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Sales tax is a reach too far

“Public employees unions run the statehouse,” said state Rep. Dennis Richardson, during a 2014 visit to Astoria. The unions assert broad influence on the Democratic side of the state Legislature through candidate interviews and campaign funding.

Now the public employees unions are asserting themselves grandly with Initiative Petition 28, the initiative to establish a corporate sales tax on corporations with gross receipts of more than \$25 million annually. Paris Achen of our Capital Bureau reported Tuesday that the farm supplies and fuel cooperative Wilco would face a huge increase in its tax liability if IP 28 passes.

Ballot measures are blunt instruments. They are seldom as simple as their proponents make them sound. So what is the reality check on Initiative Petition 28?

The most correct title for the measure is the PERS Bailout Tax. Financial demands of the Public Employees Retirement System will soon increase the load on school districts and municipalities — causing schools to lay off teachers in order to fund retire-

ment pensions.

Legislative remedies to the PERS dilemma — brokered by former Gov. John Kitzhaber — were thrown out by the Oregon Supreme Court. In the face of the court’s judgment, there was a proposal to require new PERS enrollees to contribute to their retirement, in the manner that is common in the private sector. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown would not support that.

Revenue raised by IP 28 is the unions’ answer to the PERS problem.

Achen reported that the Legislative Revenue Office projects the measure’s effects as follows: a contraction of the private sector and an enlargement of the public sector. Another consequence will be price increases for consumers, as corporations cover their big new tax liability.

Initiative Petition 28 is a reach too far.

Suicide haunts Northwest jobs

Suicide is often associated with mental illness — particularly chronic depression — without much reference to external factors occurring in victims’ lives. But a large new study of suicide in the U.S. shows that individual economic circumstances and working conditions play a substantial role.

The eye-opening aspect of a study by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is the extent to which rural Pacific Northwest jobs are associated with high rates of suicide. The CDC’s occupational suicide list is topped by farmworkers, fishermen, lumberjacks and others in forestry or agriculture — with a rate of 85 per 100,000.

In popular culture, there has been a perception that suicide is especially common among dentists and doctors. But those professions have an 80 percent lower rate than the archetypal Northwest jobs of fishing, logging and farming.

The CDC leaves to others interpretation of these find-

ings, but “found the highest suicide rates in manual laborers who work in isolation and face unsteady employment,” AP reported.

It may be argued that personality types more prone to suicide tend to enter certain professions. However, a compelling case can be made for the proposition that those who grow and catch our food and harvest our trees, have been increasingly left in the lurch by an economic system that attaches too little importance to lives spent in these vital pursuits.

Suicide among fishermen makes innovations like a proposed community fishing associations on the Columbia River all the more important, by providing better monetary outcomes for fishing families and providing a path for long-term economic stability. Similar systems are possible in wood products and farming.

We should do all we can to provide hope for our neighbors in these crucial industries. Far too often, they are left feeling forgotten and unvalued.

Living disabled in an able-bodied world

EVEN SO



By Joan Herman

I reluctantly left Astoria 14 years ago for graduate school and then career. Now retired, I am finally back home in the wind- and rain-swept town I so love.

Yet my return has not been without some reservations, most having to do with my much-changed body.

All of us age, of course, but multiple sclerosis, or MS, has accelerated my physical decline well beyond what most 57-year-olds face.

I am all-too aware that my experience living here is going to be far different from my previous life in which I co-founded and managed a business, Bikes & Beyond, and rode my bike literally over hill and dale.

In my diminished body, I wonder, how will I carve out a new life for myself?

This column, the first of what I hope will be the occasional piece, represents one step toward creating a full life here, regardless — or in the case of the column, because of — my condition.

I could tell you my goals for the column include raising awareness and giving a face to the millions of people in our country who live with disabilities. And that would not be untrue.

That said, I would not presume to speak for others with disabilities. Nonetheless, I know we share many experiences and feelings, yet to a great extent, people with disabilities are invisible in our youth-obsessed culture. I have a voice and want to use it.

But the biggest reasons I am writing are personal ones: to reach out and make connections in a way I could not without this forum; to give my life a sense of purpose and value, which to a great extent is lost with retirement, especially when, as in my case, it comes prematurely; and, perhaps most important, to do something that makes me feel “abled.”

Through the column, I will share my struggles living with a chronic condition, an experience that so many people face, whether themselves or a loved one. The column may also veer into the political/advocacy realm, when appropriate.

I should mention this is not the first time I have written for the paper. In fact, I first moved to the North Coast 30 years ago to accept a job as a reporter with The Daily Astorian.

Obama’s final fight for his legacy

By FRANK BRUNI

New York Times News Service

You introduce yourself to voters as a son of Kansas and Kenya, an emblem of this country’s openness to outsiders and its embrace of difference.

Your election and re-election affirm the distance that the United States has traveled, or so you believe. So you hope.

Then you look up toward the end of your second term to behold a Republican presidential nominee who is cynically exploiting racism and xenophobia to put the White House within his own reach. He’s not merely your adversary; he’s your antithesis. And his victory would do more than endanger your policies. It would question the very moral of your journey, the very bend of the arc you frequently invoke.

That’s what Barack Obama confronts right now, and that’s why he hit the campaign trail Tuesday, appearing onstage with Hillary Clinton in North Carolina and proclaiming without reservation that “there has never been any man or woman more qualified for this office” than she. That’s why he’ll say words like those again and again, with the same fire, in the months ahead.

For the nation’s first black president, Clinton isn’t just the better candidate. She’s the better America. She wins and he holds on to his rosiest convictions about what he and his presidency symbolize. Donald Trump wins and that’s a tricky thing to do.

Trump forged his bond with bigots by essentially calling Obama an impostor and demanding to see his birth certificate. But that particular stunt weighs less on Obama than Trump’s sustained behavior during the 2016 presidential race does, according to people close to the president.

“The thing that I’m sure aggravates him — enrages him — is the invoca-



A newspaper ad in the late '80s, early '90s, spoke of Joan Herman’s role at The Daily Astorian. Today, she returns, albeit in a different role and a different stage of life.

Although there are so many things I can no longer do, I still want — and need — to feel useful.

I was 27, just two years out of college, and excited to start my new job. My biggest health concern was floppy ankles that would sprain easily when I ran the trails at Fort Stevens.

I could never have imagined I would return some day in a much different physical state. Today I am in a wheelchair pretty much 24/7, leaving me feeling imprisoned in my body much of the time.

Often, I want to shout that I used to be successful, holding down a full-time job as a college English instructor, where I was treated with deference by colleagues and students alike.

When I ride my red wheelchair up and down the Astoria hills because I can no longer drive, let alone walk, I want to tell everyone who sees me that I once ascended these hills on my bike with ease.

I feel self-conscious about how acquaintances who haven’t seen me in years react when they view me in “the chair.” I hate the pity looks I sometimes get and assume others are secretly relieved they’re not in my situation — and I can’t blame them. I’ve been there, too.

But I’m taking the leap into carving out a new, “active” life anyway. If nothing else, having a chronic condition has given me an attitude of “What do I have to lose?”

Although there are so many things I can no longer do, I still want — and need — to feel useful. So I volunteer twice a week answering the phones at the local community radio station,

KMUN. Some might view it as a big step down from my previous lives, but being there has helped restore, at least a little bit, the sense of worth I had when I was working.

I have even ventured into broadcasting, starting a new radio program reading short fiction on the air Sunday evenings. As my husband, John, jokes, my mouth still works just fine.

I hope to become involved with other community efforts as they present themselves, as well.

Those of us living with chronic conditions are often told we’re inspirational because we continue living our lives as best we can in spite of our conditions.

While I much appreciate the sentiment behind those words, they also make me wonder, “Well, what would you have me do?”

Hence my column’s title, taken from the poem *Late Fragment* by the late, great American writer Raymond Carver (who incidentally was born in Clatskanie):

*And did you get what
 you wanted from this life, even so?
 This life is not what I planned —
 even so ...
 This body is not what I wanted —
 even so ...
 It’s all I have.*

Joan Herman is a second-time Astorian who was co-owner of *Bikes & Beyond* and a former reporter for *The Daily Astorian*. She will contribute an occasional column about living with disabilities.



Frank Bruni

Where does Trump fit into it, and does it survive him?

tion of race and ethnicity in our politics,” David Axelrod, a former White House aide, told me. “Obama’s message is about the emerging America and the strength of our diversity. He represents it. And when Trump says ‘Make America great again,’ there’s an element of turning the clock back to the days when minorities were at the back of the bus.”

“That goes to the character of our country,” Axelrod added. “The president is someone who would be uniquely sensitive to that.”

Uniquely sensitive and utterly impassioned. In North Carolina he didn’t so much urge voters as command them, with a testimonial about Clinton that was gushing and epic. I swear I saw her blush.

Was Trump on Obama’s mind? I suspect. “Everybody can tweet,” he said, adding that it’s no preparation or qualification for the presidency. He brought up his younger daughter. “Sasha tweets, but she doesn’t think that she thereby should be sitting behind the desk.”

Was Trump on Clinton’s mind? Clearly. She complimented Obama as “someone who has never forgotten where he came from — and Donald, if you’re out there tweeting, it’s Hawaii.”

The 2016 campaign keeps showing us things that we’re not accustomed to, and a second-term president campaigning with unfettered vigor for his desired successor is another of those. George W. Bush didn’t do it: He was so toxic at this point in his administration that John McCain’s most fervent wish was to tuck him into a broom closet.

Bill Clinton didn’t do it, because Al Gore was intent on coming across as his own, less priapic man. Neither did Ron-

ald Reagan, because Bush’s father similarly felt the need to flex his own muscle, outside of anyone’s shadow, and Reagan’s energy was flagging anyway.

Dwight Eisenhower? When asked what Richard Nixon had accomplished as his vice president, he said that he needed a week to think about it.

Obama and Hillary Clinton have arrived at a place of obvious respect for each other, and of palpable fondness. His high approval ratings put him in a position to help. Her stature puts her in a position not to be eclipsed by his presence or belittled by that assistance.

Campaigning together is an imperfect arrangement, inasmuch as she may seem to be arguing for the status quo instead of a better tomorrow. But Americans hold Obama in significantly higher esteem than they do her or Trump. There are far riskier things than letting the president carry the ball.

And he’s a player in this regardless, given the larger context, which was clear when Clinton asked the North Carolina audience to think of “the early patriots who met in Philadelphia” in 1776.

“Nobody who looked like Barack Obama or me would have been included back then,” she said. “But we’re here today because the story of America is the story of hard-fought, hard-won progress.”

That’s the tale that Obama has always told. It’s the narrative that so many of us cling to. Where does Trump fit into it, and does it survive him? Instead of just wondering and worrying, the departing president has joined the fight.