

OUR VIEW

# Pump your own is out of gas

California may have its Silicon Valley and Hollywood. Ohio gets all those new high-paying computer chip manufacturing jobs for Intel. Washington state may have no income tax. But here in Oregon we don't have to pump our own gas.

Those aren't fair comparisons. We are not of a mind to be fair, hearing that once again a bill to let Oregonians pump their own gas is dead.

We get it if you don't want to pump your own. If you appreciate the bond Oregon has with the only other no self-service state, New Jersey, so be it. If you worry about people who would find pumping their own difficult, if you worry about safety, if you want another opportunity for jobs in Oregon, those are all real concerns.

But remember the bill as it was written, House Bill 4151, would not have removed the requirement to have attendants ready to pump gas. It would have made it optional for people who want to pump their own gas.

Is that so bad? We don't think so.

The undoing of HB 4151 was the need for some \$543,000 for the Oregon Fire Marshal to regulate consumer pumping. Time became too short to come up with that in this session.

We think the fire marshal may need even more money, if we understand the concerns. The worries about people pumping their own transfer to people plugging in their own electric cars, right? Especially those higher voltage charging ports.

In the 2023 Legislature shouldn't there be a bill to require Oregonians to be assisted with a paid professional when plugging in their electric vehicles?

We can't claim it as our idea. It would, though, create jobs. It would be very helpful for whom such effort can be difficult. It would be safer.

And just because Oregon would be the only state to make this requirement shouldn't be a reason to stop us. Maybe New Jersey would join in.

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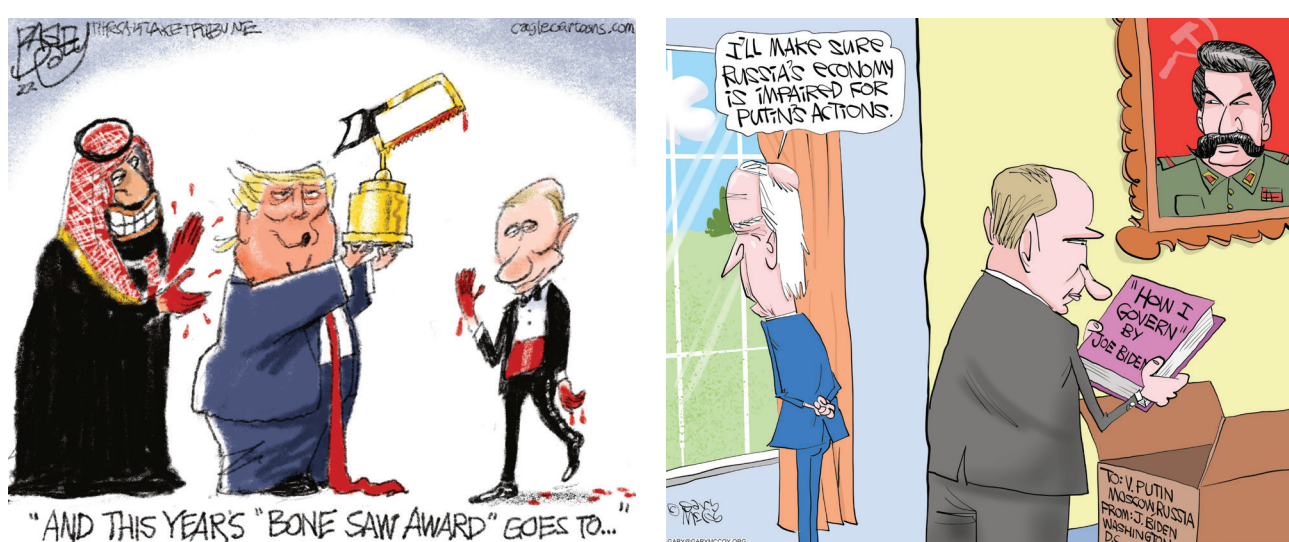
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SEND LETTERS TO: letters@lagrandeobserver.com or via mail to Editor, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850



## Legislature honors Courtney's longevity



DICK HUGHES  
OTHER VIEWS

If ever there was an issue that is neither Democrat nor Republican, urban nor rural, it is the issue of preventing animal abuse.

So said state Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, on Wednesday, March 2, as he urged his colleagues to pass his Senate Bill 1504 banning any greyhound racing in Oregon.

He received unanimous support. The "debate" mostly was senators showering praise upon Courtney, the longest-serving legislator in state history.

Courtney, 78, will retire in January.

"I guess we're here doing a reverse Shakespeare. We're not here to bury the Senate president; we're here to praise him," said Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland.

"The state's a heckuva lot better because Peter Courtney has been here," said Sen. Fred Girod, R-Lyons. "He has deep respect for our differences and deep respect for our similarities," said Sen. Kate Lieber, D-Beaverton.

Yet if ever there was an issue that was almost wholly Democrats vs. Republicans, urban vs. rural, it came the next day. Again, Courtney was at the center. The Senate passed House Bill 4002, phasing in overtime for agricultural workers, on a near-party-line vote and sent the measure to Gov. Kate Brown.

Courtney presided over a lengthy, intense, back-and-forth debate in which he heard himself criticized by Republicans for not ensuring a more collaborative outcome. Then he was the wrap-up speaker for the advocates, all of whom were Democrats.

Courtney found himself on the opposite side from senators who the previous morning had extolled his leadership — Girod; Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield; Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena; Republican leader Tim Knopp, of Bend, and others.

Legislators, Courtney said, generally don't like to make decisions. And for him, this at least was a start on agricultural overtime, even though he doesn't know how it ultimately will play out for workers or the industry. He defended the bill as "a very good beginning," full of checks and balances, and "not an irresponsible piece of legislation."

Senate Republicans had insisted that the overtime bill be read word-by-word before the debate, as they had for the greyhound legislation and other bills as a way of slowing the Democratic behemoth that controls the Legislature. But later Thursday, the Senate and House Republicans dropped the bill-reading requirement, easing the path toward adjournment on Friday.

The week's back-and-forth illustrated the swings and trade-offs of politics.

Courtney is Oregon's longest-serving Senate president, first elected in 2003 when the chamber was evenly split between Democrats and Republicans. The late Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem, convinced her fellow Republicans that they could trust Courtney in a power-sharing arrangement. He's been the presiding officer ever since — a moderating influence against the more liberal House to the chagrin of liberal Democrats in both chambers.

This is his 38th year in the Legislature, having started in the House when Democrats were in the minority.

In contrast to Courtney's long tenure, three Democratic women in

the House announced they could not afford to seek reelection due to the low pay for a job that supposedly is part time but really isn't.

Karin Power, of Milwaukie, Rachel Prusak, of Tualatin, and Anna Williams, of Hood River, collectively have served 14 years in the Legislature.

In a joint statement, they wrote: "Balancing our work, multiple day jobs, families and our service has become unsustainable. How much of a check on power can we be if we earn a base salary of less than \$33,000 a year? How can we adequately oversee a state budget of more than \$25 billion, with dozens of different state agencies?"

Among the bills dying in the session's final days was one that would have raised the pay to more than \$63,000 and added a monthly child care stipend for eligible parents.

This is a challenge for the Legislature's future. Increased pay would attract more candidates of low and moderate incomes, instead of having to rely on other jobs or family finances. Yet legislators' awareness of issues is enhanced by their firsthand knowledge of the working world, as well as other community issues.

There likely would be less divisiveness within the Legislature if there were more Democrats with retail, manufacturing and other business experience and more Republicans with backgrounds in social services and the public sector. As with any organization, the Legislature needs enough turnover to stay fresh instead of insular, but not so much turnover that it loses touch with itself and repeats past missteps.

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

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