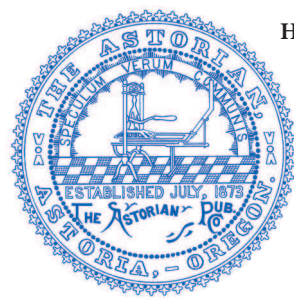


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Alex Pajunas/The Daily Astorian
Public schools and local governments are struggling to meet pension obligations.

Oregon needs deep examination of PERS solutions

The best idea to come from Gov. Kate Brown's PERS task force was creating a matching fund to help schools and local government pay for their pension liabilities.

The Public Employees Retirement System serves some 900 public employers in addition to state government. A state match — say, 25 cents on the dollar — could encourage faster action by those cities, counties, school systems, fire districts, community colleges, public universities and other entities.

These governments and the state need to come up with \$25.3 billion to fully fund PERS' obligations to retirees. Until they act, PERS will consume more and more of their operating budgets, meaning less money for programs and services.

How would the state pay for those matching dollars? Ah, that's the rub.

And for local governments and schools, their current usually overshadow future obligations. How would they come up with the money to gain a state match? That's another rub.

In its report delivered to the governor on Wednesday, the PERS task force didn't provide the answers.

The group of seven financial experts emphasized that it was not making recommendations. Instead, it came up with a list of ideas that could deserve study. They range from nonstarters such as privatizing state universities to reasonable proposals like setting up the matching fund and selling surplus state land.

Except the state doesn't know what it owns. Individual agencies do, or at least they should. But the task force discovered there is no overall inventory of state-owned land and property.

That underscores the weakness of the task force. It convened in July but no one acted to have that inventory created by the time the task force held its fourth and final meeting in October. Meanwhile, the gap in PERS reserves continued to grow by billions of dollars.

With a complete inventory in hand, the task force could have made — or at least explored — the often-difficult decisions of which surplus lands to sell and which to hold for future use. That work had seemed a key role when Brown appointed the task force. Members did come up with a few possibilities, such as selling the State Office Building in Portland and replacing it with less-expensive real estate.

As Brown and legislators prepare legislation for the 2018 Legislature, workable ideas may yet develop. But what the task force provided was a broad picture of PERS possibilities. What Oregon needed was a deep examination of PERS solutions.

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than

mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

E-mail to editor@dailyastorian.com; online at www.dailyastorian.com; delivered to the Astorian offices at 949 Exchange St. and 1555 N. Roosevelt in Seaside or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103.



COLUMN

This year's World Series ends with a whimper



AP Photo/David J. Phillip
Houston Astros' Carlos Correa, left, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, with World Series trophy, and World Series MVP George Springer ride on top of a fire truck during a parade honoring the World Series baseball champions Friday in Houston.

By STEVE FORRESTER
The Daily Astorian

For San Francisco Giants fans, this baseball season was a burden. After winning three World Series, the Giants finished 40 games out of first place.

Needing a replacement for my baseball affections, I turned to the Giants' arch rival — the Los Angeles Dodgers. They are in our time zone, and their alluring win-loss percentage was the best in baseball.

What I did was treason in the eyes of some baseball chums. Our baseball friend Bob Bernstein in Washington, D.C., asked my wife if he should fly out to do an intervention. At a concert intermission, Dan Supple scurried up the steps of the Liberty Theatre balcony in disbelief at my new team. Dan didn't use the word heretic, but it was in his look.

For many years, the great baseball writer Roger Angell would produce a long New Yorker piece weeks after the World Series ended. This saga would glance at the season and recount the heroics of that year's championship series.

This year's series would be a challenge for Angell. There was Yasiel Puig's botched catch in the second game, which unleashed Houston's first victory. There was the five hour, 17 minute Game 5 and its tit-for-tat dynamic and the 10th inning, 13-12 outcome. Finally there was Game 7, in which LA left 10 runners on base and scored one run.

The most prescient observation I heard was from the Fox Sports broadcaster John Smoltz. During the fifth game, Smoltz said: "It hasn't been a classic series. But it has been unexpected."

A well-crafted short story ends with a paragraph that illuminates everything that came before. The last line in a poem sometimes explains everything above. Imitating T.S.

Eliot, the World Series ended not with a bang, but with a whimper.

President Donald Trump's bad treatment of Puerto Rico has fueled my dark suspicion that if the Big One were to strike our region during his presidency, he would be slow to send assistance. Oregon, Washington state and California are blue states. It is unsettling to nurture that dark notion, but we have Puerto Rico's example.

When Gen. John Kelly quit being Trump's straight-arrow minder, he violated the first rule of the theater

The most penetrating observation about Trump has been that if people get too close to him they soil their reputation. Retired Gen. John Kelly, the White House chief of staff, is the latest victim. Beyond what Kelly said about a congresswoman and the Gold Star mother she defended, Kelly violated the first rule of casting. In other words, Kelly was hired to play the straight-arrow general — to bring order to the chaotic West Wing of the White House. With his decision to pitch in on Trump's prolonged, bumbling response to a Gold Star mother, Kelly left the character he was cast to play, in order to become one of Trump's thugs. And in theatrical terms, his performance is not credible.

One looks for some humor these days, because our politics are so wretched. What Gen. Kelly did somehow reminded me of what the

Hollywood film mogul Jack Warner said when he heard that Ronald Reagan was running for governor of California in 1960. "No, no," said Warner. "Jimmy Stewart for governor; Ronald Reagan for best friend."

This is a good season to hike the trails of Fort Clatsop. On an October Sunday afternoon, my wife and I hiked the Kwis Kwis Trail. If it's been awhile since you've been there, you'll notice trail improvements.

Walking that trail system is a reminder of the storm of 2007. Upended giant trees and their immense root systems border the trail.

Cathy Peterson, education program coordinator at the fort, tells me that her daughter Jenna, while on Kwis Kwis, saw a mother bear and cubs. Jenna, says Cathy, realized she and the bears had a mutual appreciation for the berries.

The classical music world loves centenaries. Across America, symphony orchestras are rediscovering the works of Leonard Bernstein, who was born 100 years ago next August.

For many of us baby boomers, Bernstein's Young People's Concerts ignited our curiosity about classical music. At the same time John F. Kennedy was becoming America's first telegenic president, Bernstein used TV to make the concert stage an exciting place.

When Bernstein brought the New York Philharmonic to Portland in August of 1960, I wanted to see him. The Civic Auditorium was being renovated. So Lenny and the orchestra performed in the Pacific International Livestock Pavilion, now the Portland Expo Center. Responding to their cowboy surroundings, the philharmonic opened its concert with "Hoe-down" and "Buckaroo Holiday" from Aaron Copland's "Rodeo."

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Daily Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.