

KeizerOpinion

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Too many families on the edge

The stock market is having its worst January ever. Oil and gas prices are the lowest they have been in almost 10 years. Inflation is, for all purposes, in check. Unemployment is down to 5 percent as millions of jobs have been added in recent years. The economy as been in recovery for more than six years. One would think that things are looking. They are, but not for everyone.

A recently released report, commissioned by Rutgers University, uses current data in a new way to identify those who are struggling financially and why. The report, in part, covers each county of the Pacific Northwest states.

The study is titled ALICE, which stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed; it shows that more than 40 percent of Marion County residents live above the federal poverty line but do not earn enough to afford the area's cost of living and are one unexpected disaster away from financial calamity.

Forty-three percent of Keizer's 13,500 households fall into the ALICE and poverty income levels. According to the study a household in Marion County with two adults, one infant and one preschooler needs to gross a bit more than \$51,000 annually to afford the bare minimums. That might sound like a nice income, but it is for a family of four. The average monthly expenditures for a family that size is more than \$4,000.

Any of us should be able to understand the vicarious of that situation; we have all lived through the Great Recession, many losing jobs and many more losing their homes to foreclosure.

Every family can tell their unique story of how the recession affected them, regardless of income. The recession increased reliance on government programs (SNAP and unemployment benefits, for two). People say the recent economic conditions laid bare the reality of income inequality, which will be one of the main issues of this year's presidential campaigns.

Protests such as the Occupy encampments allowed people to rail against the so-called 1 percent and demand more equal income which led to calls for an increase in the minimum wage across the country. In Oregon that demand is fostering fierce debate, pitting big cities

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against rural communities, progressives against conservatives and business against workers.

At \$9.25 per hour, Oregon has the second highest minimum wage in the nation (behind Washington); the federal minimum hourly wage is \$7.25. Gov. Kate Brown is proposing a two-tier minimum wage (one for the Portland and one of the rest of the state. That is unfair; there should be one wage state-wide. Will an increase in the minimum wage help every household in the ALICE category? Probably not. Households at the ALICE level unfortunately are not eligible for most government programs that require a income maximum for assistance.

Why should households that are doing economically well care about the ALICE report and the households at that level? Because those households are part of our community. A desirable place to live is only as strong as the neediest of our citizens. The trend of conservative states slashing public programs and assistance is troubling. It's almost like the leaders of those states are saying "We've got ours, you get yours."

A small percentage of recipients of assistance might gloat about being on the dole and not having to work, but we suspect most people who need to seek government help do so under duress. They seek a hand up, not a hand out.

The best answer for decreasing households at the ALICE level in our area is action not talk. This report from Rutgers should not be an invitation to our public officials to pile on with their own reports.

The best thing our public officials can do is focus on economic development—recruiting jobs whose wages can support a family; cut bureaucracy and rules that impede the delivery of assistance; and, know the resources available. Again there are dozens of organizations in our area whose mission is to aid those less fortunate.

Let's lessen the hand outs and extend a hand up. Every family is responsible for its own success but as the recession showed us, sometimes outside forces control our fates.

We have the information, let's use it to give every household that wants the opportunity to do better, as long as they are part of the solution. —LAZ

Does Oregon get a say in nominees?

To the Editor:

Why should Oregonians vote in the primaries to select presidential candidates when the selection has already been made by others?

Why should the people of New Hampshire or Alabama have a greater voice than the voters of Oregon?

Oregon needs to move its presidential primary election date up so our votes count for something. It is up to our state political parties to move our primary date.

The same is true when we vote for a president. In many cases, when Oregonians go to the polls, the world already knows who has been

letters

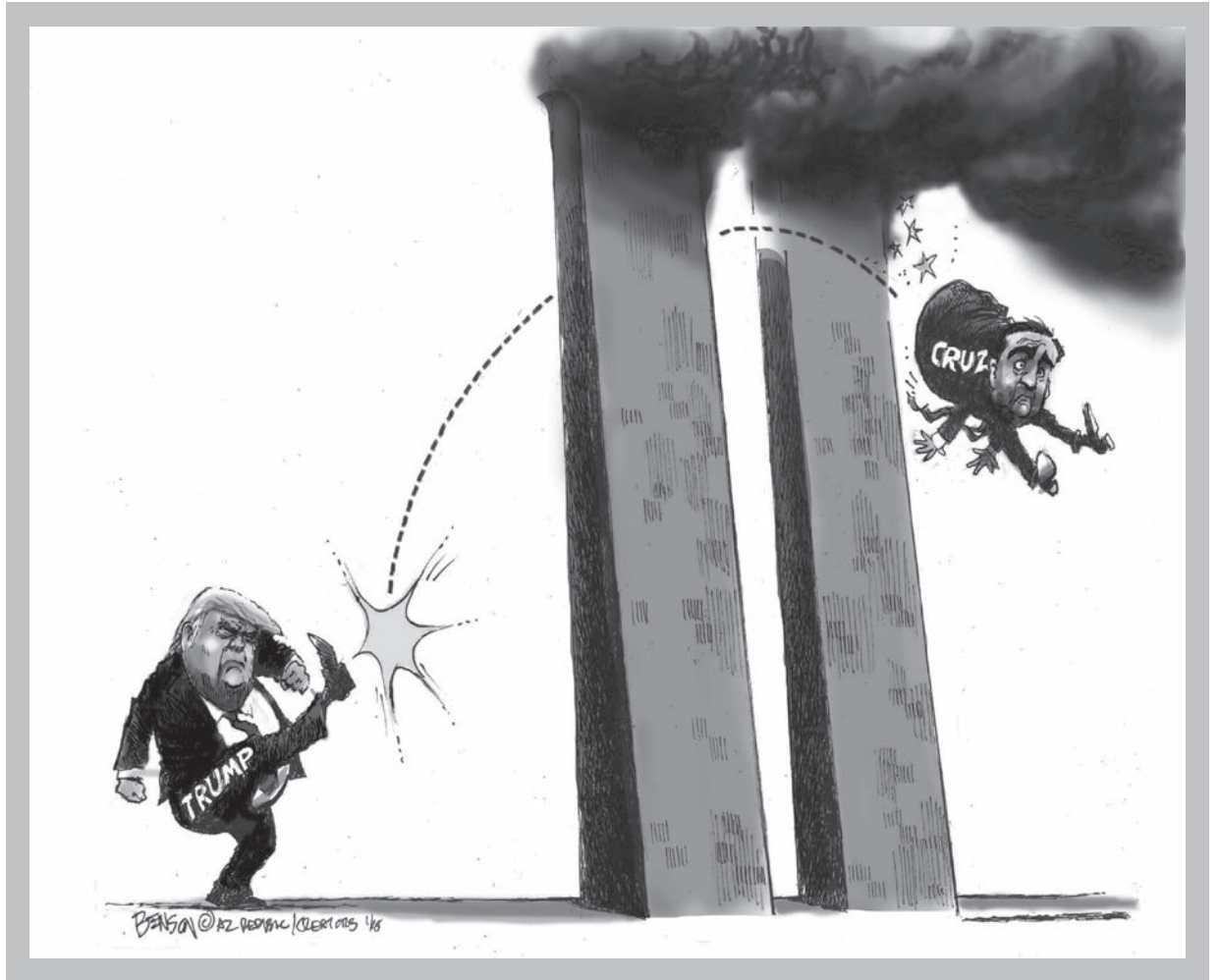
elected as the vote from other states have been counted and announced.

In order to make every vote count the results of voting in every state should not be announced until the next day so that the people on the west coast believe their vote counts. It is up to our national officials to fix this injustice.

**Bill Quinn
Keizer**

Have an opinion?

Email letters to the editor (300 words) by noon Tuesday. Submitted letters must be accompanied with writer's name and address.
Email to: publisher@keizertimes.com



GOP needs both Trump, Cruz to fall

By MICHAEL GERSON

The outbreak of hostilities between Donald Trump and Ted Cruz may not be edifying, but it is clarifying.

Cruz represents the arrival of tea party ideology at the presidential level. He espouses a "constitutionalism" that would disqualify much of modern government, and a belief that Republican elites are badly, even mainly, at fault for accommodating cultural and economic liberalism. Trump has adopted an ethno-nationalism in which the constraints of "political correctness" are lifted to express frankly nativist sentiments: that many illegal immigrants are criminals and rapists who threaten American jobs, and that Muslims are foreign, suspicious and potentially dangerous.

These approaches can overlap, but they are not identical. Cruz is attacking Trump as a "fake conservative" on gun and property rights and as a New York liberal on cultural matters. For his part, Trump defends those portions of the welfare state that benefit the working class, opposing cuts in Social Security and an increase in the retirement age. Cruz is the conservative true believer. Trump is the wrecking ball of political convention. They are not only two strong personalities; they demonstrate two different tendencies within the right.

Trump's attacks on Cruz have begun drawing both blood and protests from ideological conservatives. "Either cut the crap," warns radio host Mark Levin, "your accusations ... that Cruz is Canadian, a criminal, owned by the banks, etc. ... or you will lose lots and lots of conservatives." Levin and others registered no protest when Trump denigrated women, minorities and the disabled. Attacking a favored conservative is evidently a different matter.

other views

But this is Trump's greatest political talent—exploiting weaknesses like a dentist probing and drilling the most sensitive spot. Trump's questions about Cruz's Canadian roots are not primarily about constitutional interpretation. The issue is simpler: Why would voters who support the forced expulsion of 11 million undocumented people want a president born north of the border? Trump's mention of undisclosed Wall Street contributions highlights the contrast between Cruz's outsider brand and insider resume. And Cruz's seriously Denmark-like proposal for a value-added tax—as Marco Rubio pointed out in the recent Republican debate—may be disqualifying for many economic conservatives.

In a Trump-Cruz battle, I would not bet against Trump. Much of the Republican donor class is convinced that Cruz is the political equivalent of Barry Goldwater, in part because of his very conservative social views. A Trump-Clinton contest, however, is beginning to appear more winnable (particularly as Hillary Clinton appears more awkward and inept). "Donors," one leading Republican figure told me, "are trying hard to get comfortable with Trump." And Trump, without doubt, has improved his skills as a candidate.

But here is the problem. Donors, analysts and media are naturally drawn to the horse-race aspect of politics: establishment vs. anti-establishment, insider vs. outsider. But Trump is proposing a massive ideological and moral revision of the Republican Party. Re-

created in his image, it would be the anti-immigrant party; the party that blows up the global trading order; the party that undermines the principle of religious liberty; the party that encourages an ethnic basis for American identity and gives strength and momentum to prejudice.

We are already seeing the disturbing normalization of policies and arguments that recently seemed unacceptable, even unsayable. Trump proposes the forced expulsion of 11 million people, or a ban on Muslim immigration, and there are a few days of outrage from responsible Republican leaders. But the proposals still lie on the table, eventually seeming regular and acceptable.

But they are not acceptable. They are not normal. They are extreme and obscene and immoral. The Republican nominee—for the sake of his party and his conscience—must draw these boundaries clearly.

Ted Cruz is particularly ill-equipped to play this role. He is actually more of a demagogue than an ideologue. So he has changed his views on immigration to compete with Trump—and raised the ante by promising that none of the deported 11 million will ever be allowed back in the country. Instead of demonstrating the humane instincts of his Christian faith—a faith that motivated abolition and the struggle for civil rights—Cruz is presenting the crueler version of a pipe dream.

For Republicans, the only good outcome of Trump vs. Cruz is for both to lose. The future of the party as the carrier of a humane, inclusive conservatism now depends on some viable choice beyond them.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

Court decision could tie up unions

gene h. mcintyre

Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association represents a threat to public employee unions that continue now to represent more than one-third of all government workers. However, regarding all unions in the U.S., as determined in 2014, only 11 percent of the population still belong to unions.

The issue in this case is free-speech rights of non-union public employees. If the Supreme Court rules in Friedrichs' favor it will rule that non-members can contribute nothing to the costs of representation. The anticipated result is that more workers can opt out of financing unions' activities and become what are generally known as "free riders" with a drop in union membership and revenue.

A "free ride" means that those who pay nothing in support of what a union gains through its negotiations get something, often a lot, for which they must not pay a single dime. Those who want out and may get out argue that getting out means they do not any longer have to pay for union interests, like, for example, tenure, merit pay and class sizes. One of the justices from California, Anthony Kennedy, has been critical of mandatory union fees; he's said that "the union basically is making the teachers 'compelled riders.'"

A lawyer for the dissident teachers, Michael Carvin, has said that predictions of doom from the unions are overstated. He believes that gloom and doom are not real or provable in the real world. It is reported that there are 4.5 million union members nationwide.

The present state of union dues comes from a 1977 Supreme Court decision that allowed public employee unions to collect so-called fair share fees from non-members. This money was based on the argument before the Supreme Court of the need by unions that the collected dues was to be used for the purpose of collective bargaining.

One issue that handicaps the Supreme Court is that not one of them has had personal experience as a public school teacher. As a result they know little to nothing about the social culture that exists in our schools. Teachers are typically persons of dedication who want to work with children and youth in a learning environment; meanwhile, they want to earn a decent living and be free from the oppression of overzealous principals and superintendents who are often much more about ambition to move up than the care and encouragement of kids.

Unions protect these people from some people who shouldn't be in charge of administering schools. Those who don't want to join a union (but want a union looking after their interests) are quite often those who want to be a principal or administrator themselves.

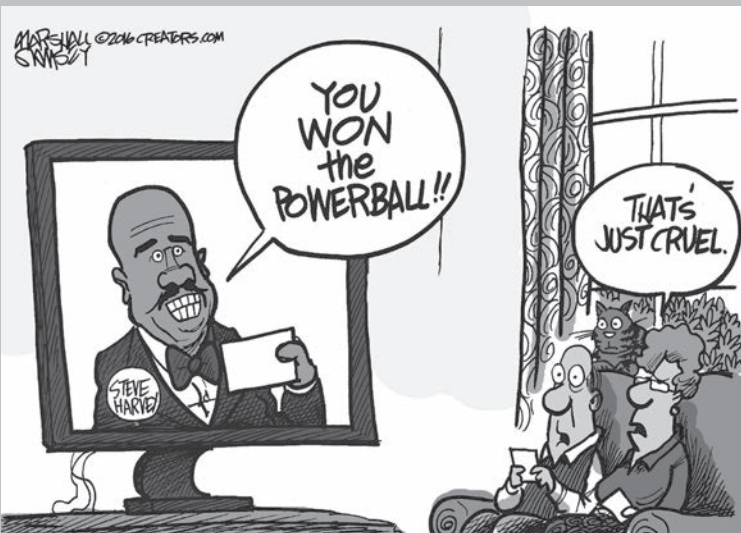
A union defends and protects those teachers who are good teachers but are not in the school to make the principal feel good. Without a

union, the school becomes a horrible place to work unless you are a person who seeks constantly to snitch on others and pass along compliments to administrators who've not earned them.

The same environment in our schools applies also to many government jobs. In government workplaces, you also have the snitches and the brown-nosers. They too are a huge nuisance to providing services to the people of Oregon because many workers want to please managers who want to please their administrator while too many administrators want to please the governor. Again, our Supreme Court justices have limited knowledge of what's going on in the real world of the public employee workplace.

Meanwhile, the only real counterweight to wealthy Republican super PACs is union money. Citizens United and other recent rulings by the Supreme Court have set in motion a tsunami of take-aways from public employees' ability to defend themselves against those billionaires who want to rule America through their all too often "owned" politicians without interference from teachers and public employees of all stripe and kind. All those working folks in service to the nation's youth and all Americans who merely want to maintain a defensive wall between themselves and a gathering dominance, known now as the American oligarchy.

(Gene H. McIntyre's column appears weekly in the Keizertimes.)



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