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OUR VIEW



Gov. Kate Brown speaks with the *East Oregonian* editorial board Friday about her administration's priorities for Eastern Oregon. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Eastern thinking

Two Eastern Oregon issues are high on new governor Kate Brown's priority list.

You can find them both on the front page of today's paper. One is as old as Eastern Oregon: securing more water out of the Columbia River to benefit agriculture. The other is a 21st century phenomenon: Pendleton's fledgling drone test range.

We're happy to see both are on the governor's radar and are happy to welcome any political will and financial investment we can get from Salem. This newspaper has long been a supporter of the Umatilla Basin water project, and we think the ag community has put forward a sustainable project that will boost output and the river economy.

Former governor John Kitzhaber was high on the project, too, but it may be Brown who finally brings it to fruition. She expects to partner with State Senator Bill Hansell to firm up support and put the proposal before the ways and means committee next month. She said she is eager to see it pass.

Eager was a word Brown used often during her trip, in her public statements Friday at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport and in an interview afterward with the *East Oregonian* editorial board.

She is eager to connect with Eastern Oregon. She is eager to support the water, drone, housing and transportation projects in the region. And in general, she's eager.

Pendleton city council was also eager on the drone project, perhaps too much so. On Tuesday, without any public interaction and without even noting it on the council agenda, they agreed to accept a mix of loans and grants from the state worth nearly \$1.7 million. It was a haphazardly planned action that took some starch out of Brown's public remarks at the airport. It was also a disappointing one that undermined

the council's recently stated desire for increased public awareness and transparency.

And it's that lack of clarity that continues to cloud the drone project. First, there is the mountain of muddled, still-being-sorted Federal Aviation Administration drone rules, which City Manager Robb Corbett aptly described as a "bowl of spaghetti." Then there are the yet-to-be-decided details about specific rules for test ranges. And then there is debate between the test range sites and how revenue will be divvied up between the different entities.

Also, there is the inability of Pendleton and airport officials to be forthright about the number of aerospace technology companies interested in the range — city officials say more than a dozen, but won't name any at each company's request. And then there is the great unknown as to what those companies see in the drone range: is it just an empty field to experiment in, or is it a headquarters and base of operations?

This bureaucratic swamp, mixed with the vagaries of a quickly changing and regulated industry, presents a real hurdle to quick and guaranteed success. But \$1.7 million in state dollars to build necessary infrastructure sure helps clear some hurdles. Some are straight grant dollars and much of the rest is low-interest, low-risk loans that are well worth accepting. A piece of the package will have to be repaid if less than 130 jobs are created by the test range in five years.

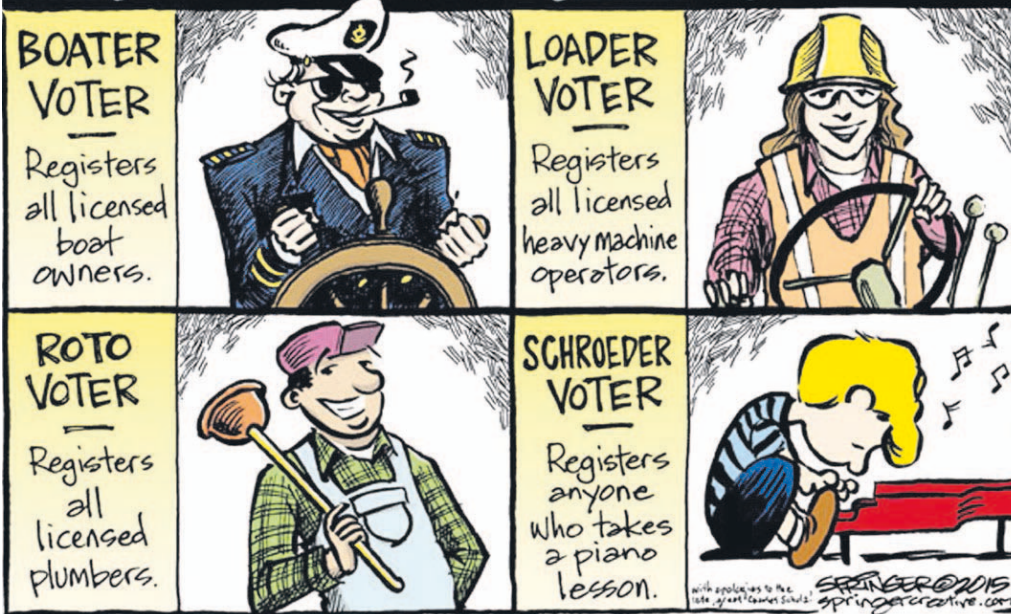
Obviously, anything near 130 high-tech jobs in such a short period of time would be an overwhelming success. Even half that would be well worth \$1.7 million in taxpayer money and would spark a much-needed return to vibrancy for the Pendleton area.

Like Kate Brown, we are eager to see if the bet pays off.

Brown said she is eager to connect with Eastern Oregon.

Q: DOES OREGON'S "MOTOR VOTER" LAW GO FAR ENOUGH?

Here are some more laws that could automatically register even **MORE** eligible Oregonians...



OTHER VIEWS

Oh no! A new senate low

The United States Senate is worse than ever.

I know this is hard for you to believe, people. But, really, this week was a new bottom. The Senate found itself unable to pass a bill aiding victims of human trafficking, a practice so terrible that it is one of the few subjects on which members of Congress find it fairly easy to work in bipartisan amity.

"This has got to get done for me to continue having faith in this institution," said Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., who's particularly concerned about sexual exploitation of Native American women. She has always struck me as one of the more cheerful members of the Senate, so this seems like a bad sign.

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives has passed 12 bills against human trafficking already this year.

Wow, the House is doing great! If you overlook the introduction of a budget that features terrible math and many assaults on hapless poor people, the lower chamber has been on a roll lately. Speaker John Boehner and Nancy Pelosi, the minority leader, rescued the budget for the Department of Homeland Security, and now they're working out a plan to avoid the next fiscal cliff, which involves keeping Medicare running.

Plus, this week, the Republican majority got rid of disgraced Rep. Aaron Schock, who decorated his office as if it was a scene from "Downton Abbey." In the wake of questions about his mileage reimbursement requests, Schock announced his resignation. Since he had never successfully sponsored any legislation in his six-year congressional career, his greatest legacy may be a reminder that members of the House of Representatives should avoid brightening the workplace with vases of pheasant feathers.

So the House is working on a new fiscal-cliff plan, passed 12 human trafficking bills and subtracted Aaron Schock. Maybe it's going to become the center of bipartisan cooperation the nation has been waiting for!

OK, probably not. Anyway, it's been doing better than the Senate.

At the beginning of the month, the Senate was working on its own anti-trafficking bill, sponsored by Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, with several Democratic co-sponsors. The idea was to fine sexual predators and give the money to groups that help sex-trafficking victims.

Sounded promising. The Senate Judiciary Committee had easily approved Cornyn's bill earlier this year. Then before it reached the floor, someone discovered that it had acquired a clause forbidding the use of the money to provide victims with access to abortions.



GAIL COLLINS
Comment

"They're putting poison pills in their own bills!" Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said in a phone interview.

Before we discuss how badly the Republicans behaved, we need to take time out to note that none of the Democrats on the Judiciary Committee seem to have noticed that somewhere along the line, this change had been inserted in the bill. (One senator acknowledged that an aide knew, but never shared the information.)

It was easy to miss, the Democrats contended, being very oblique and supertiny. "Out of a 112-page bill, there is this one sentence," complained Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

I believe I speak for many Americans when I say that missing a change in important legislation is excusable only if the Senate Judiciary Committee is suffering from a shortage of lawyers.

No one seemed clear on how the new language got there in the first place, but abortion restriction is not something you casually toss into a bill that you want to pass with support from both parties. It would be as if the Democrats had quietly added a stipulation requiring all trafficking victims be barred from carrying a concealed weapon.

Cornyn argued that it made no difference whatsoever because there were plenty of exemptions that would allow any sexually exploited trafficking victim to qualify for an abortion anyway. That was a good point, except for the part where you wondered why he was so insistent that this allegedly meaningless language be preserved at all costs.

"My wish is that we hadn't junked that bill up with abortion politics," said Sen. Mark Kirk, R-Ill., who has to run for re-election next year. Many Republicans agreed with him, but in public they dug in their heels. In retaliation, the Democrats brought all progress to a halt with a filibuster.

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who thought he was going to show how to make the Senate work, was irate, and said there would be no vote on Loretta Lynch, President Barack Obama's attorney general nominee, until Democrats gave in.

Possible theme for the session: "Republicans who can't lead meet Democrats who can't read."

Lynch did get some support from former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who penned a letter urging Republicans to get behind her. When Giuliani is the most sensible voice in the room, there's not much farther down to go, unless they start bringing in pheasant feathers.

Gail Collins joined *The New York Times* in 1995 as a member of the editorial board.

Republicans who can't lead meet Democrats who can't read.

YOUR VIEWS

BMCC medical programs valuable to local hospitals

I am writing in support of Blue Mountain Community College and the upcoming bond measure. It has been my pleasure over the past 20 years to serve two terms on the BMCC budget committee and to see firsthand the college's efforts to provide high quality education to our residents even as state funding for community colleges has continued to shrink.

As vice president of human resources at Good Shepherd Health Care System, I have seen the value of our local community college in helping to educate registered nurses, medical technologists and many other occupations we need at a community hospital. Good Shepherd has been happy to help fund a nursing instructor at BMCC to ensure the availability of qualified nurses to care for our patients.

BMCC provides our area with affordable college education opportunities not only in Pendleton but also in Hermiston and Boardman, two communities where I spend a lot of time.

I am impressed with the coordination between our local school systems and BMCC to fulfill the Eastern Promise that helps so many of our high school students get a head start on a college education with dual credit classes.

It is for these reasons that I encourage the citizens of Umatilla and Morrow counties to vote yes on the BMCC bond on the May 19 election ballot.

Your vote will be an investment for years to come, and will allow BMCC to continue to provide a quality learning environment through upgrades at its facilities, enhance existing successful programs such as nursing, agriculture, dental and diesel tech, and develop new workforce development programs to meet the needs of regional industries so vital to our area.

No one likes to pay more taxes but BMCC is vital to the continued growth of our region. In my opinion passage of this bond will be a good investment in our future.

Please join me in voting yes for the BMCC bond.

Kelly B. Sanders
Irrigon

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

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