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Our indexed minimum wage still makes sense

Planning for annual increases works for business

Oregon *Capital Insider* — which our company publishes in collaboration with Pamplin Media Group — reported last Friday that mandatory paid sick leave is moving forward in the Oregon Legislature, in place of the \$15 minimum wage.

It is encouraging that Democratic legislators are stepping back from the minimum wage bill. Moving Oregon's minimum wage abruptly to \$15 per hour would have major effect on small- and mid-sized businesses.

Oregon voters did a wise thing in 2002 in passing Measure 25, which raised Oregon's minimum wage from \$6.50 to \$6.90. The most important aspect of that ballot initiative was to index the minimum wage to inflation. Today Oregon's minimum wage is \$9.25. California's is \$9 and Washington's is \$9.47.

Among all the states, Oregon's is the third highest minimum wage.

The wisdom of indexing the minimum wage is twofold. It recognizes that the minimum wage should not remain static, but follow the economy. Secondly, indexing allows businesses to plan and budget

for that increase. They can see it coming. There is a huge difference between planning for annual payroll increases in the minimum wage and facing a sudden leap.

Jumping Oregon's minimum wage by \$5 in one year would have different effects throughout the spectrum of the state's businesses. There is gap between large Oregon employers such as Nike and Intel and the broad mass of Oregon businesses. While metropolitan Portland's economy is fueled by those two global brands, the economy of towns across Oregon are sustained by small- and mid-sized businesses. It is those small- and mid-sized businesses that would have great difficulty absorbing the sudden jolt of the jump to a \$15 minimum wage

Oregon's Measure 25 was an intelligent response to real need. It still makes sense.

Oil refinery in Longview?

This project must fully immunize the Columbia River

Does it make sense to build a new oil refinery on the banks of the Columbia River in Longview, Wash., especially one that will be supplied with crude oil via rail? No, but this answer is not quite so clear cut as environmental advocates make it seem.

Riverside Energy Inc. indicates it is looking into several locations in Oregon and Washington for a new West Coast refinery that would turn crude oil — likely from the Bakken field of North Dakota and Alberta — into gasoline and other products. The company says it is far from firmly settled on Longview, though its very name — Riverside — suggests that a facility based on Columbia River transportation and water may be a fundamental aspect of its business plan.

This will be anathema to many in the environmental and fishing communities. Even pipelines are susceptible to spills, but rail-based tank cars are a particularly potent source of concern. There is no disputing that they have suffered derailments, explosions and other mishaps that have cost lives and forced expensive cleanups. Even a relatively minor spill at the wrong time could wipe out a critical salmon run, while a major accident could put an end to fishing, clamming and tourism for years. Lives have been lost under such circumstances and doubtless will be again, and we don't have to go along with accommodating such risks in our neighborhood.

However, much as some might wish to permanently end fossil fuel exploitation immediately and forever, economic realities dictate that time is still at least two or three decades in the future, if we're

lucky. The vast majority of Pacific Northwest residents continue to depend on petroleum products for a broad range of necessities, from transportation to home heating, plus many uses that aren't so immediately apparent, from tires to fertilizer. Only about 19.4 gallons in a 42-gallon barrel of oil becomes gasoline.

The entire West Coast is plagued with gasoline prices that tend to be significantly higher than those in other parts of the U.S. In part, this is because we lack refinery capacity. The loss of a single refinery for routine maintenance or to make repairs following an accident causes a month-long spike in Western fuel prices. With a growing population, we could certainly use additional refining.

Technological advances mitigate some concerns raised by Riverside's opponents. For example, existing refineries in highly environmentally conscious Whatcom and Skagit counties in northwest Washington state are not permitted to emit "a toxic soup of carcinogens and neurotoxins" as Columbia Riverkeeper states is true of refineries in general. Such scare tactics aren't helpful.

As always with industrial proposals, Riverside's plans to build a refinery must be forced to fully internalize costs and risks. Promises of jobs, taxes and useful products must not sway communities and regulators from ensuring that wherever a new refinery is eventually built, neighbors and regional citizens are in no way left on the hook for coping with pollution or other costs. Any plan that can't fully immunize the Columbia River and its creatures and communities must itself be refined or rejected.

When cultures shift too far

By DAVID BROOKS
New York Times News Service

In January 1969, two quarterbacks played against each other in Super Bowl III. Johnny Unitas and Joe Namath were both superstars.

They were both from western Pennsylvania, but they came from different cultural universes.

Unitas was reticent, workmanlike and deliberately unglamorous. Namath was flashy and a playboy. He turned himself into a marketing brand and wrote a memoir jokingly called, "I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow 'Cause I Get Better Looking Every Day."

The contrast between these two men symbolizes a broader shift from a culture of self-effacement, which says, "I'm no better than anybody else and nobody is better than me," to a culture of self-expression, which says, "Look at what I've accomplished. I'm special."

The conventional story, beloved especially on the right, is that this cultural shift took place in the 1960s. First there was the Greatest Generation, whose members were modest and self-sacrificing, but then along came the baby boomers who were narcissistic and relativistic.

As I found while researching a book, this storyline doesn't really fit the facts. The big shift in American culture did not happen around the time of Woodstock and the Age of Aquarius. It happened in the late 1940s, and it was the members of the Greatest Generation that led the shift.

The real pivot point was the end of World War II. By the fall of 1945, Americans had endured 16 years of hardship, stretching back through the Depression. They were ready to let loose and say farewell to all that. There followed what the historian Alan Petigny called "the renunciation of renunciation." The amount of consumer advertising on the radio exploded.



David Brooks



AP Photo/JR

Three pro athletes indicate that they have overcome knee problems by kicking out their right feet with American Airlines stewardess Kathy Dunn at a midtown restaurant in New York on Tuesday, Jan. 19, 1972. Joe Namath of the New York Jets, left, Johnny Unitas of the Baltimore Colts, and Tommie Agee of the New York Mets, right, gathered for the launching of American Airlines' sixth-annual golf classic in which the three athletes competed at Puerto Rico the next month.

Magazines ran articles on the wonderful lifestyle changes that were going to make lives easier — ultraviolet lights that would sterilize dishes in place of dishwashing.

What's lost is the more balanced view, that we are splendidly endowed but also broken.

There was a softening in the moral sphere. In 1946, Rabbi Joshua Liebman published a book called *Peace of Mind* that told everybody to relax and love themselves. He wrote a new set of commandments, including "Thou shalt not be afraid of thy hidden impulses;" thou shalt "love thyself." Liebman's book touched a nerve. It stayed atop *The New York Times*' best-seller list for 58 weeks.

A few years later, Harry Overstreet published *The Mature Mind*, which similarly advised people to discard the doctrine based on human sinfulness and embrace self affirmation. That book topped the list for 16 weeks.

In 1952, Norman Vincent Peale came out with *The Power of Positive Thinking*, which rejected a morality of restraint for an upbeat morality of growth. That book rested atop the

highest return now goes to those who combine soft skills — excellence at communicating and working with people — with technical skills.

"So I think a humanities major who also did a lot of computer science, economics, psychology, or other sciences can be quite valuable and have great career flexibility," Katz said. "But you need both, in my view, to maximize your potential. And an economics major or computer science major or biology or engineering or physics major who takes serious courses in the humanities and history also will be a much more valuable scientist, financial professional, economist or entrepreneur."

My second reason: We need people conversant with the humanities to help reach wise public policy decisions, even about the sciences. Technology companies must constantly weigh ethical decisions: Where should Facebook set its privacy defaults, and should it tolerate glimpses of nudity? Should Twitter close accounts that seem sympathetic to terrorists? How should Google handle sex and violence, or defamatory articles?

In the policy realm, one of the most important decisions we hu-

Regulators should be informed by first-rate science, but also by first-rate humanism.

mans will have to make is whether to allow germline gene modification. This might eliminate certain diseases, ease suffering, make our offspring smarter and more beautiful. But it would also change our species. It would enable the wealthy to concoct superchildren. It's exhilarating and terrifying.

To weigh these issues, regulators should be informed by first-rate science, but also by first-rate humanism. After all, Homer addressed similar issues three millenniums ago.

best-seller list for an astounding 98 weeks.

Then along came humanistic psychology, led by people like Carl Rogers, who was the most influential psychologist of the 20th century. Rogers followed the same basic line: Human nature is intrinsically good. People need to love themselves more. They need to remove external restraints on their glorious selves.

"Man's behavior is exquisitely rational," Rogers wrote, "moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goal his organism is endeavoring to achieve."

Humanistic psychology led to the self-esteem movement and much else, reshaping the atmosphere in schools, human-resources departments and across American society.

In short, American popular culture pivoted. Once the dominant view was that the self is to be distrusted but external institutions are to be trusted. Then the dominant view was that the self is to be trusted and external constraints are to be distrusted.

This more positive view of human nature produced some very good social benefits. For centuries people in certain groups in society had been taught to think too poorly of themselves. Many feminists and civil rights activists seized on these messages to help formerly oppressed groups to believe in themselves, to raise their sights and aspirations.

But I would say that we have over-shot the mark. We now live in a world in which commencement speakers tell students to trust themselves, listen to themselves, follow their passions, to glorify the Golden Figure inside. We now live in a culture of the Big Me, a culture of meritocracy where we promote ourselves and a social media culture where we broadcast highlight reels of our lives. What's lost is the more balanced view, that we are splendidly endowed but also broken. And without that view, the whole logic of character-building falls apart. You build your career by building on your strengths, but you improve your character by trying to address your weaknesses.

So perhaps the culture needs a rebalance. The romantic culture of self-glorification has to be balanced with an older philosophic tradition, based on the realistic acknowledgment that we are all made of crooked timber and that we need help to cope with our own tendency to screw things up. That great tradition and body of wisdom was accidentally tossed aside in the late 1940s. It's worth reviving and modernizing it.

Starving for wisdom in information sea

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom."

That epigram from E.O. Wilson captures the dilemma of our era. Yet the solution of some folks is to disdain wisdom.

"Is it a vital interest of the state to have more anthropologists?" Rick Scott, the Florida governor, once asked. A leader of a prominent Internet company once told me that the firm regards admission to Harvard as a useful heuristic of talent, but a college education itself as useless.

Parents and students themselves are acting on these principles, retreating from the humanities. Among college graduates in 1971, there were about two business majors for each English major. Now there are seven times as many. (I was a political science major; if I were doing it over, I'd be an economics major with a foot in the humanities.)

I've been thinking about this after reading Fareed Zakaria's smart new book, *In Defense of a Liberal Education*. Like Zakaria, I think that the liberal arts teach critical thinking (not to mention nifty words like "heuristic").

So, to answer the skeptics, here are my three reasons the humanities enrich our souls and sometimes even our pocketbooks as well.

First, liberal arts equip students with communications and interpersonal skills that are valuable and genuinely rewarded in the labor force, especially when accompanied by technical abilities.

"A broad liberal arts education is a key pathway to success in the 21st-century economy," says Lawrence Katz, a labor economist at Harvard. Katz says that the economic return to pure technical skills has flattened, and the



Nicholas Kristof

In *The Odyssey*, the beautiful nymph Calypso offers immortality to Odysseus if he will stay on her island. After a fling with her, Odysseus ultimately rejects the offer because he misses his wife, Penelope. He turns down godlike immortality to embrace suffering and death that are essential to the human condition.

Likewise, when the President's Council on Bioethics issued its report in 2002, Human Cloning and Human Dignity, it cited scientific journals but also Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Even science depends upon the humanities to shape judgments about ethics, limits and values.

Third, wherever our careers lie, much of our happiness depends upon our interactions with those around us, and there's some evidence that literature nurtures a richer emotional intelligence.

Science magazine published five studies indicating that research subjects who read literary fiction did better at assessing the feelings of a person in a photo than those who read nonfiction or popular fiction. Literature seems to offer lessons in human nature that help us decode the world around us and be better friends.

Literature also builds bridges of understanding. Toni Morrison has helped all America understand African-American life. Jhumpa Lahiri illuminated immigrant contradictions. Khaled Hosseini opened windows on Afghanistan.

In short, it makes eminent sense to study coding and statistics today, but also history and literature.

John Adams had it right when he wrote to his wife, Abigail, in 1780: "I must study Politicks and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematics and Philosophy. My sons ought to study Mathematics and Philosophy, Geography, natural History and Naval Architecture, navigation, Commerce and Agriculture, in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Musick, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelaine."