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Testing the time tests take

By capping time spent on assessment exams, students can focus on school

Spending about 20 hours a year taking high school assessment tests will strike some Oregonians as high, some as low and some about right. The fact is, however, that few of us will have given much thought to the question.

Last week, after much internal and external debate, the Obama administration urged curtailing the time devoted to testing — particularly the standardized statewide tests that have become so much the singular focus of school districts and education departments. The recommendation is to cap test-taking to 2 percent of classroom instruction time, about one hour out of every 50.

Oregon and other states tinker with their requirements for classroom time — a factor that impacts everything from budgets for teacher salaries and classroom construction. This January the Oregon Board of Education approved 990 instructional hours per year for high school students and 900 hours for younger kids. Two percent of 990 hours is 19.8 hours and 2 percent of 900 is 18 hours.

Arguments over testing are closely bound up with other longstanding disputes: how best to assess teacher performance and ensure U.S. young people are prepared to compete for an ample slice of the globe's economic pie.

But there is concern across the political spectrum about testing becoming a singular focus, rather than merely a way to ensure stu-

dents are essentially on track. A study released last week finds no evidence that spending more time on tests improves academic performance.

Most citizens will agree with the recipe for academic success spelled out by a *New York Times* reader commenting on the "2% solution":

"Teachers who can teach. Teachers who care about kids. Involved parents. Expectations and accountability (both teachers and students). School buildings in good repair. Neighborhoods and families that protect and inspire kids. Not too hard to figure out. Standardized tests play a minor role (and are a boondoggle for the test companies)."

Setting an upper time budget for testing is a start in the right direction toward making standardized tests just one tool to make sure students, teachers and districts are on the right track. They should never have become such an obsession. The classroom time specifically devoted to preparing for them also should be capped.

Schooling has a complex mix of appropriate goals, of which doing well on standardized tests should be a side benefit and not a primary target in its own right.

House GOP makes Clinton look good

Freedom Caucus scares the voter who prizes stability

It is easier to follow the complexities of Major League Baseball's league playoffs than to know who's on first base in the struggle for Republican governance of the U.S. House of Representatives.

As we presently understand it, House Speaker John Boehner will attempt to pass a government funding bill prior to executing his resignation from the House. We also know that Rep. Paul Ryan is poised to become Boehner's successor after making some kind of agreement with the Freedom Caucus, which has paralyzed the Republican majority's ability to govern.

One of the House's basic functions is to fund the federal government and keep it running. But it's not clear that's how the Freedom Caucus sees it. They seem to be willing to take down the government in order to make a point about Planned Parenthood, Obamacare or an assortment of other grievances.

The genius of our congressional system is its capacity at any given moment to contain countervailing points of view and eventually make a decision. The dangerous thing about what we observe on the Republican side of the House

is a faction that is content for the House not to make decisions.

The most dangerous pending decision this group flirts with is to play chicken over raising the debt limit. Some of these members of Congress have even convinced themselves that it doesn't matter.

But it does matter enormously. If these men and women get their way, count on major economic calamity.

The ultimate joke on the Republicans who enable the Freedom Caucus and unqualified presidential candidates such as Donald Trump and Ben Carson is that they are scaring Americans who hang out in the middle of the political spectrum and value stability.

Last week's nine-hour interrogation of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was another plank in the Republicans' we-can't-be-trusted marketing campaign. The House Select Committee on Benghazi managed to give Clinton new life — to make her look good.

In the run-up to the World Series, it's all about capitalizing on your opponent's mistakes. At this point, Republicans are throwing the game.

Empire strikes back at Clinton

By MAUREEN DOWD
New York Times News Service

WASHINGTON — Nobody plays the victim like Hillary.

She can wield that label like a wrecking ball.

If her husband humiliates her with a girlfriend in the Oval Office, Hillary turns around and uses the sympathy engendered to launch a political career. If her Republican opponent gets in her space in an overbearing way during a debate, she turns around and uses the sympathy engendered to win a Senate seat. If conservatives hold a Salem witch trial under the guise of a House select committee hearing, she turns around and uses the sympathy engendered to slip into the HOV lane of a superhighway to the presidency.

Hillary Clinton is never more alluring than when a bunch of pasty-faced, nasty-tongued white men bully her.

And she was plenty alluring during her marathon session on Thursday with Republican Lilliputians, who were completely oblivious to the fact that Hillary is always at her most potent when some Teanderthal is trying to put her in her place.

Trey Gowdy and his blithering band of tea-partiers went on a fishing expedition, but they forgot to bring their rods — or any fresh facts.

It was a revealing display of hardcore conservatives in their parallel universe, where all their biases are validated by conservative media. They crawled out of the ooze into the sea of cameras, blinking and obtuse. Ohio's Jim Jordan, bellowing. South Carolina's Gowdy, sweating. Alabama's Martha Roby, not getting the joke. And Indiana's Susan Brooks, allowing that "most of us really don't know much about Libya."

Hillary acted bemused, barely masking her contempt at their condescension. She was no doubt amazed at what an amateur job they were doing at character assassination.

The Republicans came across as even more conspiratorial than their other target, Sidney Blumenthal, and his nickname is "G.K.," for grassy knoll. One conservative on the panel, trying to paint Clinton as an addled 68-year-old, as of Monday, kept snidely offering to pause while she read the notes her posse was passing her.

They must have been mistaking her for W., who always looked as if he wouldn't know what to say if his notes blew away in the wind.

It is not the terrain of Gowdy's lame committee, but it is legitimate to exam-



Jacquelyn Marti/AP Photo

Democratic presidential candidate and former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, laughs out loud after Rep. Martha Roby, R-Ala., asked Clinton if she was home alone during night of the 2012 Benghazi attacks during testimony on Capitol Hill in Washington, Thursday, before the House Select Committee on Benghazi. After laughing, Clinton said it was a bit of levity at 7:15 p.m., more than nine hours since the hearing began. She described conversations with other officials and said, "I did not sleep all night."



Maureen Dowd

ine Clinton's record in the Middle East.

As a senator, she made a political vote to let W. invade Iraq. As much homework as she did to get ready for the Libya committee, she chose not to do her homework on Iraq in 2002 — neglecting to read the sketchy National Intelligence Estimate. She didn't want to seem like a hippie flower girl flashing a peace sign after 9/11.

Then she urged President Barack Obama to help topple Moammar Gadhafi without heeding the painful lesson of Iraq — that if America went into another nebulous defined mission, there would have to be a good plan to prevent the vacuum of power being filled by militant Islamic terrorists.

Since she was, as her aide Jake Sullivan put it, "the public face of the U.S. effort in Libya" — one of the Furies, along with Samantha Power and Susan Rice, who had pushed for a military intervention on humanitarian grounds — Hillary needed to stay on top of it.

She had to be tenacious in figuring out when Libya had deteriorated into such a caldron of jihadis that our ambassador should either be pulled out or backed up. In June 2012, the British closed their consulate in Benghazi after their ambassador's convoy was hit by a grenade. A memo she received that August described the security situation in Libya as "a mess."

When you are the Valkyrie who engineers the intervention, you can't then say it is beneath you to pay attention to the ludicrously negligent security for your hand-picked choice for ambassador in a lawless country full of assassinations and jihadi training camps.

According to Republicans on the committee, there were 600 requests

from Stevens' team to upgrade security in Benghazi in 2012 and 20 attacks on the mission compound in the months before the Sept. 11 siege.

In a rare moment of lucidity, Rep. Mike Pompeo of Kansas said to Clinton: "You described Mr. Stevens as having the best knowledge of Libya of anyone," but "when he asked for increased security, he didn't get it."

As Hillary kept explaining, that job was the province of the "security professionals," four of whom were later criticized for providing "grossly inadequate" security at the Benghazi compound and removed from their posts.

The 11-hour hearing showcased the good Hillary, but there were occasional flashes of the bad. She still doesn't believe that setting up her own server was so wrong. Even though the inspector general of government intelligence said that there was top secret information in her emails, she sticks with her parsing. "There was nothing marked classified on my emails, either sent or received," she told Jordan.

She seemed oddly detached about Stevens, testifying that he didn't have her personal email or cell number, "but he had the 24-hour number of the State Operations in the State Department that can reach me 24/7."

There were no call logs of talks between Stevens and Clinton, and she said she could not remember if she ever spoke to him again after she swore him in, in May. "I was the boss of ambassadors in 270 countries," she explained.

But Libya was the country where she was the midwife to chaos. And she should have watched that baby like the Lady Hawk she is.

Clinton didn't want to seem like a hippie flower girl flashing a peace sign after 9/11.

Free Mitt Romney from the chains

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

Sometimes I find myself feeling sorry for Mitt Romney.

No, seriously.

In another time and place, he might have been respected as an effective technocrat — a smart guy valued (although probably not loved) for his ability to get things done. In fact, that's kind of how it worked when he was governor of Massachusetts, a decade ago.

But now it's 2015 in America, and Romney's party doesn't want people who get things done. On the contrary, it actively hates government programs that improve American lives, especially if they help Those People. And this means that Romney can't celebrate his signature achievement in public life, the Massachusetts health reform that served as a template for Obamacare.

This has to hurt. Indeed, a few days ago Romney couldn't help himself: He boasted to *The Boston Globe* that "Without Romneycare, we wouldn't have had Obamacare" and that as a result "a lot of people wouldn't have health insurance." And it's true!

But such truths aren't welcome in the GOP. Ben Carson, who is leading the latest polls of Iowa Republicans, has declared that Obamacare is the worst thing to happen to America since slavery; 81 percent of likely Republican caucus-goers say that this statement makes him more attractive as a candidate.

Not surprisingly, then, Romney quickly tried to walk his comments back, claiming that Obamacare is very different from Romneycare, which it isn't, and that it has failed.

But you know, it hasn't. On the contrary, the Affordable Care Act has been a

remarkable success, especially considering the scorched-earth opposition it has faced.

First of all, a lot of people — around 16 million, the administration estimates, a picture confirmed by independent sources — do indeed have health insurance who otherwise wouldn't. Millions more would be insured if Republican-controlled states weren't refusing to expand Medicaid (even though the federal government would pay the costs) and generally trying to obstruct the program.

How good is the insurance thus obtained? Not perfect: Despite subsidies, policies are still hard for some to afford, and deductibles and copays can be onerous. But most people enrolled under Obamacare report high satisfaction with their coverage, which is hugely better than simply not being uninsured. And may I inject a personal note? If truth be told, I live in a pretty rarefied, upper-middle-class-and-above milieu — yet even so I know several people for whom the Affordable Care Act has been more or less literally a lifesaver. This is, as Joe Biden didn't quite say, a really big deal.

Oh, and have you noticed how those ads featuring people supposedly hurt by Obamacare have disappeared? That's because none of their stories held up.

What's more, the big Biden deal has come in below budget. Insurance premiums in Obamacare's first two years were well below predictions. It looks as if there will be a partial rebound in 2016, but it's still cheaper than expected. And overall, health care spending has slowed dramatically.

Meanwhile, none of the bad things that were supposed to happen have. Em-



Paul Krugman

ployment growth since the "job-killing" law went into effect has been faster than at any time since the 1990s. Employers have not, in fact, eliminated full-time jobs to avoid the act's provisions. And the budget deficit keeps falling.

In short, President Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, who pushed the Affordable Care Act through despite total opposition from the GOP, have a lot to be proud of. And so does Romney, who helped lay the foundation. Instead, however, he's trashing the best thing he's ever done.

You have to wonder: Does Romney really think that his party would look more favorably on Obamacare if it worked even better than it has, if it cost no money at all? If so, he's delusional. After all, the great majority of Republican-controlled states have turned down free money, refusing to let the federal government expand Medicaid (and in so doing pump money into their economies.)

The point is that from the point of view of the Republican base, covering the uninsured, or helping the unlucky in general, isn't a feature, it's a bug. It's not about how much it costs in taxpayer funds or economic impact: the base is actually willing to lose money in order to perpetuate suffering.

And a movement with those values has no use for technocrats. Ask Ben Bernanke, who has given up on a party in thrall to the "know-nothingism of the far right."

Maybe Romney still imagines that a desperate party will call on him to save it from Donald Trump. Or maybe he just can't bring himself to admit that he picked the wrong group of people to hang out with. Either way, one hopes for his sake that he eventually gives up his illusions. Trust me, Mitt: It will be a liberating experience.

The Affordable Care Act has been a remarkable success.