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OUR VIEW

Don't shoot the messenger

No sooner had retiring Postmaster General Patrick Donohoe completed his farewell speech Tuesday than critics sharpened their knives.

His negative comments about powerful postal unions battling senior managers' attempts to introduce more flexible work rules drew the most headlines. But looking deeper, the 40-year veteran made points worthy of study if we are going to save one of America's key institutions.

There is no question that the Internet and email mean the days of the old-time mail service monopoly are over. Federal Express and United Parcel Service perform a creditable job shipping packages by ground and air, charging what the market will bear. Businesses like Amazon demonstrate flexibility and creative thinking to serve customers.

The post office is one of the few government departments mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. But is a nationwide postal service still needed? We believe the answer is "yes" — but only if the agency is allowed to move with the times.

Donohoe pulled no punches. In addition to more flexibility in work rules and pricing, he said the agency needs to review its pension promises, plus its employee and retiree health care commitments.

Although the post office hasn't received tax revenue for decades — it is self-sustaining — it does have Congressional oversight. We believe that oversight must consider the impact of any proposed cutbacks in jobs, routes and office hours on our nation's 59 million rural residents.

Closing or consolidating 80 regional sorting plants may save money by cutting jobs — Pendleton and Bend facilities are in the

crosshairs. But too little emphasis is placed on the true cost for rural customers of delayed mail caused by such actions.

Newspapers like ours, of course, rely on the mail for timely, reliable delivery to readers of many of our publications. The National Newspaper Association's president, John Edgecombe, Jr., of Nebraska, makes a solid case for Congress to better monitor the impact of postal cutbacks

The post office should remain a core American institution

on rural areas.

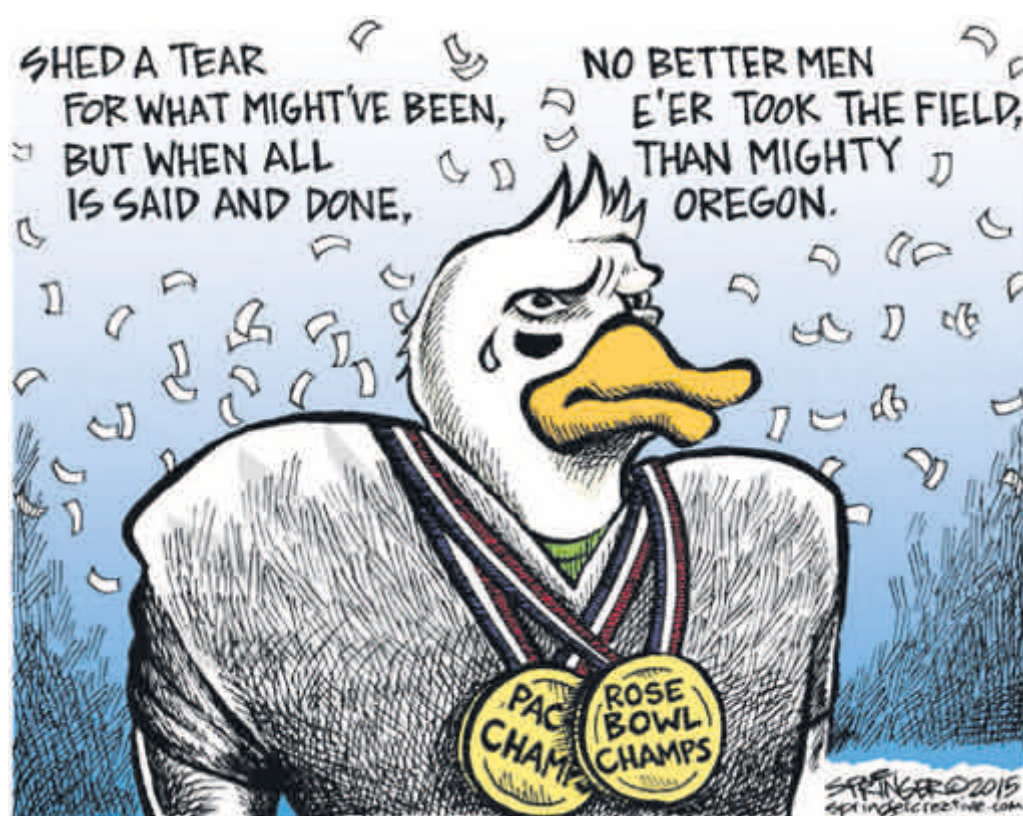
"Unfortunately for many — seniors without Internet, lower income residents, rural folks without good Internet service and people who don't necessarily trust the Internet — the mail is a necessity," he wrote in a recent column.

Edgecombe noted that the USPS Inspector General chastised the service in October for not properly analyzing the impacts of plant closures. The postal service leadership said it would do so — but only after its slower service standards went into effect.

"In other words," Edgecombe wrote, "it will consider whether it can reach its goals after it has lowered them."

That's the wrong approach. Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley have lobbied hard to protect endangered rural mail services. But it is time for a bipartisan Congressional effort to preserve the post office as a core government function.

Creative thinking will combine federal oversight with flexibility. Donohoe suggests a 10- or 15-year plan. This needs to accommodate changes in technology and society, never losing sight of the agency's mission to connect the nation from Alaska to Florida in an efficient and reasonably priced manner.



OTHER VIEWS

For the love of carbon

It should come as no surprise that the very first move of the new Republican Senate is an attempt to push President Barack Obama into approving the Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry oil from Canadian tar sands. After all, debts must be paid, and the oil and gas industry — which gave 87 percent of its 2014 campaign contributions to the GOP — expects to be rewarded for its support.

But why is this environmentally troubling project an urgent priority in a time of plunging world oil prices? Well, the party line, from people like Mitch McConnell, the new Senate majority leader, is that it's all about jobs. And it's true: Building Keystone XL could slightly increase U.S. employment. In fact, it might replace almost 5 percent of the jobs America has lost because of destructive cuts in federal spending, which were in turn the direct result of Republican blackmail over the debt ceiling.

Oh, and don't tell me that the cases are completely different. You can't consistently claim that pipeline spending creates jobs while government spending doesn't.

Let's back up for a minute and discuss economic principles.

For more than seven years — ever since the Bush-era housing and debt bubbles burst — the U.S. economy has suffered from inadequate demand. Total spending just hasn't been enough to fully employ the nation's resources. In such an environment, anything that increases spending creates jobs. And if private spending is depressed, a temporary rise in public spending can and should take its place. That's why a great majority of economists believe that the Obama stimulus did, in fact, reduce the unemployment rate compared with what it would have been without that stimulus.

From the beginning, however, Republican leaders have held the opposite view, insisting that we should slash public spending in the face of high unemployment. And they've gotten their way: The years after 2010, when Republicans took control of the House, were marked by an unprecedented decline in real government spending per capita, which leveled off only in 2014.

The evidence overwhelmingly indicates that this kind of fiscal austerity in a depressed economy is destructive; if the economic news has been better lately, it's probably in part because of the fact that federal, state and local governments have finally stopped cutting. And spending cuts have, in particular, cost a lot of jobs. When the Congressional Budget Office was asked how many jobs would be lost because of the sequester — the big cuts in federal spending that Republicans extracted in



PAUL KRUGMAN
Comment

2011 by threatening to push America into default — its best estimate was 900,000. And that's only part of the total loss.

Needless to say, the guilty parties here will never admit that they were wrong. But if you look at their behavior closely, you see clear signs that they don't really believe in their own doctrine.

Consider, for example, the case of military spending. When it comes to possible cuts in defense contracts, politicians who loudly proclaim that every dollar the government spends comes at the expense of the private sector suddenly begin talking about all the jobs that will be destroyed. They even begin talking about the multiplier effect, as reduced spending by defense workers leads to job losses in other industries. This is the phenomenon former Rep. Barney Frank dubbed "weaponized Keynesianism."

And the argument being made for Keystone XL is very similar; call it "carbonized Keynesianism." Yes, approving the pipeline would mobilize some money that would otherwise have sat idle, and in so doing create some jobs

— 42,000 during the construction phase, according to the most widely cited estimate. (Once completed, the pipeline would employ only a few dozen workers.) But government spending on roads, bridges and schools would do the same thing.

And the job gains from the pipeline would, as I said, be only a tiny fraction — less than 5 percent — of the job losses from sequestration, which in turn are only part of the damage done by spending cuts in general. If McConnell and company really believe that we need more spending to create jobs, why not support a push to upgrade America's crumbling infrastructure?

So what should be done about Keystone XL? If you believe that it would be environmentally damaging — which I do — then you should be against it, and you should ignore the claims about job creation. The numbers being thrown around are tiny compared with the country's overall work force. And in any case, the jobs argument for the pipeline is basically a sick joke coming from people who have done all they can to destroy American jobs — and are now employing the very arguments they used to ridicule government job programs to justify a big giveaway to their friends in the fossil fuel industry.

Paul Krugman joined *The New York Times* in 1999 as a columnist on the Op-Ed Page and continues as professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.

Building Keystone XL could slightly increase U.S. employment.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Legislators need straight approach on 'joint' committee

Corvallis Gazette-Times, Jan. 5

One of the key challenges facing the 2015 Oregon Legislature when it gets down to work next month will be writing the rules to implement Measure 91, the initiative that legalized the recreational use of marijuana.

Already, the Legislature has struggled with its first challenge: Naming the committee that will be charged with the heavy lifting. As one legislator told us, the panel originally was called the "Joint Committee on Marijuana," until someone took a long look at the name. Then the suggestion was made just to call it the "Joint Committee," which would have been somewhat accurate but still bears the whiff of a Cheech & Chong routine.

That idea eventually gave way to the final nomenclature of the panel: It will be the "Joint Committee on Measure 91 Implementation," which still doesn't get rid of the "joint" part, but seems suitably cloaked in bureaucratic phrasing to get the job done.

Even though Measure 91 was remarkably detailed, the committee still has plenty of challenges ahead of it. Sen. Ginny Burdick, the Portland Democrat who is one of the two chairs of the committee, suggested in a meeting with *The Oregonian* editorial board that most voters weren't familiar with the intricacies of the measure — but generally supported the idea of legalization.

The upshot, Burdick said, is that legislators have some room to maneuver, as long as they honor the overall will of voters.

That's probably correct — even though it does leave plenty of room for mischief. For example, expect the panel to endure heavy lobbying from cities and counties looking to cash in by taxing the sale of marijuana, even though Measure 91 is reasonably clear that only the state can tax it. (The general concern here is that, the more you tax recreational pot, the more likely it is that black-market pot will be a cheaper alternative.)

The joint committee does have one big advantage: Legislators already have labored to create a structure that governs the distribution of medical marijuana. That process didn't go perfectly, but the structure is up and running, and we can't see any reason why legislators wouldn't take a careful look at combining the recreational and medical markets. Why invent this particular wheel twice?

In fact, many of the medical marijuana dispensaries that already have jumped through the state's regulatory hoops and opened their shops have said they're considering expanding their businesses to include recreational marijuana.

That's not to say it will all be smooth sailing for the panel. But taking a careful look at combining the marketplaces will give its members a head start at working through the myriad other details that need to be settled.

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



YOUR VIEWS

Civil, nonviolent people an overwhelming majority

What an inspiration it was this Sunday to see the people in Paris and France join together to say, "Je Suis Charlie!" This was a spontaneous people's march — people of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds, the "silent majority" — more than 2.5 million people who came out on the street to show

their unity. People like us.

It was a wonderful image, a vision to hold on to — all people working together in peace, standing for freedom with respect for others. Even though we may not see each other out on the street, I believe, the majority of us share this vision. That it will live on in our imagination in the coming years.

Lawrence Jones
Hood River