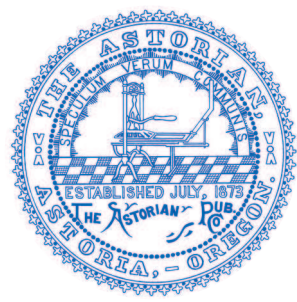


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OUR VIEW

Control costs before adding new spending

This seems like a no-brainer: The state Legislature should examine the worth of current programs before starting new ones.

That's an idea put forth last week by several legislators.

Don't public officials do that already? No, at least not always. And that reality shows why the Legislature has failed to curb its spending, regardless of whether the Democrats or the Republicans were in control.

The 21st century opened with Republican Senate President Gene Derfler sounding the alarm about out-of-control Public Employees Retirement System costs and unsustainable state budgets. Those issues still confound legislators today.

So it was with a bit of hope that five veteran legislators — three Democrats and two Republicans — on Friday unveiled a long list of ways to control future spending. They included something that, to most Oregonians, should be routine: "Review performance and need for current programs and services to determine whether new proposals are a higher priority than current programs and services."

That responsibility lies with the executive branch — the Governor's Office, which runs the majority of state agencies — as much as with the legislative branch, which writes the state budget. It was disappointing that Gov. Kate Brown initiated a firm hiring freeze only last week, although the magnitude of the state budget hole had been known for months. A governor is the CEO of state government, and that role requires as much fiscal discipline and diligence as in any other corporate entity. It requires leadership.

However, as Gov. Ted Kulongoski once said, there is little political glory to be gained from the behind-the-scenes, nuts-and-bolts work of streamlining government, and Brown seems uninterested.

That is why legislative leaders on Friday had high praise for the cost-containment concepts from state Sen. Richard Devlin, D-Tualatin; Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose; Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem; Rep. Nancy Nathanson, D-Eugene; and Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner.

Legislative leaders, let alone public-employee unions and outside interest groups, did not seem keen on some of the ideas. However, Senate President Peter Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek deserve credit for appointing the cost-containment group and taking its ideas seriously.

As Sen. Johnson said in presenting several recommendations, "These should be considered a starting point for discussion and subject to further refinement, analysis and negotiation."

The Legislature, after all, is a political entity. But it also is the state's board of directors. It has the fiduciary responsibility to institutionalize the ongoing cost-benefit analyses of existing agencies, programs — and yes, laws — as well as proposed ones.

As Rep. Smith noted, the state budget has grown substantially during the past six years, and will be even larger during 2017-19.

That growth rate not only may be unsustainable but, ironically, it is insufficient to maintain existing programs. Thus, "unspending" should be as important as spending.

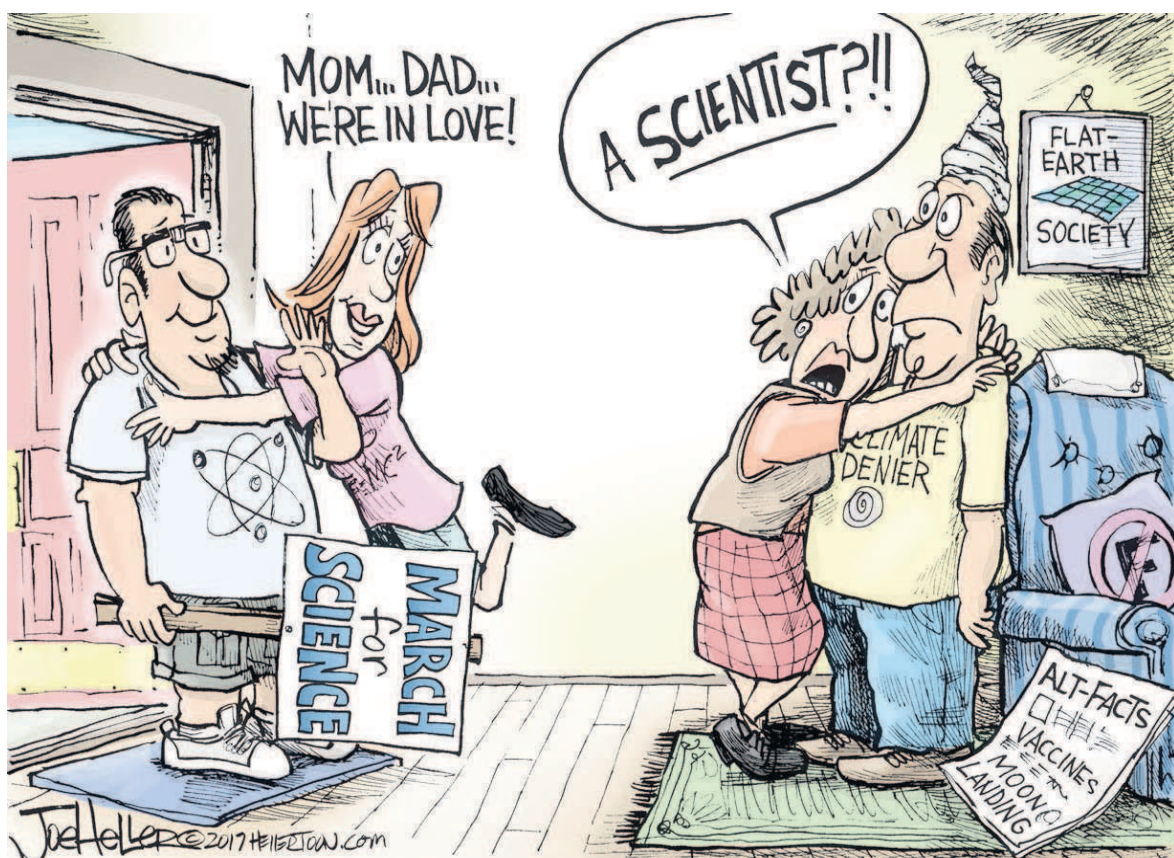
As part of that, the Legislature should reach out more to the state workforce — the front-line workers who see what works and doesn't work — and seek their ideas for refining government.

Furthermore, the Legislature should find more self-discipline. When issues arise, the Legislature should undertake a root-cause analysis of what went wrong, instead of assuming that a potentially expensive new law, task force or program is the answer.

In fact, the Legislature could make itself a test case: Refocus its priorities to make government more cost-effective, and accomplish that work without adding staff.

After all, as the late Gov. Vic Atiyeh was fond of saying, it's amazing how much can be accomplished when you don't worry about who gets the credit.

The Legislature, after all, is a political entity. But it also is the state's board of directors. It has the fiduciary responsibility to institutionalize the ongoing cost-benefit analyses of existing agencies, programs — and yes, laws — as well as proposed ones.



With North Korea, we do have cards to play

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — The crisis with North Korea may appear trumped up.



It's not. Given that Pyongyang has had nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles for more than a decade, why the panic now? Because North Korea is headed for a nuclear breakout. The regime has openly declared that it is racing to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile that can reach the United States — and thus destroy an American city at a Kim Jong Un push of a button.

The North Koreans are not bluffing. They've made significant progress with solid-fuel rockets, which are more quickly deployable and thus more easily hidden and less subject to detection and pre-emption.

At the same time, Pyongyang has been steadily adding to its supply of nuclear weapons. Today it has an estimated 10 to 16. By 2020, it could very well have a hundred. (For context: The British are thought to have about 200.)

Hence the crisis. We simply cannot concede to Kim Jong Un the capacity to annihilate American cities.

Some will argue for deterrence. If it held off the Russians and the Chinese for all these years, why not the North Koreans? First, because deterrence, even with a rational adversary like the old Soviet Union, is never a sure thing. We came pretty close to nuclear war in October 1962.

And second, because North Korea's regime is bizarre in the extreme, a hermit kingdom run by a weird, utterly ruthless and highly erratic god-king. You can't count on Caligula. The regime is savage and cult-like; its people, robotic. Karen Elliott House once noted that while Saddam Hussein's Iraq was a prison, North Korea was an ant colony.

Ant colonies do not have good checks and balances.

If not deterrence, then prevention. But how? The best hope is for China to exercise its influence and induce North Korea to give up its programs.

For years, the Chinese made gestures, but never did anything remotely decisive. They have their reasons. It's not just that they fear a massive influx of refugees if the Kim regime disintegrates. It's



AP Photo/Wong Maye-E
 North Korean soldiers sit at the back of trucks as they are driven through Mirae Scientists Street in Pyongyang, North Korea.

also that Pyongyang is a perpetual thorn in the side of the Americans, whereas regime collapse brings South Korea (and thus America) right up to the Yalu River.

So why would the Chinese do our bidding now?

For a variety of reasons.

Our objective should be clear. At a minimum, a testing freeze. At the maximum, regime change.

- They don't mind tension but they don't want war. And the risk of war is rising. They know that the ICBM threat is totally unacceptable to the Americans. And that the current administration appears particularly committed to enforcing this undeclared red line.

- Chinese interests are being significantly damaged by the erection of regional missile defenses to counteract North Korea's nukes. South Korea is racing to install a THAAD anti-missile system. Japan may follow. THAAD's mission is to track and shoot down incoming rockets from North Korea but, like any missile shield, it necessarily reduces the power and penetration of the Chinese nuclear arsenal.

- For China to do nothing risks the return of the American tactical nukes in South Korea, withdrawn

in 1991.

- If the crisis deepens, the possibility arises of South Korea and, most importantly, Japan going nuclear themselves. The latter is the ultimate Chinese nightmare.

These are major cards America can play. Our objective should be clear. At a minimum, a testing freeze. At the maximum, regime change.

Because Beijing has such a strong interest in the current regime, we could sweeten the latter offer by abjuring Korean reunification. This would not be Germany, where the communist state was absorbed into the West. We would accept an independent, but Finlandized, North.

During the Cold War, Finland was, by agreement, independent but always pro-Russian in foreign policy. Here we would guarantee that a new North Korea would be independent but always oriented toward China. For example, the new regime would forswear ever joining any hostile alliance.

There are deals to be made. They may have to be underpinned by demonstrations of American resolve. A pre-emptive attack on North Korea's nuclear facilities and missile sites would be too dangerous, as it would almost surely precipitate an invasion of South Korea with untold millions of casualties. We might, however, try to shoot down a North Korean missile in mid-flight to demonstrate both our capacity to defend ourselves and the futility of a North Korean missile force that can be neutralized technologically.

The Korea crisis is real and growing. But we are not helpless. We have choices. We have assets. It's time to deploy them.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY?

100 words for 100 days of Trump

The Daily Astorian

Saturday marks 100 days of Donald Trump's presidency.

To mark the occasion, we're asking readers to submit 100 words on the president's first 100 days. Whether it's about the man, his policies, his approach to the office or his accomplishments, we'd like to share your take.

Email your thoughts to news@dailyastorian.com or drop them off at the Astoria office at 949 Exchange St. or the office in Seaside at 1555 N. Roosevelt. Please include a phone number and city of residence so we can verify your identity.

The deadline is Friday at noon. And be concise — 100 words goes fast.



AP Photo