

Quick takes

Man wins \$676,000 on Wildhorse penny machine

Hey that was my quarter! Lol
— Danyale Walker

I can’t even win lucky number Tuesday at Bi-Mart.
— Eric Skaggs

I think that’s about the amount I have lost there! Lol! Congrats!!
— Myrna-Alex Cazares

Hey, aren’t you my second cousin’s brother-in-laws’ twice removed uncle? We might be related ... LOL jk ... congrats dude.
— Jamie Woodard

Cool spend it wisely and save some. Some people get foolish and still end up broke
— Sandra Stephan

Echo man defeats feds

It’s nice to hear of people standing for what they believe in and the proper way to do it. You are setting a good example for your kids.
— Tracy Bara

I’m inspired! I’m gonna take the kids canoeing on Lake Oswego!
— Craig Murk

Really miss the days and the river with all the islands before the dam went in, what a shame.
— Teresa Thorpe Long

Roundup a probable carcinogen

You can pick anything apart and find it causes cancer. Quite simply, without it, farmers could not produce the quality crops they do when Roundup is used properly now.
— Mark A Anderson

I don’t see a downside to enforcing chemical companies to test their own products.
— Sabrina Vertrees

Without GMOs, the world will go hungry. People don’t understand Roundup or what it really is, glyphosate. Glyphosate is the active ingredient in Roundup which is a contact herbicide with no residual it is not in your food.
— Conley Kittredge

What’s Pendleton going to do without the Roundup?
— Louie D Smith

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week’s takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

Airports in the rural West are getting squeezed

By JON KOVASH
Writers on the Range

Starting sometime in May my only option for flying from Moab, Utah, to a regional hub will be to get on a Brasilia 30-seat turboprop (Great Lakes Airlines) that flies over the heart of the Rockies to Denver.

Until then, we have Beechcraft 1900s that fly to Salt Lake City. Both of these are venerable aircraft that have served small towns in the mountains for decades, but now are destined to either rust in the Arizona desert or continue their service in Third World countries.

Rural Westerners may be among the last to fly in airliners with propellers. Within just a few years, jets with 76 to 100 seats will be at the bottom level of service available to rural airports. For towns like Moab and Vernal, Utah, that means at least tens of millions of dollars are needed for airport upgrades. It’s the end of an era for airports with a windsock and a doublewide for a terminal.

Rural air service faces a vast transformation in the next few years, especially in the mountain West, with its longer flight distances and greater number of isolated communities. The U.S. Government Accountability Office says the nation’s air service in general is trending downward, but small airports will get hit the hardest, offering fewer flights and fewer airplanes.

Already, in the last two years, 27 small airports have lost service altogether. Great Lakes, which serves Cheyenne,

Denver, Phoenix and Los Angeles, has abandoned 17 cities since July, and been kicked out of several others. Constant air carrier switches have become the norm for small airports.

The current crisis is due to a number of factors:

Continued consolidation of airlines has allowed carriers to cherry-pick the most profitable routes, leaving low-traffic communities in the lurch.

The majors have outsourced their short routes to “more obscure local airlines,” as the GAO puts it.

There’s a pilot shortage, meaning a shortage of pilots willing to start at a sub-McDonald’s pay.

Continuing volatility in fuel costs.

Continuing risk that Congress will terminate Essential Air Service program subsidies.

Planes with 50 seats or less are largely no longer made and are vanishing from U.S. service; many of these planes are ready for a major overhaul. This places smaller towns at a huge disadvantage.

Eventually, when the smoke clears, we will be riding in safer planes because they will be newer, and because the new regional jets have a longer range, more power to get through or fly over bad weather,

and better de-icing systems. Cabins in the new planes are also taller, roomier and quieter, with bigger windows and more legroom.

Whether rural flying will be safer overall is a different question. Since deregulation, the industry has created a second tier of regional carriers that seem engaged in a “race to the bottom” to cut costs. If you’re a resident of a small town out West, chances are overwhelming that you rely on federally subsidized carriers, such as St. George, Utah-based Skywest or Cheyenne, Wyoming-based Great Lakes. Both are among the 10-lowest payers in the industry, according to Bloomberg News.

Current federal safety regulations require \$100,000 worth of flight training to get an entry-level pilot job, which at Great Lakes pays a paltry \$14,000 a year. The pilots/ union says that the pilot shortage is “self-inflicted” by the carriers, and the GAO backs them up — a report last year concluded many pilots have not given up flying; they are simply working abroad or in the military. Others have switched to higher-paying occupations.

Like most regional carriers, Skywest will work for anyone. Most of its planes are badged with the logo of United Express,

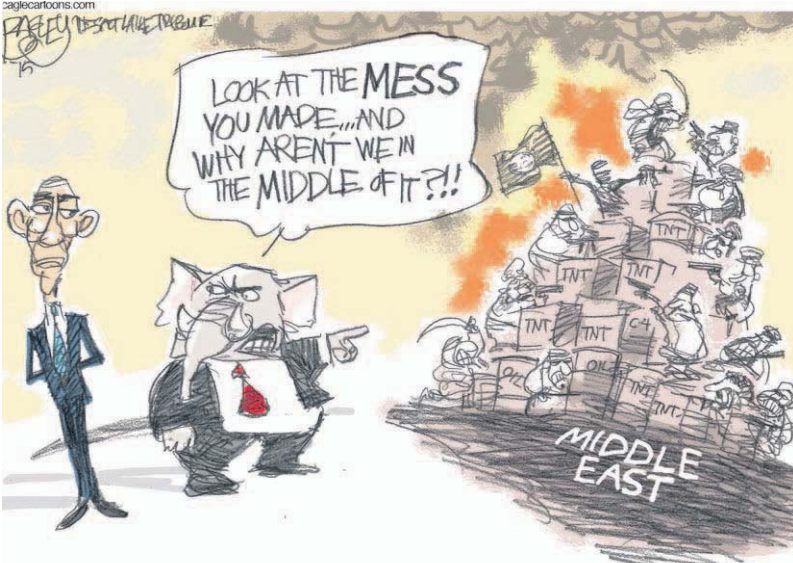
Delta Connection, US Airways Express or Alaska Airlines. Skywest’s older planes have previously received FAA citations for airworthiness violations. The company says it wants to get out of “unprofitable 50-seat contracts” and into 76-seat jets. The GAO has concluded, as economics would suggest, that bigger planes “often lead to reduced frequency in many airport markets.”

The future is uncertain for even the largest and longest-established mountain airports. In Aspen, you can board a Bombardier Q400, a modern turboprop, to get to Denver, or take a CRJ900 twin-engine jet to more distant hubs. Both are the kind of high-performance aircraft necessary for dealing with thin air, mountain weather and unforgiving topography, but both are facing ultimate retirement. The next generation of high-performance regional jets will have a bigger wingspan; that means Aspen’s venerable Sardy Field will need a wider runway and other improvements to the tune of well north of \$200 million.

Will propellers vanish altogether? It’s hard to say. Several major manufacturers vow to continue making and marketing a new generation of quieter, “high-speed” turbo-props that will be able to compete in smaller and niche markets. Meanwhile, we who live in rural outposts face a more difficult flying future.

■

Jon Kovash is a contributor to Writers on the Range, a column service of High Country News. He writes in Moab, Utah.



STEM shortage overblown

Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google, believes passionately that the United States needs more skilled foreign workers. He has long advocated increasing the number of so-called H-1B visas, which allow those workers to come to the U.S. for several years and, in many cases, work for lower wages than current employees. Schmidt is frustrated that Congress hasn’t done as he and other tech moguls want.

“In the long list of stupid policies of the U.S. government, I think our attitude toward immigration has got to be near the top,” Schmidt said during a recent appearance at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. “Everyone actually agrees that there should be more H-1B visas in order to create more tech, more science, more analytical jobs. Everyone agrees, in both parties.”

The Eric Schmidt pleading for more foreign workers is the same Eric Schmidt who boasts of turning away thousands upon thousands of job seekers who apply for a few prized positions at Google. For example, at an appearance in Cleveland last October to promote his book, “How Google Works,” Schmidt explained that his company receives at least 1,000 applications for every job opening. “The good news is that we have computers to do the initial vetting,” Schmidt explained, according to an account in the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Other tech leaders join Schmidt in calling for more foreign workers. Some companies are actually lobbying for more H-1Bs and laying off American staff at the same time. For example, last year Microsoft announced the layoff of 18,000 people at the very moment it was pushing Congress for more guest worker visas.

Given all that, there’s not quite the unanimous agreement on the need for more foreign workers that Schmidt claims. At a recent hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, a number of experts testified that the H-1B program, so sought-after by CEOs, is being abused to harm American workers.

Ron Hira, a Howard University professor and author of the book



BYRON YORK
Comment

“Outsourcing America,” told the story of Southern California Edison, which recently got rid of 500 IT employees and replaced them with a smaller force of lower-paid workers brought in from overseas through the H-1B program.

The original employees were making an average of about \$110,000 a year, Hira testified; the replacements were brought to Southern California Edison by outsourcing firms that pay an average of between \$65,000 and \$75,000.

“To add insult to injury,” Hira said, “SCE forced its American workers to train their H-1B replacements as a condition of receiving their severance packages.”

Hira testified that such situations are not unusual. And on the larger issue of whether there is, as many tech executives claim, a critical shortage of labor in what are called the STEM fields — science, technology, engineering and math — another professor, Hal Salzman of Rutgers, testified that the shortage simply does not exist.

“The U.S. supply of top-performing graduates is large and far exceeds the hiring needs of the STEM industries, with only one of every two STEM graduates finding a STEM job,” Salzman testified. “The guest worker supply is very large (and) it is highly concentrated in the IT industry, leading to both stagnant wages and job insecurity.”

Not everyone agrees with Schmidt on the need for more H-1B workers. Certainly not the laid-off IT employees at Southern California Edison. And not the workers reportedly displaced by similar practices at Disney, Harley Davidson, Cargill, Pfizer and other companies. Who knows? Maybe some of those workers have been among the 1,000-plus who apply for every Google opening.

To hear the witnesses before the Senate Judiciary Committee tell it, Congress needs to act — not to increase the number of H-1Bs but to close the loopholes that allow them to be so badly abused at such a cost to American workers.

■

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

When Nancy Pelosi met Johnny Boehner

Today, concerned citizens, we will consider when we want our elected representatives to just throw in the towel and get something done.

This comes up less often than you might think. On Wednesday, for instance, members of the House of Representatives had a choice between casting a meaningless “no” vote on a budget bill or supporting a plan that fails to do anything positive, including, um, add up.

The budget is not a real law so much as a blueprint of where the majority party stands. This year, the Republican majority in the House is in favor of putting a ton of new money into defense without actually paying for it. Plus cutting programs that help poor people, and ending Medicare as we know it for Americans now younger than 56.

Grab the picket signs, 55-year-olds. Once again, they’re out to get you.

The bill I’m thinking of is different. It’s a bipartisan plan cooked up by John Boehner and Nancy Pelosi. (Question: What do you imagine when you think of those two cooking? Macbeth or Cupcake Wars?)

The subject was another fiscal cliff. Next week, Medicare payments to doctors are scheduled to drop by 21 percent. The formula for reimbursement is all screwed up, and Congress is always having to put in a last-minute fix.

But this bill does not just kick the can down the road. It actually solves the problem. It fixes the formula and pays for the solution by raising the cost of Medicare for the wealthiest recipients. Plus, it’s got money for community health clinics and the CHIP health care program for children.

Boehner and Pelosi kept their negotiations supersecret, but, when they unveiled their bill, the House members seemed pretty darned happy. The Rules Committee approved it Wednesday with a voice vote, and much self-congratulations.

“Genuine bipartisanship.”

“A kumbaya moment.”

“This bill is not perfect.”

(Lawmakers only call something



GAIL COLLINS
Comment

“not perfect” when they’re seriously trying to resolve a problem. Otherwise, it’s the most wonderful and important piece of legislation in a decade, and it turns out they’re repealing Obamacare again.)

You know there’s a catch, right? Well, the Senate Democrats hate it.

They hate the fact that the children’s health program, which they’ve been working on extending for another four years, will be extended for only two. “The Democrats are going to stick together here,” Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio told *The Times*. “I don’t see how you say yes to doctors and no to 10 million children.”

And they hate that the bill includes the Hyde amendment, banning federal funding for abortions. This is a particularly sore point. “Our goal is to repeal Hyde,” said Dawn Laguens, executive vice president of Planned Parenthood. “It’s bad for women; it hurts their health; it damages poor women, in particular, and this is an unnecessary compromise.”

Laguens is certainly right about the Hyde amendment being terrible, and you’d be shocked if she felt differently about the bill. Planned Parenthood’s job is to support women’s reproductive choices, not keep the Medicare program from being messed up.

But the Hyde amendment has been in appropriations for decades. It’s pretty much chiseled in stone. The pro-choice caucus in the House supports the health care bill, which the members have concluded makes no change in the status quo.

“I don’t like it,” Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Fla., grumbled in the Rules Committee meeting. But, he told the group that if Louise Slaughter,

the pro-choice caucus co-chair, was satisfied “and Nancy Pelosi is satisfied, then I guess I should shut up.”

Most of the Senate Democrats seem to have gone from declaring war to grumbling under their breath. You can understand why they’re miserable. Some of them have been working on these health issues for years, and all of a sudden they discover that Pelosi and Boehner have made a secret deal without giving them the least bit of input. It is yet another bruising wound in the greatest enmity in Washington, which is not Republicans versus Democrats but House members versus senators.

Also, there was that unfortunate situation last week when the Senate Democrats bottled up a bill to help the victims of human trafficking because they discovered a tiny clause expanding the rules against funding for abortion.

It was a totally righteous battle, except for the part where the Democrats had failed to notice the language was in the bill until the last minute. But now everyone is dug in, and if the Boehner-Pelosi bill passes, the senators will be helping the doctors before they help the sex-trafficking victims.

So what would you do, people? I’d vote for throwing in the towel. When you’re in the minority, there’s a limit to how good any deal is going to look.

■

Gail Collins joined The New York Times in 1995 as a member of the editorial board and later as an Op-Ed columnist. In 2001 she became the first woman ever appointed editor of the Times’s editorial page.

What would you do?
I’d vote for throwing in the towel.
When you’re in the minority there’s a limit to how good any deal is going to look.