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KATHRYN B. BROWN

Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER

Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON

Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR

Opinion Page Editor

OUR VIEW

State should consider raising governor’s salary

In Gov. John Kitzhaber’s recent decline and fall, Oregon voters were reminded that their governor is paid \$98,000 annually. Even in a state that notoriously devalues the compensation for elected public service, what we pay our governor is laughable. Oregon is among the bottom five states for governor salary, joining Colorado, Arkansas, Arizona and Maine in that group. The most generous states are Pennsylvania, Tennessee, New York, Illinois and New Jersey.

We are well behind our West Coast neighbors: Washington pays \$166,891, the ninth most generous state, and California pays \$173,987, the seventh.

These numbers are for 2014 and were gathered by the website Ballotpedia.

In the aftermath of Kitzhaber, Oregon’s corruption law and corruption culture are under a renewed microscope. It’s understandable to wonder if a low salary helped exacerbate the problems that overtook the governor’s mansion. Granted, it can’t be the main culprit. A quick look at the states that pay the highest to their government leader are among those with the most common and high-profile corruption cases.

But our state salary wasn’t enough for the money-obsessed Cylvia Hayes and it wasn’t getting her rich enough fast enough. Compensation became an issue because the former governor sought outside speaking engagements and it appears that he and his girlfriend were trying to supplement their income by getting paid to do favors for outside interests. Federal

authorities are investigating if the two broke laws along the way.

If you look at how Oregon pays its judges, there is a similar pattern. For salaries paid for general jurisdictional courts (circuit courts), Oregon ranks 49th. For salaries paid to the state’s highest court, we rank 48th. Those numbers are gathered by the National Council for State Courts.

There is a little-known Oregon Public Officials Compensation Commission. It makes recommendations for salary adjustments to the state legislature. The commission in 2008 recommended raising the governor’s salary from \$93,600 to \$130,000. The subsequent raise took the governor to the present \$98,000.

Raising the governor’s salary would not necessarily inhibit another Kitzhaber-type episode. The best antidote to that are good examples, a strong and unbiased media and a voting culture that does not tolerate such actions. Gov. Kate Brown’s first returns are good ones, when considering the sweeping ethics and public records disclosure legislation she proposed recently.

We urge legislators to find the gumption to take this issue on. The same is true for judicial salaries, where there is a very real comparison to be made with what a good lawyer can make in private practice.

If salaries are strong enough, we could then work to lawfully restrict outside income while in the state’s highest position. That’s the simplest way to ensure the seeds of corruption don’t sprout real problems.

In the aftermath of Kitzhaber, corruption law and culture is under a renewed microscope.

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

Use state lottery dollars for sage grouse protection

The Baker City Herald

The potential effects on Baker County’s economy if the federal government lists the sage grouse as a threatened or endangered species can hardly be underestimated.

Most directly, most of the beef cattle that produces about \$53 million annual sales for local ranchers also spend part of the year grazing on public land that that feds might deem critical habitat for sage grouse.

Although it doesn’t seem likely that a sage grouse listing would end public land grazing, even a moderate reduction in grazing could cause considerable problems for ranchers and, inevitably, create a ripple effect throughout the local economy.

All of which goes to explain why we support efforts to prove to federal officials that the sage grouse doesn’t need federal protection.

The latest example is House Bill 3334, sponsored by Baker County’s legislator, Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario.

Bentz’s bill would require the state to spend \$2 million per in year in lottery revenue to protect and restore sage grouse habitat.

That’s a relatively modest amount by lottery standards — the state doled out more than \$46 million in the most recent two-year budget cycle.

But it can only bolster the state’s case against federal protection for sage grouse if it can point to a \$2 million state investment — and not involving tax dollars — in helping the bird.

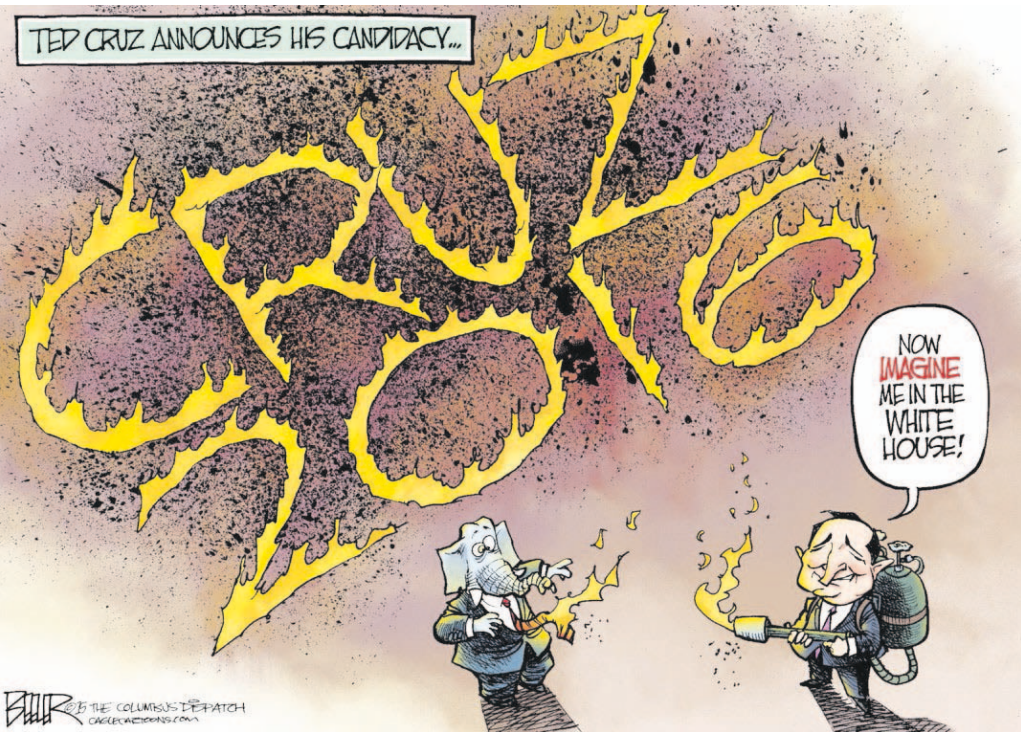
As for the bill, we’re optimistic about its prospects in Salem.

Legislators certainly should not ignore the testimony from Baker County business owners who addressed the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources via video link on Tuesday morning.

Business owners said they fear a sage grouse listing would ravage the local economy. If the state can help to avoid that disaster by spending a relative pittance, then lawmakers should do so.

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.



OTHER VIEWS

What’s new pussycat? Meerkat!

AUSTIN, Texas — Pity the poor cat.

Somehow that creature of infinite detachment emerged as the symbol of incessant attachment here at South by Southwest.

In this festival of interactivity, connectivity, sharing and Tinder-ing, the two big stars were Grumpy Cat, who groggily greeted an endless stream of fans, and Meerkat, the live-streaming video app pounced on by presidential candidates eager to seem hip. (The meerkat is actually from the mongoose family.)

Animal shelters hosted “yappy hours” with free beer, and Friskies cat food set up the Haus of Bacon, where Internet cat stars took photos with groupies. There was even an attempt to rebrand cats to be less snobby and more in tune with the huggy Internet age.

Jackson Galaxy, the tattooed, pierced, catwhispering host of “My Cat From Hell,” on Animal Planet, held a standing-room-only session called “CATastrophe: Good, Bad and Ugly of Internet Cats.”

He advised the crowd — some wearing orange cat ears — that, rather than calling cats “alooof,” it might be better to describe them as “freethinkers,” “Zen masters” and “Buddhists.”

Galaxy’s attempt to warm up the image of cats was undercut by research suggesting that the only species that seems to show no regret or forgiveness after spats are cats.

“I would hesitate to call cats domestic animals,” he told me, adding that he liked the fact that they are not “slavish,” but rather “no compromise” creatures who “kill stuff really well.”

The focus on felines made me wish I could roam the festival with Tobermory, the barbed British cat with the “velvet tread and studied unconcern” from the Saki short story. In the 1911 yarn, a member of Lady Blemley’s house party teaches Tobermory, or Toby for short, to talk. Indifferent to the feelings of humans, Toby is brutally honest, exposing the guests’ dalliances, deceptions and foibles.

I needed someone like Toby to help me cut through the verbal clutter and Panglossian spin in a world where celebrities are “influencers,” people are “users,” news is “content,” “platforms” are not shoes, the “Deep Web” is no place for Charlotte, and virtual reality trumps plain old reality. Toby would glide coolly past the drones in the Robot Petting Zoo. But he would make quick work of Yik Yak co-founders Tyler Droll and Brooks Buffington, former frat brothers wearing matching turquoise Yik Yak socks for their interview on stage.

They tried to push back against criticism that their anonymous, location-based social app used by students is a magnet for crude sexual hazing, bomb threats and bullying: the intimidating “Wild West of anonymous social apps,” as a law professor put it in a *Times* article.

Droll and Buffington said they wanted to create a site that would offer “a level playing field for content,” no matter your race, gender, ethnicity or popularity. They talked about how it could provide lifesaving help on

donation drives and showed a sample of innocent “yaks.” In one, a lost girl was escorted back to her building; in another, redheads were praised as awesome.

“Do you think we’re so feeble-minded that we believe this flimflam about Yik Yak?” Toby would say serenely. “Look at any anonymous comments section online. Even I shudder, and I have claws and highly developed feral instincts.”

At a Marie Claire dinner for “Veep” at The Spotify House, I asked Tyler Winklevoss, who is developing a stock market for Bitcoin with his twin brother, to explain the invisible currency.

“Bitcoin is Internet money,” he said. “It’s a value transfer protocol.”

When I asked about the nefarious Bitcoin transactions in the Internet netherworld, Winklevoss protested: “People use cash every second of the day to do illegal things. Bitcoin is traceable and cash is anonymous.”

If Toby deigned to accept the Marie Claire invitation, he no doubt would interpolate: “Bitcoin more transparent? Balderdash! We don’t even know who invented it. It’s Disney dollars for tech nerds.”

Then there was my interview with Alex Winter, who graduated from playing Bill in “Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure” to create an Epix documentary about the Darknet, where the Silk Road marketplace operated with Bitcoin, called “The Deep Web.”

“It’s like looking under the hood of the Internet,” Winter said, arguing that the Deep Web is “largely used for good” by government agencies, dissidents and journalists.

But Toby would certainly beg to differ, scoffing, “It’s a first-rate bazaar for drug dealers, child pornography peddlers, illegal arms salesman and Bitcoin burglars.”

If I dragged Toby to the panel with Dan Rather and the former Obama adviser Dan Pfeiffer, he would twitch at the exuberance of Pfeiffer predicting a Meerkatting “revolution” in coverage. And Toby would put his paws together, as many in the audience did, when Rather advised prudence during this tech “orgy of delight” and insisted that journalists will always be needed to separate the “brass tacks from the bull shine.”

Toby would sniff that South by Southwest was more social than media and prowl off to catch up with Judd Apatow.

Not one to pussyfoot, Toby would offer his biting commentary as he left: “People at South By are not aiming higher anymore. They are aiming niche. They aren’t looking to do anything larger than themselves. They are aiming to monetize eyeballs in a petty way. They are making even less meaningful social apps and not creating things that are either blazingly new or deeply important to our lives or transformative to society. It’s not inspiring to aggregate 100,000 tweets.”

Meow.

■

Maureen Dowd, winner of the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for distinguished commentary, became a columnist on The New York Times Op-Ed page in 1995.

MAUREEN DOWD

Comment

People at South by Southwest aren’t aiming higher anymore. They are aiming niche.

YOUR VIEWS

‘Statue worship’ is really just respect for ancestry

In living in Umatilla County and Pendleton for 75 years, I though I had seen all the dumb thinking in the area, but the comment by the editor in the March 20 *East Oregonian* tops it all.

The conversion of the Jackson Sundown statue to a cartoon character and it is so charming by a member of the city council. These people should go back to human behavior school.

The comment that this is worship of a statue is ridiculous. The term is respect of a person and ancestry.

To make a comparison of purpose the editor should picture a statue of E.B. Aldrich at the *EO* and see Ms. Brown’s reaction to making him a circus clown.

Ed M. Tucker
Pendleton

Requa’s contribution makes Main Street an apt location

Don Requa made a significant contribution to the continuing feeling of pride in the

Pendleton community. His Buckaroo football teams dominated Eastern Oregon and were a statewide power for many years. He sent many players on to major college programs on scholarship, while many more of “Requa’s boys” went on to play at smaller colleges because of the love of the game they had developed under Requa’s tutelage.

These boys went on to become teachers, coaches, school administrators, doctors, dentists, lawyers, farmers, ranchers and successful businessmen. Many of them returned to the Pendleton community to continue contributing to the city’s pride and success.

At the time of his retirement, he was the winningest football coach in Oregon high school history. His players and fans have combined to raise money to erect a statue in his memory in downtown Pendleton.

It is appropriate that it be placed in a location where it will continually be a reminder to the community of Requa’s legacy. I am proud to speak out on behalf of my friend.

Chuck Solberg
Welches, Ore.