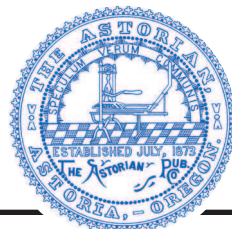


OPINION



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW

PERS plan smacks of class warfare

The good news is Gov. Kate Brown finally has a plan for putting PERS on solid financial footing. The bad news is that it includes pushing SAIF off that solid ground, as well as taking most of Oregonians' tax "kicker" refund next year.

Brown says her proposal has something for anyone to like and to dislike. She is correct. The Oregon Education Association immediately screamed that she was trying to cut teachers' salaries. That is false. Brown wants public employees to accept a slight reduction in their future pensions so as to help pay the unfunded actuarial liability of the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System.

The governor calls her proposal "shared responsibility." Shared pain is more like it.

PERS' inadequate funding is not the fault of everyday Oregonians or of current public employees. No, the blame lies with the 20th century legislators and union leaders who disregarded how bloated PERS retirement obligations possessed the potential to undermine state, school and local government budgets.

Brown's suggestion to take all but \$100 of each Oregonian's kicker refund will draw howls from taxpayers. It certainly is one way to spread the PERS solution — and pain — among all Oregonians. But it smacks of class war-



AP Photo/Don Ryan
Gov. Kate Brown's PERS plan would take most of Oregon taxpayers' kicker rebate next year.

fare, just like many other ideas in the Democrat-dominated Oregon Capitol. Any person, any business and any organization that makes much money seems to be under attack.

The governor's suggested raid on the State Accident Insurance Fund is a perfect and unfortunate example. Legislators in 1982 illegally raided the semi-public workers' compensation carrier, taking

plus reserves. Brown and legislators considering her plan apparently didn't learn much else. They are seduced by lawyers' advice that the new raid would be legal, just as then-Rep. Peter Courtney, D-Salem — now the Senate president — and other legislators were assured in 1982 that their bipartisan raid on SAIF was legal.

As now, state officials at the time said SAIF had far more reserves than necessary for future claims and thus could easily weather the Legislature's intrusion. Maybe. But SAIF's sales plummeted, sending it into a years-long tailspin. It turns out that companies don't like to do business with an insurer whose money can be taken on a whim by the Legislature. Meanwhile, SAIF's top officials were so angry — for good reason — that they quit and formed a competing, private workers' compensation carrier that took a significant share of

paid back to employers.

Isn't that what we want — accident prevention being more effective, employers paying less for coverage and SAIF customers getting rebates on some of their premiums, plus interest earned? That sounds like a well-run program, unlike PERS.

A legitimate argument can be made for SAIF to work with school districts on lowering their workers' compensation premiums. However, school districts are not the only governments facing soaring PERS rates. Rural public employers, especially fire districts, are especially hard-hit.

Meanwhile, Brown is dead-set against offering current and future public employees a defined contribution plan, like a 401(k), as a complete alternative to PERS' defined benefit. She is wrong. So, too, are the legislators whose solution is to merely extend PERS' debt over more years, holding down the yearly cost to employers but increasing the overall cost.

There is more to Brown's plan, including her idea of diverting estate and capital gains taxes to pay for PERS. Such taxes are absurdly high in Oregon, but at least this way they would go for a good purpose.

Still, the best that can be said about Brown's proposal is that it is ... a proposal, not necessarily a wise or innovative proposal.

THE GOVERNOR CALLS HER PROPOSAL 'SHARED RESPONSIBILITY.' SHARED PAIN IS MORE LIKE IT.

\$81 million to prop up the state budget.

After being forced to repay that money with interest, the Legislature learned from its mistake by subsequently making it legal in the future to raid SAIF sur-

SAIF's business.

As justification for a new raid on SAIF, the governor and her cohorts point out that Oregon has some of the lowest workers' compensation rates in the nation and the highest rate of dividends being

LETTERS

Call before digging

April is National Safe Digging Month, and it is also the time when NW Natural reminds you to call 811 before you dig. Spring brings planting and the start of outdoor projects; before starting a task that involves digging 12 inches or lower, call 811 to have underground utilities located.

Contacting 811 is free and easy. At least two days before the start of a project, call 811 or go online to make the request at digsafelyoregon.com. You can also use NW Natural's new safety app.

When you contact 811, a local one-call center representative collects details and notifies the local utility companies of the intent to dig. Then, a professional locator visits the site to mark the location of underground utility lines with paint. Once the site is marked, it is safe to dig carefully around the marked areas.

If, while you're digging, you accidentally hit a gas line, report it immediately by calling 911 or NW Natural's emergency line at 800-882-3377. No damage is too small to report to NW Natural, and even a small dent could weaken a natural gas line.

Enjoy the season, and remember to call 811.

TERESA BROWNLIE
NW Natural Community Affairs
Portland

Safety concerns

I am a new, proud homeowner in Astoria still learning about the community and its history. There is a lot of material! I have also been homeless, for three months, in 2014, when I lived with my cat in a tent.

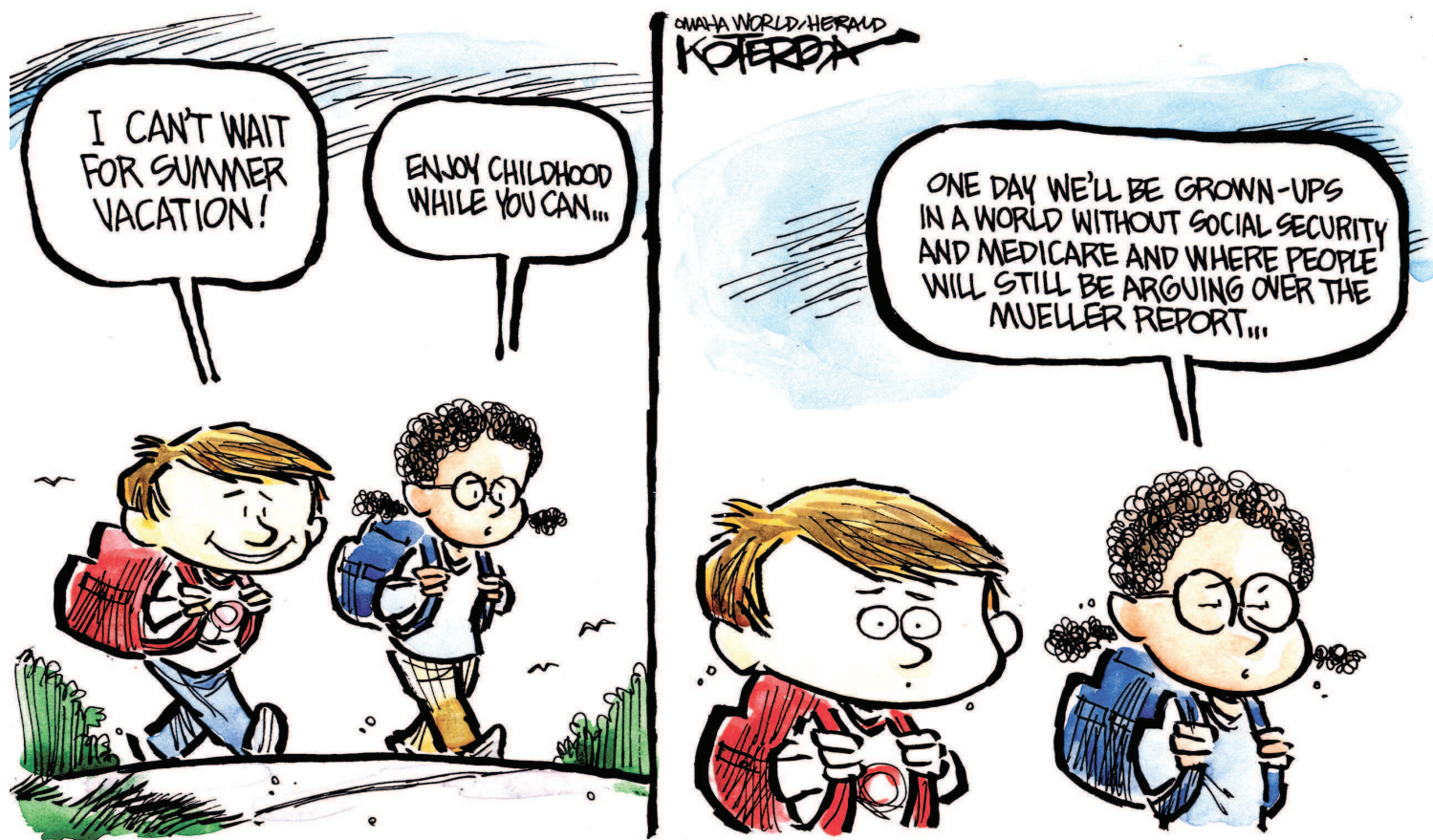
At the risk of stating the obvious, homeless people are members of the public. It thus stands to reason that there is no real distinction between the safety of homeless people and the safety of everybody else. The editorial voice and coverage in this publication seem to differentiate between these topics (see "Astoria police track aggressive homeless behavior," The Daily Astorian, April 19).

This concerns me. I would hope that the police are concerned about the safety of the homeless people whose behavior they are "documenting" to the same extent that they are for the safety of everyone else.

JED HERMAN
Astoria

McClaine for Port

I would like to commend to you my brother Scott McClaine for the Port of



Astoria Commission Position 3.

Scott served in the Coast Guard as a medic for 28 years and retired with the rank of chief.

He and his wife of 36 years, Helen, decided to move back to Astoria because of the incredible beauty of the town, and have lived in Astoria for a total of 16 years.

Serving others is in his DNA. He has helped me selflessly over the years, and would give me the shirt off his back. It wouldn't surprise me if many others in Astoria could tell stories of how Scott McClaine has helped them.

He is a dedicated individual, and would serve the Port with integrity and dedication. He would be a good man for you to vote for on May 21.

STEVE MCCLAIN
Moscow, Idaho

Pass HB 2020

The world's best scientists have warned us. We have 11 years to significantly reduce greenhouse gas pollution, which causes climate change, or we're in for a world of trouble. The worst storms of the past will become the new normal. Sea levels will rise and threaten coastal communities here in Oregon, around the nation and around the world.

The 2018 National Climate Assessment Report stated clearly that climate change is having economic impacts now,

and will only become more severe as time passes if we do not reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

We owe it not only to our children, and our grandchildren, but to ourselves, to take action to reduce greenhouse gas pollution. And many people I know do their part when they can. Now it's time for large, polluting corporations to do their part.

That's what Oregon's proposed Clean Energy Jobs bill do: Require big polluters to pay for what they put out, and reduce their emissions over time. And, it will invest money into our local communities to build more affordable clean energy and create jobs.

Now that the federal government has backed out of the Paris Climate Agreement, it is up to the states to act. We must create a clean energy future in Oregon, and we must start right now. Tell your legislators to pass HB 2020, the Clean Energy Jobs Bill.

KATHLEEN MACDONALD
Seaside

Demand impeachment

If you have any misgivings at all of how 2016 went down, I urge you to act now to demand impeachment hearings in Congress.

Impeachment is not removal from office — Clinton was impeached, but not removed. Impeachment is the hearing pro-

cess by which Congress, using its Constitutional authority, examines evidence that the president's crimes and misdemeanors make him unfit to serve.

With 180 pages of obstruction evidence in the Mueller report, we're at a critical juncture. You can either sit on the sidelines or take a stand by calling your members of Congress (Rep. Suzanne Bonamici 202-225-0855) to request impeachment hearings now.

Some Congressional leaders have been putting political calculus first. Their political calculus could well backfire. Would the GOP Senate under any circumstances remove Trump from office? I wouldn't bet on it. But the general public might take the failure to impeach, i.e. hold open hearings, as proof that President Donald Trump has done nothing wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Open impeachment hearings will have a far greater impact than piecemeal investigations. Our voices, loud and persistent and clear, are crucial in the coming days and weeks.

This is not about political gamesmanship or disgruntled Democrats. For the sake of our democracy, all of us who love America must be committed to the pursuit of truth. We must keep speaking up until Trump is fully called to account, out in the open, by the process our country's founders devised for times like this.

D. V. FERENCY
Warrenton