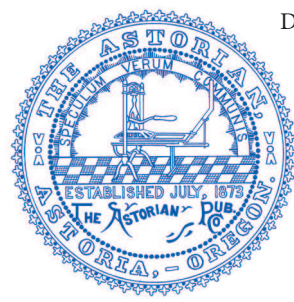


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

Wrong solution for housing pinch

Portland Democrat now wants to control rents throughout state

Not content to legislate wages, a Portland Democrat now wants state government to act as Oregon's Chief Landlord. It's one more example of the wave of proprietary governance that began in our largest city and has swept south to our state capital.

Housing already is one of the most regulated industries. And rent controls exacerbate the problems supporters claim they fix: affordability and supply.

No matter, political leaders like Tina Kotek are anxious to exert more control over the private sector. The speaker of the House, fresh off her victory to raise the minimum wage and salivating over the \$3 billion Measure 97 would generate in higher taxes, has made rental housing her next crusade.

Kotek, who represents northeast Portland, says she will lead an effort next year to repeal the state's ban on rent-control laws. She also pledges to restrict all but "reasonable" increases in rental fees and further restrict the ability of landlords to evict tenants.

"We need to prevent property owners from making excessive profit and protect tenants from economic eviction and displacement," Kotek said. Her solution is to cede more control to state government — the same folks who have wasted billions of dollars on technology boondoggles and recently handed out \$347 million in improper or suspicious energy tax credits.

Oregonians should be encouraged to look at how rent controls have worked in two other bastions of "progressive" politics: New York City and San Francisco.

The Big Apple has imposed rent controls on and off since World War I. Apartment vacancies have all but vanished as tenants in rent-controlled units renew their leases in perpetuity. In San Francisco, government limits the amount rents can increase each year in an effort to preserve affordable housing. The policy has backfired. Instead of renting out units at below-market rates, owners offer their apartments to well-heeled visitors as weekend getaways and vacation rentals.

Government-imposed rent controls also discourage construction of new apartments and the maintenance of existing units. There is no incentive for builders to build if they cannot quickly recoup their investment. The resulting housing shortages benefit existing homeowners, but create significant disadvantages for the poor and those seeking to rent.

There's no doubt that Portland is experiencing steep increases in the cost of housing. The booming tech economy and the city's allure for young professionals has created an imbalance between housing supply and demand. Home price increases are among the highest in the nation. Portland also has the 15th highest apartment rents in the country.

But state and local governments can better address the situation by encouraging the supply of new and refurbished dwellings. Let the private sector respond with market-based solutions rather than by government directives that overreach.

Unfortunately, that's not The Portland Way.

Senate action great news for local ports, coast environment

Last week included major wins in the U.S. Senate for issues of pivotal importance for Columbia River and Pacific Coast communities.

The Water Resources Development Act of 2016 passed the Senate Sept. 15. It includes reforms of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund and passage of the Columbia River Basin Restoration Act. These will have big positive impacts.

Oregon and Washington senators have been key to crafting WRDA the act's provisions for the forthcoming two-year funding cycle and for many years ahead. It's vital for the U.S. House to follow suit and for the president to sign legislation that will maintain small ports and clean up toxins.

It can hardly be overstated how helpful this legislation will be for small regional ports in our area — from Ilwaco and Chinook, Washington, to Garibaldi. If it is finalized, they no longer have to sweat every year whether there will federal funds to keep navigation channels open.

Funds will come from the \$7 billion Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. Congress long diverted a large part of the trust fund to non-port purposes. Starting with WRDA 2014, this began to change. And now, WRDA 2016 aims to provide certainties for port funding, including a permanent 10 percent slice of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for small ports.

Significantly, WRDA 2016 also permits the federal EPA to set up a voluntary grant program to encourage toxin cleanups along the Columbia.

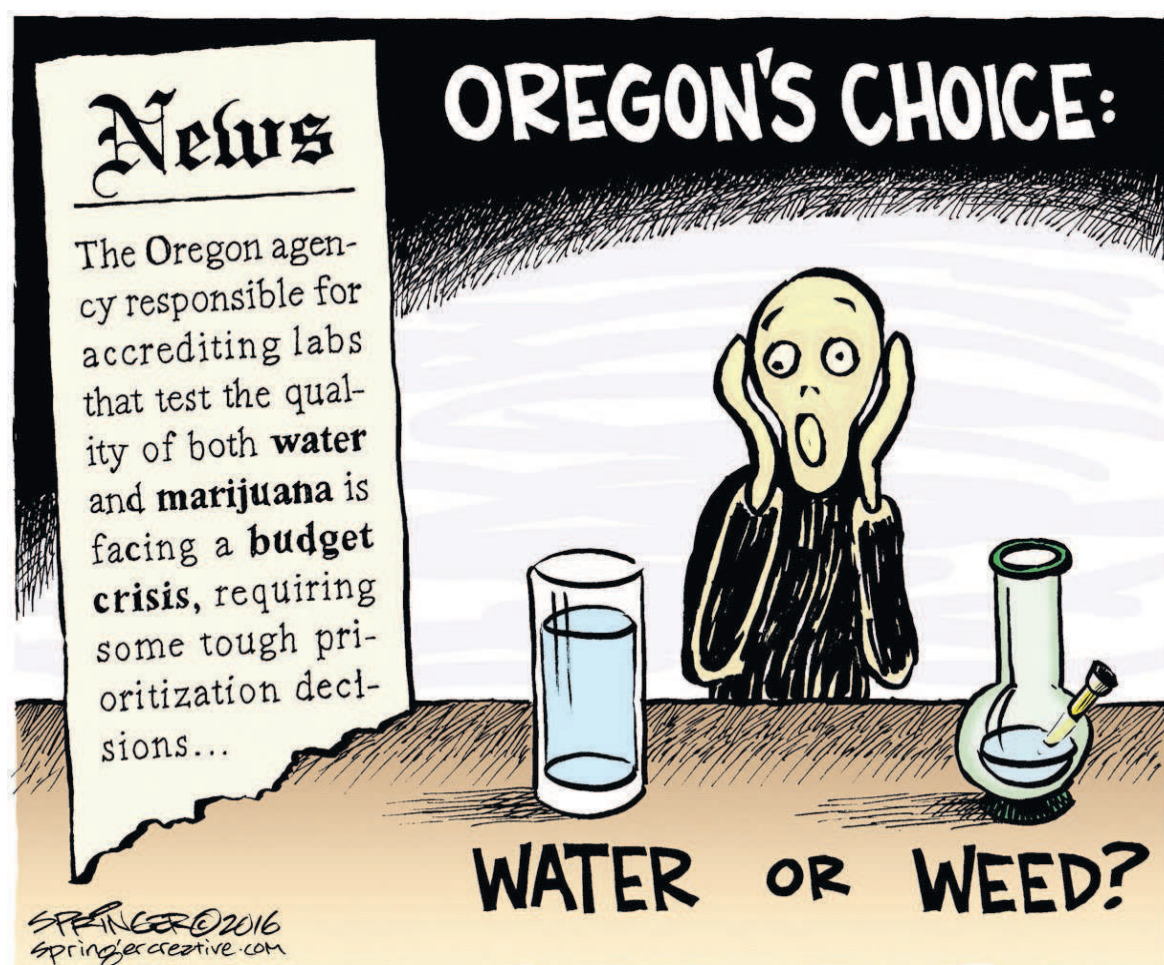
All in all, the Water Resources Development Act of 2016 is a win for our economy and our environment. It deserves the broad bipartisan support it has received so far.

News

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OREGON'S CHOICE:



Why college rankings are a joke

By FRANK BRUNI

New York Times News Service

Shortly before the newest U.S. News & World Report college rankings came out last week, I got a fresh glimpse of how ridiculous they can be — and of why panicked high school seniors and their status-conscious parents should not spend the next months obsessing over them.

I was reporting a column on how few veterans are admitted to elite colleges and stumbled across a U.S. News subranking of top schools for veterans. Its irrelevance floored me. It merely mirrored the general rankings — same institutions, same order — minus the minority of prominent schools that don't participate in certain federal education benefits for veterans.

It didn't take into account whether there were many — or, for that matter, any — veterans on a given campus. It didn't reflect what support for them did or didn't exist.

It was just another way to package and peddle the overall U.S. News rankings, illustrating the extent to which they're a marketing ploy. No wonder so many college presidents, provosts and deans of admissions express disdain for them. How sad that they participate in them nonetheless.

The rankings nourish the myth that the richest, most selective colleges have some corner on superior education; don't adequately recognize public institutions that prioritize access and affordability; and do insufficient justice to the particular virtues of individual campuses.

On campus

Consider a school I visited this month, in conjunction with its 50th birthday: the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

At the Starbucks in the middle of campus, I met a senior majoring in film. He has the usual Hollywood dreams but more than the usual optimism about making them come true. After all, a short movie that he wrote and directed as a sophomore got a showing at the Cannes Film Festival.

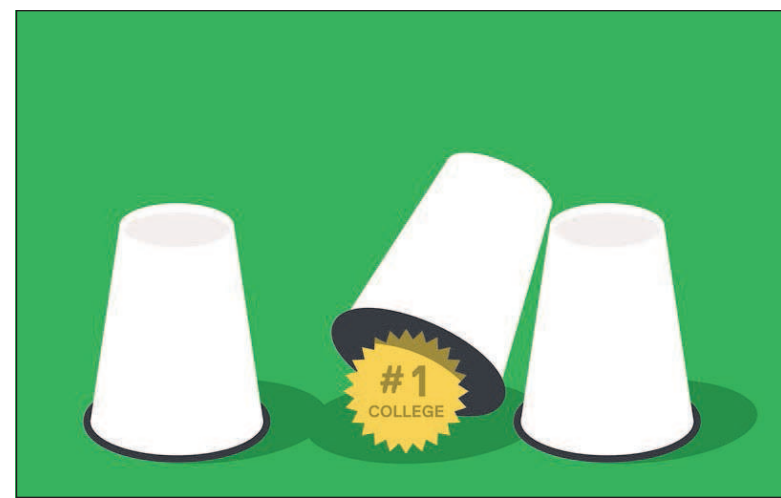
Later, I spoke with a renowned mathematics professor, Manil Suri, who is also the openly gay author of an acclaimed sequence of novels set in India, where he was born, and who has contributed frequently to The Times. His conversations with undergraduates range far beyond algorithms.

I slipped into the arts center, completed just two years ago, where there's a stunning music hall with sumptuous acoustics and a theater of eye-popping technical sophistication.

Minorities

I dropped in on Michael Summers, a biochemist who has done pioneering research into retroviruses and HIV. He said he'd never trade his faculty position here for one elsewhere, though he has been wooed, because of UMBC's almost unrivaled record for guiding African-American undergraduates toward doctorates and other postgraduate degrees in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and math).

"We're doing something that nobody else is doing," Summers told me. In a conversation with another journalist years ago, he put it this way: "If you see a group of black students walking together on a college campus, your first thought might be, 'Oh, there goes the basketball team.' Here you



Ben Wiseman/The New York Times

Rankings like U.S. News and World Report nourish the myth that the richest, most selective colleges have some corner on superior education, but they can be blunt and too blind to certain gems.

think. "There goes the chemistry honors club, or the chess team." It's just a different attitude."

The UMBC chess team has won the national college chess championship six times over the last 13 years. But Summers' remarks also reflect something else: In 1988, the school started the Meyerhoff Scholars Program, designed to address the paucity of minorities in STEM fields by giving generous financial aid and extensive mentorship to talented African-American students.

More than 1,100 men and women of all races have been through the program, typically going on to extraordinary careers. Summers and I chatted about one graduate we both knew, Isaac Kinde, who said no to Stanford in order to attend UMBC. He recently completed a combined medical degree and doctorate at Johns Hopkins and is now at a biotech startup.

"He has found a way to detect ovarian cancer with a Pap smear," Summers said. "That guy is going to revolutionize health care for women."

Four former Meyerhoff Scholars are on the faculty of Duke University's medical school, including Damon Tweedy, who wrote the 2015 best seller "Black Man in a White Coat: A Doctor's Reflections on Race and Medicine."

Duke is where Tweedy himself went to medical school, and he told me that although most of his classmates there were from colleges more selective than UMBC and families with more money than his, "I scored in the top 20 percent of my class during that first year of basic science classes, which are the toughest part of med school." UMBC had prepared him well, not just academically but also, he said, by making him feel that he was "part of something more than just your individual attainment."

He recalled that before he decided to go there, several Ivy League colleges tried to recruit him — for basketball. In contrast, he first came on to UMBC's radar because of his aptitude for science.

More than 1 in 4 UMBC undergraduates qualifies for federal Pell grants, meant to serve low-income families. About 45 percent are white, while 18 percent are Asian-American and 16 percent are African-American.

From the ceiling of the student commons hang flags of countries from which students have come. There are more than 100. It's a kind of kaleidoscope, and as I walked under it with Freeman Hrabowski, UMBC's dynamic president, he stressed the school's determination to "connect students to people different from themselves and lives different from their own." The young men and women who ate, talked or studied at

almost every one of the tables around us were a mix of colors, and I couldn't map the room in terms of any obvious tribes or cliques.

Other factors

Diversity, socioeconomic or otherwise, doesn't factor much into U.S. News rankings, though a broadening of perspectives lies at the heart of the best education. UMBC, with its acceptance rate of nearly 60 percent, places 159th among national universities.

One of the main factors in a school's rank is how highly officials at peer institutions and secondary-school guidance counselors esteem it. But they may not know it well. They're going by its reputation, established in no small part by previous U.S. News evaluations. A lofty rank perpetuates itself.

Another main factor is the percentage of a school's students who graduate within six years. But this says as much about a school's selectiveness — the proven achievement and discipline of the students it admits — as about its stewardship of them.

Schools try to game the system and score better on additional criteria that go into their rank, though Robert Morse, the chief data strategist for U.S. News, told me in an email that the methodology had evolved so that "you cannot make a meaningful rise in the rankings by tweaking one or two numbers."

He also noted, rightly, that the copious information that U.S. News collects about the student bodies and academic tracks at hundreds of schools produces a mother lode of useful facts and figures that go far beyond the numerical rankings.

But those rankings are front and center, fostering the idea that schools are brands in competition with one another. The rankings elevate clout above learning, which isn't as easily measured.

Intentionally or not, they fuel a frenzy to get into the most selective schools. They can't adjust for how well certain colleges serve certain ambitions.

And they err. For the newest rankings, in what was obviously meant as an improvement, the subplot for veterans included only schools at which 20 or more students were using GI Bill benefits.

But those benefits flow to dependents of veterans — their children, for example — as well as to veterans themselves. They're a fatally flawed metric. So MIT is ranked second, though it knows of only four veterans among its undergraduates. (I checked.) Duke is tied for third, though it knows of only two.

These colleges' best-for-veterans triumphs still have no real relevance. There's a larger lesson in that.