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OUR VIEW

Two lawmakers enter, one tax plan leaves

Pragmatic, collaborative efforts needed

This how to put Oregon schools and state government on a path to stable, sustainable funding: Stick Ontario Republican Cliff Bentz and Beaverton Democrat Mark Hass in a room and give them the task of developing a fair tax plan for the state.

That is the idea of state House Republican Leader Mike McLane, who suggested he would accept whatever the two legislators came up with. He also mentioned a few other Republican and Democratic lawmakers who could be added to the mix.

The point is that a new tax plan can only be achieved by people who are pragmatic and collaborative, who entertain new ideas and who put the good of the state above self-interests.

That didn't happen in the Legislature this year, despite the best attempts of Sen. Hass, Rep. Bentz and others. Labor was stinging from the defeat of the massive corporate tax hike contained in Measure 97 last fall, and constantly refought the battle in the Legislature. Business was divided on what to do next, instead of being conciliatory and collaborative after victory over Measure 97.

If there is good news from the legislative session that ended July 7, it is that lawmakers finally were talking about realistic revenue reform. It also is that lawmakers, especially in the state Senate, set a good example through bipartisan compromise on several contentious issues, including fair pay and predictable work schedules in the workplace.

Yet on revenue reform, the interest groups of business and labor could not achieve that same pragmatism. They stuck with their "all-or-nothing" approaches.

Most people agree that Oregon has an unstable tax system, especially for funding schools. Some consider a sales tax as the answer, but political history shows little chance of one being enacted in our lifetimes.

Hass and others, especially Democrats, advocate a type of sales tax to be paid by businesses — a commercial activity tax modeled after one in Ohio. Senate Republicans stood firm against that tax this year, especially after modeling showed threefold tax increases for some businesses.

And pension reform, which Republicans and the business community rightfully demanded in return for corporate tax increases, fell by the wayside.

Gov. Kate Brown is among those who say revenue reform will not happen until the 2019 Legislature. That would be unfortunate, leaving the tax debate to another set of divisive ballot measures next fall.

Rep. McLane might have the solution. Give the task to Bentz, Hass and a few other like-minded political pragmatists, since interest groups on either side have shown little ability to negotiate for the good of the state. We would suggest adding Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, and Sens. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, Bill Hansell, R-Athena, and Jackie Winters, R-Salem. All have shown the ability to work across party lines to solve complex issues.

Genuine tax reform should include these principles:

- A plan for ground-level examination of agency-by-agency spending, instead of building each budget based on what agencies and schools spent during the previous cycle. The concept of "roll forward" budgets should be eliminated in favor of "zero-based" budgeting that starts with where the dollars will do the most good.
- A holistic look at corporate, individual and other taxes and fees. Lawmakers and the public need an unbiased understanding of how much each sector pays for government, instead of relying on partisan-based studies.
- Appropriately matching expenses with revenue, while providing stability in both areas.
- Reform of the Public Employees Retirement System and of public employee health care premiums — two of the highest costs for governments and schools. All options must be on the table, especially for PERS, so they can be finally settled in court instead of being an ongoing battle in each legislative session.

Such an approach would benefit public employees, public agencies and the public. That work must start now.

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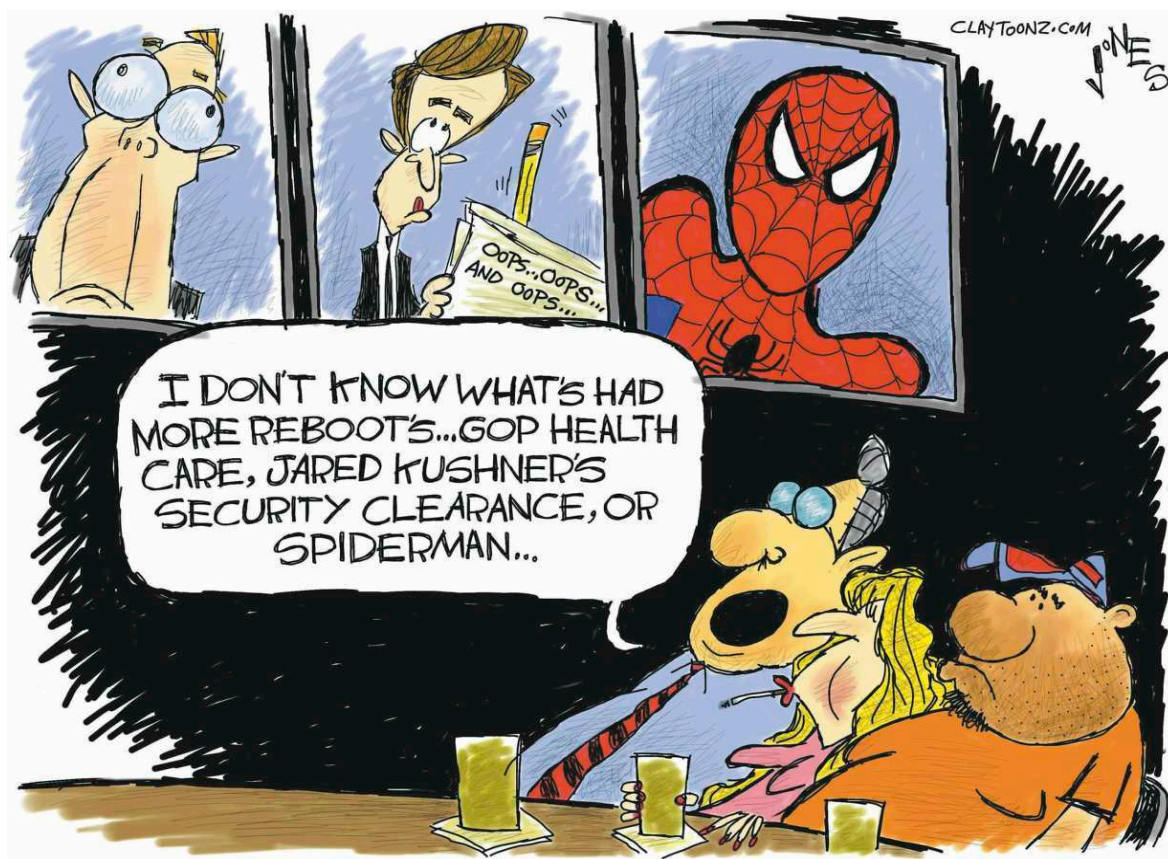
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SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Arts funds, scholarships, pay dividends

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

I met Sydney Ordway when she was wearing a tiara on her head. She is an Astoria Regatta princess, representing one of the Northwest's hallowed events.

Each princess chooses a topic to research and share with the community. Ordway, an incoming senior at Seaside High School, chose the arts.

"Art influences ideas, instills values and translates experiences across space and time," she told business and civic leaders gathered by the Seaside Chamber of Commerce. "My story is about art and culture and how that impacts our region. A huge part of culture is art."

Ordway chronicled the impact of arts programs in the region, recalling times past and present. The cities we know now as Cannon Beach, Astoria, Seaside and Gearhart were once inhabited by 14 tribes. "To this day, Indian artifacts are being discovered," Ordway said.

Art can include diverse elements, from architecture to storytelling and theater.

"The Clatsop Indians worshiped the salmon," Ordway said. "They were told if they did not appreciate and honor the salmon, the salmon would not come. The stories were important to the tribe and taught right versus wrong."

Today, Ordway described Cannon Beach as "the hub of art in Clatsop County."

"On every corner you will find an art gallery," she said. "Cannon Beach holds many opportunities to express yourself and watch others express themselves in almost every way imaginable."

Connections

Seaside's Hayley Rollins provided the spark for Oregon's Art Day, with support from her mother; her father, a teacher at Seaside High School; and the rest of the staff and administration. As an eighth-grader at Broadway Middle School, Hayley conceived and promoted the state law marking the day. She was motivated by a 2013 report by the Oregon Arts Commission, based on findings that almost one-quarter of the state's schools did not offer any arts courses.

Art allows students to have fun and relax and "not have to follow as many strict rules as math and science," Rollins, an incoming junior at Seaside High School, said.

After her impassioned plea to the state Legislature, Art Day is an annual tradition in Seaside on April 14. Heading into its third year, North Coast artists interact with kids in their chosen visual arts form. Workshops cover oil painting, cartoon portraits, printmaking, calligraphy, art therapy, pysanky egg art, culinary décor, wire sculpting, origami, photography and more.

"It's like the quote 'a picture is worth a thousand words,'" Rollins said. "We all speak different languages, but art can connect us all together despite the language barrier. Art connects us in ways words can't."

Art as a career

A new economic study by the Arts Council of Clatsop County indicates there are 93 arts jobs in the county. More than 87,000 local attendees and an additional 73,000 visitor attendees bring 161,000 people to county galleries, theaters and music venues, driving arts expenditures of \$14 million. Every cultural



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Sydney Ordway, Astoria Regatta princess and arts advocate.



LEFT: Arts association students learn watercolors from Dorota Haber-Lehigh. RIGHT: The Cannon Beach Arts Association held an arts camp last week.

visitor to Clatsop County spends an average of \$68 on meals, refreshments, souvenirs, gifts, transportation and lodging — and that's not including the ticket price.

Governments, both local and state, are also big winners, drawing in more than \$1.2 million in revenue generated from cultural events, the report found.

Cannon Beach Arts Association Program Director Cara Mico, now in her 30s, went straight to arts school before college.

Art was "something that kept me sane," Mico said. "It kept me grounded, and I think that's true for a lot of kids. When they don't have a creative outlet they tend to find another outlet. It really touches on all parts of childhood."

Art "made me a more professional person," Mico said, helping her to build confidence and develop presentation skills. "With this age of technology and the internet, you can start a business and be a billionaire before you're 25. Ninety percent of the internet is graphic."

The web provides young adults the opportunity to go pursue an arts career in a realistic way, she said.

Mico said she would like to see more of a focus allowing students to explore their own interests, including arts career readiness and business skills.

Spreading wings

At Cannon Beach's Stormy Weather Arts festival, silent auction proceeds brought scholarships for children attending the Coaster Theatre Kids Camp, the Sea Ranch



Submitted Photo

Children's Summer Music Camp or the Cannon Beach Arts Association's Arts Camp.

Are the arts education programs connecting with students?

"It's something we take really seriously at Seaside," Ordway said. "The arts are very important and a lot of kids in our community have made it a passion of their own."

The annual Tillamook Head Gathering, put on by a committee of current and former Seaside arts students and held at Seaside's Civic and Convention Center, supports arts enrichment for Seaside High School students. Last year's gathering helped fund an arts day at the high school, in which local artists gave workshops for the entire student body.

Rollins remains involved in Art Day. "When I graduate I'm hoping to be able to pass it on to a new student, but I'll still come and help out," she said. "Our goal is to continue spreading this event to schools across the state. We talked about going to other schools to show a presentation of our event in Seaside to inspire them."

Ordway intends to keep art in her life for years to come.

"In Clatsop County, we used art for trade and stories of our people," Ordway said. "Nowadays, we use art to express ourselves, and view the world around us. In the future, I don't know what it will hold, but I know it will be a work of art."

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian's South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.