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OUR VIEW

Maxing out the minimum wage

Our country has entered a dangerous time when the gulf between the rich and poor has grown to nearly incalculable levels. The top 1 percent of the 1 percent are living in rarefied air, while the middle class struggles to keep their heads above water.

We're certainly not here to begrudge anyone their wealth, but our government was designed to facilitate the growth, safety and prosperity of its citizens. That means all of us — not just those who are already safe and prospered.

Raising the minimum wage has been one way to allow the poor and middle class to keep pace with inflation and economic growth. Yet minimum wage has been stagnant across much of the nation since the 1990s and what just a few months ago seemed an insane notion — a minimum wage bump to \$15 an hour — is now being bandied about in serious policy circles.

At first blush, it seems like a good way to move dollars from corporate pockets into the pockets of the workers, who would have more money to spend on food and clothes and house and home — even buy more consumer goods that would stimulate the economy.

But there is fear too. How many struggling, small businesses would close because of a drastic increase in labor costs? How many entrepreneurs would be unable to get off the ground with such an expensive barrier to operation?

One such place at risk is this newspaper company, which dutifully scrapes up our bit of profit each month, puts some of it away in case of a rainy day and uses the rest to reward the risk and work of the company's owners.

We're no multinational conglomerate. We're not making

millions in profit. We employ about 200 Oregonians, some of whom we pay below \$15 an hour.

Look up and down Main Street in your town and you'll see plenty more like us. We'd love for the cashier at the bookstore and the baker down the way to be making more money, but neither could

make a dime if the bookstore or the bakery can't turn a profit.

We are nervous about what raising the minimum wage would mean for our business and businesses like it. We've had economists and activists come and tell us it's been done before — and this state did increase the minimum wage by more than 42 percent between 1989 and 1991, from \$3.35 an hour to \$4.75. In 1950, it jumped 88 percent because of Congressional action. A jump from roughly \$9 to \$15 would be a 62 percent increase spaced out over three years.

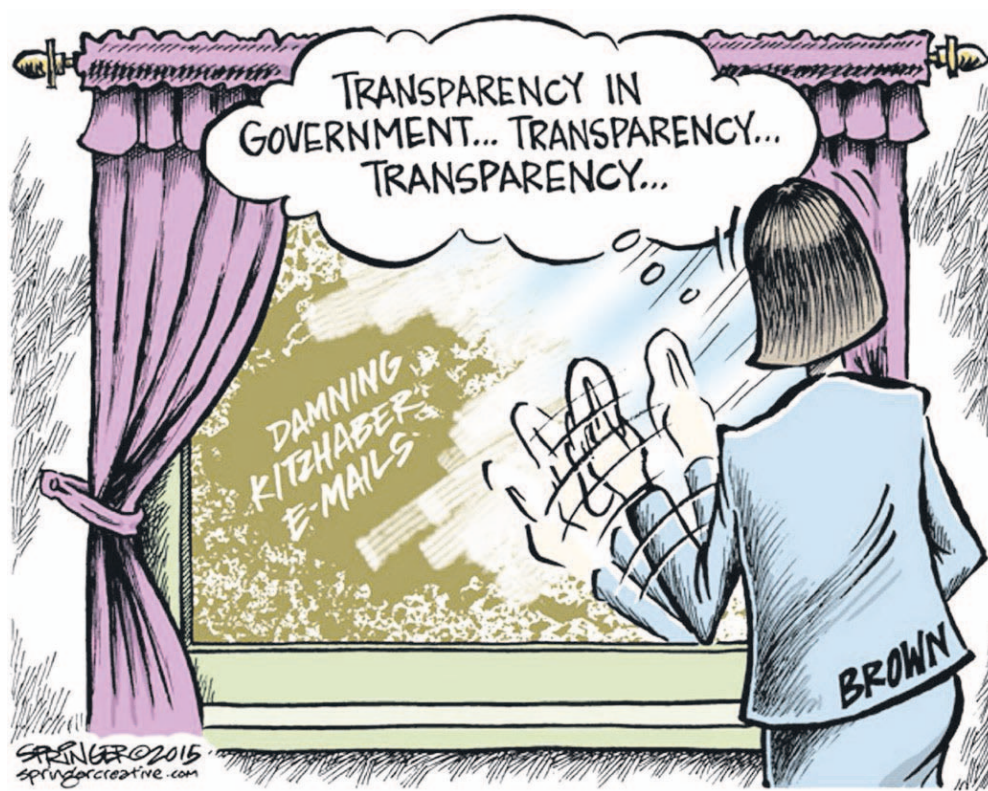
We're not economists and don't claim to know how all the tremors would reverberate through the economy after such a drastic jump in the minimum wage. And even economists who studied at the same universities see the matter differently.

But what we can all agree on is that we want every U.S. worker to have a job that pays at least enough to keep them from needing government assistance and hopefully rewards good work and loyalty with higher compensation and advancement. That's a big part of the American dream.

We want wages to go up, and see the growing disparity between the very rich and the rest of us as a real problem. But we feel there's more negotiation and study that needs to be done before the government issues a decree that could cripple small businesses.

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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

Converting the Ayatollahs

Over the past centuries, Western diplomats have continually projected pragmatism onto their ideological opponents. They have often assumed that our enemies are driven by the same sort of national interest calculations that motivate most regimes. They have assumed that economic interests would trump ideology and religion — that prudent calculation and statecraft would trump megalomania.

They assumed that the world leaders before 1914 would not be stupid enough to allow nationalist passion to plunge them into a World War; that Hitler would not be crazy enough to start a second one; that Islamic radicals could not really want to send their region back into the 12th century; that Sunnis and Shiites would never let their sectarian feud turn into a cataclysmic confrontation in places like Iraq.

The Obama administration is making a similar projection today. It is betting that Iran can turn into a fundamentally normal regime, which can be counted upon to put GDP over ideology and religion and do the pragmatic thing. The Iran nuclear negotiations are not just about centrifuges; they are about the future of the Middle East. Through a series of statements over the last few years, President Barack Obama has made it reasonably clear how he envisions that future.

He seeks to wean Iran away from the radicalism of the revolution and bind it into the international economic and diplomatic system. By reaching an agreement on nukes and lifting the sanctions, Iran would re-emerge as America's natural partner in the region. It has an educated middle class that is interested in prosperity and is not terribly anti-American. Global integration would strengthen Iranian moderates and reinforce democratic tendencies.

Once enmeshed in the global system, Iran would work to tame Hezbollah and Hamas and would cooperate to find solutions in Gaza, Iraq and Syria. There would be a more stable balance of power between the major powers. In exchange for good global citizenship, Iran would be richer and more influential.

To pursue this détente, Obama has to have a nuclear agreement. He has made a series of stunning sacrifices in order to get it. In 2012, the president vowed that he would not permit Iran to maintain a nuclear program. Six U.N. Security Council resolutions buttressed that principle. But, if reports of the proposed deal are correct, Obama has abandoned this policy.

Under the reported framework, Iran would have thousands of centrifuges. All restrictions on its nuclear program would be temporary and would be phased out over a decade or so. According to some reports, there will be



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

no limits on Iran's ballistic missiles, no resolution of Iran's weaponizing activities. Monitoring and enforcement would rely on an inspection regime that has been good, but leaky.

Meanwhile, the United States has offended its erstwhile allies, like Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, without being sure that Iran is really willing to supplement them. There is a chance that Iran's regional rivals would feel the need to have their own nuclear programs and we would descend into a spiral of proliferation.

All of this might be defensible if Iran is really willing to switch teams, if religion and ideology played no role in the regime's thinking. But it could be that Iran has been willing to be an international pariah for the past generation for a reason. It could be that Iran finances terrorist groups and destabilizes regimes like Yemen's and Morocco's for a reason. It could be that Iran's leaders really believe what they say. It could be that Iranian leaders are as apocalyptically motivated, paranoid and dogmatically anti-American as their pronouncements suggest they are. It could be that Iran will be as destabilizing and hegemonically inclined as all its recent actions suggest. Iran may be especially radical if the whole region gets further inflamed by Sunni-Shia rivalry or descends into greater and greater Islamic State-style fanaticism.

Obama is betting that Iran can turn into a fundamentally normal regime, which can be counted upon to put GDP over ideology and religion and do the pragmatic thing.

Do we really want a nuclear-capable Iran in the midst of all that? If the Iranian leaders believe what they say, then U.S. policy should be exactly the opposite of the one now being pursued. Instead of embracing and enriching Iran, sanctions should be toughened to further isolate and weaken it. Instead of accepting a nuclear capacity, eliminating that capacity should be restored as the centerpiece of U.S. policy. Instead of a condominium with Iran that offends traditional allies like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel, the U.S. should build a regional strategy around strengthening relations with those historic pillars.

It's hard to know what's going on in the souls of Iran's leadership class, but a giant bet is being placed on one interpretation. March could be a ruinous month for the Middle East. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel could weaken U.S.-Israeli relations, especially on the Democratic left. The world might accept an Iranian nuclear capacity. Efforts designed to palliate a rogue regime may end up enriching and emboldening it.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at The Weekly Standard, a contributing editor at Newsweek and the Atlantic Monthly.

YOUR VIEWS

Hermiston charter rewrite is power grab

I would like to respond to Mayor Drotzmann's commentary about Hermiston charter's being carefully drafted.

The mayor and manager have one issue that is a burr in their saddle. They want to have the city council pick who would be our municipal judge. As you all know well, this has been the citizens' constitutional right since the beginning. The mayor, manager and one vocal councilman favor this.

The mayor states in the article that the change in the charter is an attempt to align Hermiston with the rest of the state. Does the data from the League of Oregon Cities say that this is the best way to go?

They did not say, but as citizens, it is for us to make that determination, not people who do not live here. Just because we are one of the last five in the state doesn't make us wrong. In

addition, this can leave the door wide open to crony-ism, and I feel that they already have a friend in mind for the position. The mayor states that the city will have more control over budgeting and management. I think the public will have more control over the position and remove them by the next election.

Let's look at past appointments of the city council. We just got past an ugly scene with our past chief of police. He was arrogant and abusive to his officers, and we lost many good people because of him. The past police chief targeted particular businesses and harassed the owners. What did the city do? Nothing for eight years. Then they started an investigation. What was the result? A hefty severance package for a badly appointed police chief.

Let's look at the city council's next appointment. The council appointed George Anderson. What in his time on city council did Mr. Anderson do? Well, he consistently went and wrote articles about Doug

Primmer and John Kirwan when they were running for city council and set a bad taste on the council with his statements against the candidates.

The city was hapless in their past management of these appointed positions and should not be given complete control and take away our constitutional rights to vote the judge in. When few people get great power, corruption is not far behind.

Perry W. Hawkins
Hermiston

Humanity is a frog in a slow-boiling pot

I always thought that was a funny story, the one about the boiling frog — put a frog in boiling water, he'll jump out, but if you put him in cold water that is slowly heated, he will be cooked to death. And scientists have shown this to be true. That poor, foolish frog!

Ooh, wait a minute, that sounds familiar. Scientists tell us that

planet is warming, that the result will be catastrophic. Feel the heat? So long salmon, birds, water ... our children's future.

Of course, Greg Walden could turn down the burner. It's as simple as people speaking up — demanding he take action, like introducing a bill that charges a carbon fee at its source and passing the revenue to us (see citizensclimatelobby.org).

But that froggy feeling is good — the warmth is so soothing. I can't be bothered, it's too complicated, Greg's my friend, it's a big conspiracy ... bubble, bubble.

Lawrence Jones
Hood River

Requa statuettes could quell the controversy

It came to me this morning reading the East Oregonian that Requa statuettes might help quell that fuss.

Statuettes similar to those made for the bucking horse statue at the Round-Up Grounds might let anyone have their own statue to put anywhere they want.

They could also be great fundraiser.

Richard Winter
Echo

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.