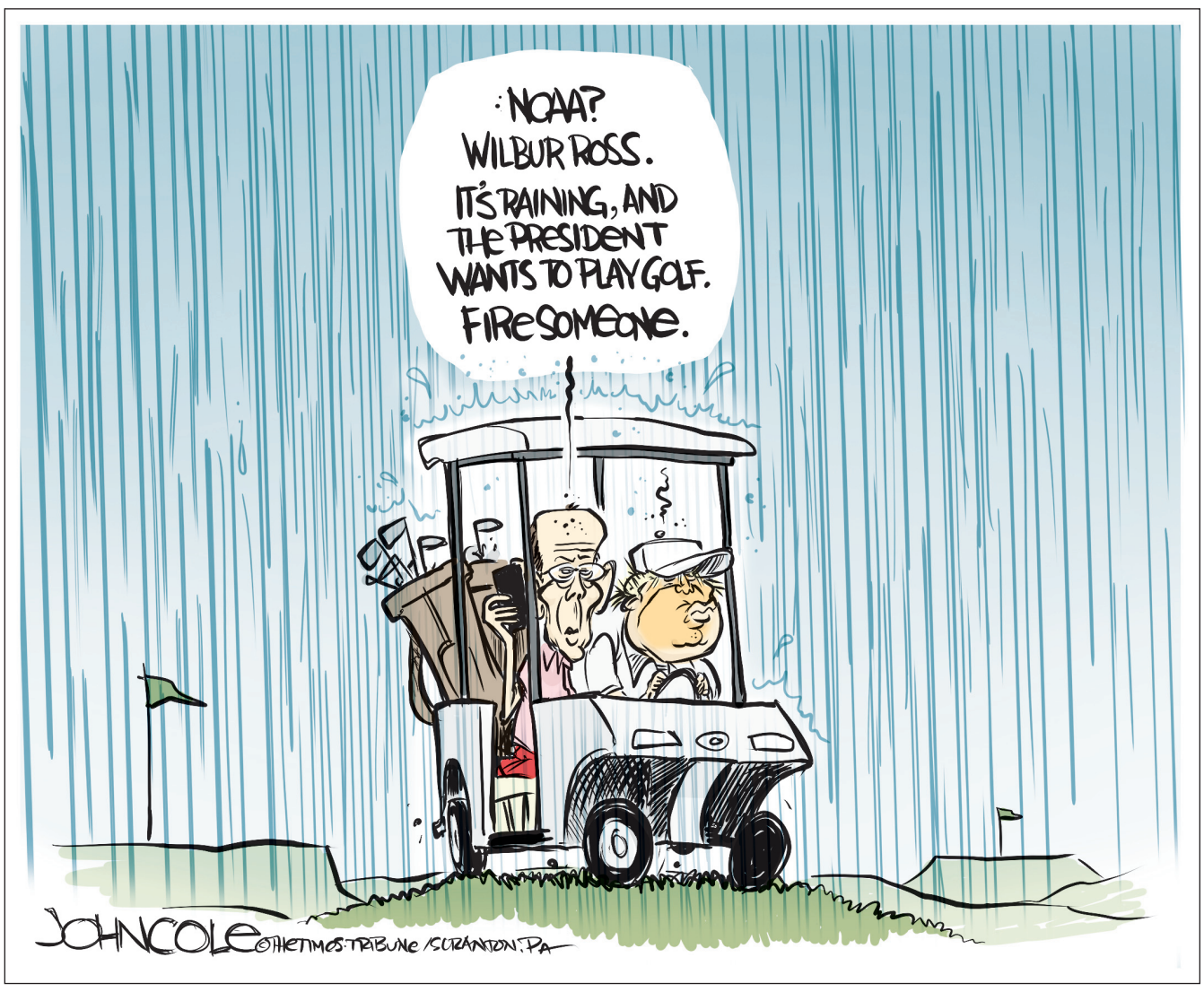

Your views

McCracken: Whose burden is environmental change?

To the Editor:

Joel Hinshaw's letter to the editor, "For real reduction of greenhouse gases, talk to China and India," was published in Aug. 28 Observer. On the same date, www.democracynow.org covered the same issue and used the same statistics as Henshaw. The question of whether the onus or burden for shouldering radical lifestyle and economic change rests primarily on the developed nations or the developing nations is directly addressed. Information is presented in unblinking honesty.

I'd be really interested in reading future letters to the editor from those who read Hinshaw's letter and watched the Democracy Now segment.

Mary McCracken
Island City

Smith: No more shopping at Walmart

To the Editor:

This letter is directed to Walmart.

Because of your un-American policies on sales of guns and ammunition, our family is boycotting your stores.

N.L. Smith
La Grande

Montgomery: Patient Rights Act is about greed

To the Editor:

The Patient Rights Act, S.1993, now in Senate committee, is designed to thwart abortion/P.O.L.S.T./Advanced Directive/Assisted Aid in Dying. It will force hospitals to push advanced technology (Full Code) from conception to grave or else the hospital will be penalized for one year in not receiving federal dollars, which will shut them down.

Be aware advanced technology cannot fix the demented brain. Advanced technology can even bring on dementia, e.g., prolonged general anesthesia, ICU, etc. Without a functioning brain, living "good enough" becomes existing poorly. To force the frail elderly, especially demented, through unwanted surgeries and rehab is cruel.

Say no to becoming a "live donor" to fuel the medical system coffers.

Say no to being warehoused in a locked-down, notoriously understaffed (unsafe) facility at $92,000+ a year.

Say no to ending up on Medicaid (63% of U.S. elders currently) with costs that could be passed on to your adult children as collateral once the Filial Recovery Act is activated (ready to launch in 34 states, Oregon included, when states no longer can afford the many elders on its rolls).

The Patient's Rights Act is about greed and political backlash to current law. Contact your senator now — say no to S.1993.

Beverly Montgomery
Newberg

Burns: Colleges should bear some risk for student indebtedness

To the Editor:

The recent college tuition scandal is a sad example of how rich parents have been paying to get their kids in the college parents think is the most prestigious. There are 51 parents now who have pled guilty to paying huge amounts of money to this Singer character to bribe college officials, coaches, and administrators. This has been going on a long time. Maybe some serious jail time for these rich cheating parents will slow down this corrupt practice, but big money always talks.

There is a much larger scandal, however, that has been going on even longer. The corrupt student loan situation has indebted hundreds of thousands of hard-working students and parents to the tune of almost $1.5 trillion in debt. In 2019, one in five Americans are carrying the burden of this debt, and it will take them 10-20 years to pay it off. You have heard most every democratic presidential candidate support some form of free college tuition or forgiveness of this debt. The trouble with free college is that it only transfers this debt to the taxpayers — many of whom never attended college.

College tuition and room and board now cost about as much as $70,000 per year. That means parents will pay about $200,000-$300,000 for a four-year degree. Many wealthy parents are willing to cheat and lie to get their kids into Stanford, Yale, USC and Harvard. Facts show, however, the prestige of a university has little to do with what a student learns, how happy they are in college, or how successful they will be after graduation.

Another strange fact is the 25 colleges receiving the largest endowments also bring in a whopping $6.9 billion in DOE funding. The irony is, the more tax-deductible endowments a college has, the higher the tuition. Isn't it suppose to be the opposite of this?

That huge amount of cash could easily be used to subsidize the out-of-pocket costs paid by parents, many who suffer financially trying to put their kids through school. It's time the government steps in and taps into these massive endowments, eliminates the tax status of this money, and forces colleges to sign on to student loans as a co-signer. They should bear some of the risk of this debt because now they just float through with no risk while they get richer and richer.

David Burns
Pendleton

Write to us

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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).
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