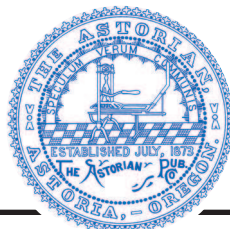


OPINION



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OUR VIEW

Education is the challenge for this Legislature

Every child in Oregon deserves an excellent education — regardless of where the student lives or attends school, regardless of whether the student comes from a well-to-do family or an impoverished one, regardless of academic ability, and regardless of ethnicity or race or background.

Last week's Department of Education report on graduation rates shows that is not the case in Oregon. But another report last week from the Legislature's Joint Committee on Student Success provides a path forward.

Across Oregon, high school graduation rates increased by 2 percentage points last year to almost 79 percent. In Clatsop County, the rates ranged from 73.4 percent in Seaside to 94.3 percent in Knappa.

The improvement is welcome news, but it remains deeply concerning that one-fifth of public high school students fail to graduate within four years.

There also are vast variations among demographic groups. The graduation rate was 82 percent for girls but 75.6 percent for boys. Graduation rates generally were lower for students of color but higher for former English language learners. Only 54 percent of homeless students graduated within four years of high school.

As members of the Student Success committee said last week, the public has had enough. Oregon has been grappling with these issues for decades, with too little progress.



AP Photo/Andrew Selsky

Gov. Kate Brown has said boosting funding for public education is her top priority heading into the 2019 Legislature.

Insufficient funding has been a major obstacle, especially since voters' passage of Measure 5 in 1990 put the onus on state government to fund public schools. But money is not the only issue. It's how the money is spent.

On the one hand, the collaborative approach espoused by the nonprofit, nonpartisan Chalkboard Project has achieved profound academic gains and higher staff morale in participating school districts. On the other hand, the state's recent audit report on Portland Public Schools shows "how a school district should not operate," according to Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner.

The bipartisan Student Success

committee has abundant ideas for reforms — excellent ideas — but with a combined price tag of well over \$3 billion. Not everything can be done.

The Legislature will significantly increase education spending. But PERS' unfunded actuarial liability will consume a huge chunk of any additional money earmarked for reducing class sizes, extending the school year or making other improvements. The majority Democrats and Gov. Kate Brown must face up to their responsibility to rein in public pension costs, instead of wringing their hands over court decisions that overturned past reforms.

School districts must accept

that additional funding will come with requirements for accountability in how that money is used. Unlike previous political endeavors that chased the educational flavor of the day, the Student Success committee based its recommendations on reality. Lawmakers visited more than 50 schools — from the coast to eastern and southern Oregon — and talked with hundreds of students, staff members, parents, business people, civic leaders and others.

This week, committee members are starting work on determining which proposals would achieve the greatest return on investment and how to pay for them. Their top priorities include the importance of early childhood education and the drastic need for more school counselors, mental health therapists and other behavioral health services — throughout the state.

In their letter submitting the Student Success report, the committee's Democratic and Republican leaders wrote: "A student's achievement should be a result of their own efforts, not their parents' income or their race, ethnicity, or ZIP code. Unfortunately, factors entirely outside of a young person's control too often determine their access to a high-quality education. Oregon's students deserve a public education system that sets them up for success."

That is the challenge for the 2019 Legislature. That is the challenge for Oregon.

Water under the bridge

Compiled by Bob Duke

From the pages of Astoria's daily newspapers



10 years ago this week — 2009

In a move eagerly anticipated by liquefied natural gas opponents on the North Coast, President Barack Obama has named Jon Wellinghoff acting chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the five-member board that oversees the LNG permitting process.

The move, together with likely changes to the board's makeup in the coming months and pending challenges to the U.S. Court of Appeals, could have consequences for the Bradwood Landing LNG project, the frontrunner among three LNG proposals in Oregon.

Wellinghoff, a Democrat, was the lone dissenting vote on the Bradwood project, which was approved by FERC in a 4-1 vote in September.

Thousands of Oregon jobs vanished in December, sending unemployment rates in a third of the state's 36 counties soaring beyond 10 percent.

On the North Coast, the picture wasn't quite so bleak, though local communities are seeing the effects of the national economic recession.

Clatsop County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose to 6.9 percent in December from 6.3 percent in November — up significantly from 5.8 percent in December 2007. But it was still the third-lowest in the state and far below the statewide average of 9 percent unemployment.

The Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals remanded the Clatsop County Commission's approval of the Bradwood Landing liquefied natural gas project Tuesday.

The board found fault with the county's finding that the facility is "small or moderate" in scale and that requirements to protect salmon and traditional fishing areas had been met.

50 years ago — 1969

Old Man Winter clamped an icy hand on the Sunset Empire Sunday night, strangling traffic, forcing closure of all schools in Clatsop County today, and making driving hazardous on all major highways.

Across the river, most meetings were canceled as five to seven inches of snow fell in Chinook and Oysterville. Many businesses were at a standstill for all but those who were in walking distance.



1969 — Winter came to the West End mooring basin along with the rest of the Lower Columbia region, blanketing ramps and boats in snow and coating the water with ice.

State patrols recommended use of chains on highways on both sides of the river.

Plight of elk and deer, several reportedly starving to death in the southeast end of Clatsop County, is termed drastic by local sportsmen and some farmers and ranchers in the Jewell and Birkenfeld areas.

On the basis of this information, District Judge Harold T. Johnson today sent a letter to the Oregon Game commission office, Salem, recommending the agency investigate this situation.

Many local sportsmen are also concerned with depletion of the winter elk herd through starvation, by forages of predatory animals and the upcoming archery season.

Several farmers in the Jewell area have been feeding the hungry animals that came down from higher elevations in search of lowland food. Snow in the area is up to three feet deep, however, making natural feeding almost impossible for the game animals.

The old-timer in the knitted wool stocking cap stamped the snow off his boots. "If you think this is bad, you should have been here in January, 1930."

Well, old-timer, yes and no. Comparing the U.S. Department of Agriculture Weather Bureau Meteorological records of January 1930 with those of this month, the situation then was more drastic and weather conditions were more severe because of ice, not snow. Snow for January 1930 was only 8.5 inches.

Editions of the Astorian-Budget through January 1930 headlined the fact that the river was frozen across from Wauna to The Dalles. The narrow channel of water at Astoria was afloat with huge chunks of ice, making traffic for small boats or those with wooden hulls impossible.

The 620-foot tanker Eagle Courier, en route to sea from the Union Oil Co. dock in Portland, went aground at 8:15 a.m. today on Jim Crow sands about 15 miles east of Astoria.

It was refloated two hours later on a rising tide with the aid of the Knappton Towboat Co. tug Noydena and proceeded to Astoria.

75 years ago — 1944

Coast guardsmen continued today in their stubborn task of trying to get the beached deep sea boat Electra off the sands of Clatsop spit, and they were not having a great deal of success.

The have lashed empty metal drums around the Electra's hull, in the hope that they would lift the foundered boat on the incoming tide. That has not worked, yet. They have dropped a heavy anchor off shore, then with a series of pulleys have tried to pull her into the water. That has not worked, yet. But the guardsmen are continuing their efforts, and not without hope. The Electra went aground Wednesday night.

U.S. Army engineers today left a dark picture of the Northwest billion-dollar salmon industry future in outlining a program for construction of more than 100 dams on the Columbia River.

Before representatives of salmon packers here, Col. Ralph A. Tudor, U.S. Army district engineer, yesterday told commercial fishermen and representatives of game commissions from the four Northwest states that the importance of the Columbia River salmon run would be small compared with the billions of dollars that could be expected from industrial growth in the Northwest through Columbia River power.