

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Upside-down on education

Oregon's education budget has passed the Democratic-dominated state Senate and House. It now travels to Democratic governor Kate Brown, who is likely to sign it.

When one party dominates all three seats of power, it has the ability to craft such legislation exactly how it pleases. And Democrats have. Every single Democratic vote in the state Senate backed this budget, but not one Republican did. It was a party-line vote in the House, too.

None of that should be surprising. People with power tend to use that power. People of another political party tend to vote against its opposition's plans.

But here is what may surprise you: the Republican education proposal would have put more money in the education budget than the Democratic one. Yes, you read that right. The stance of both parties would have surprised national political observers.

Granted, there was some political grandstanding in those GOP votes.

*The Oregonian* reported that Sen. Alan Olsen, R-Canby, said in a floor speech on Monday: "The day after the resurrection of Christ, we will witness the death knell of our education system." Olsen then paused for a moment of silence.

So yes, there was a little bit of hyperbole involved. And plenty of attempts to tar the other side.

But many of those votes weren't grandstanding at all. Many were based on the needs of their districts, needs that would not be met by the Democratic-backed budget.

That's because most Oregon Republicans with seats in the

Senate and House are from rural areas. Most of those places are not growing at the pace of the state's urban core, and most are not seeing steady economic gain. That means a "status quo" education budget will harm their districts.

Take an Eastern Oregon example: smaller Pendleton School District, with declining enrollment, will probably have to cut employees under the new budget if the governor signs it as is. Larger Hermiston School District, with quickly expanding enrollment, will be able to keep all of their employees and their current programming.

That's what the big city Democrats see in the budget: enough money to stay afloat while they work to remake the system from preschool on up. And this is what rural Republicans see: not enough dollars to keep what is already one of the worst K-12 education systems in the nation from taking another step backward.

We know money isn't the sole answer to anything, and that just throwing dollars at a problem is no way to solve it.

But when those dollars translate to reduced class sizes, more classroom instruction time and more teachers — you better believe they would be good for Oregon students, especially rural ones in economically-depressed areas.

The governor will sign this budget and school districts around the state will make do with the dollars they get. But we have to say, it's good to know that sometimes politicians are able to rise off the floor of their party platform to do what is best for their constituents.

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

# What should Oregon's state book be?

*The Oregonian*

Maybe it's the way in which Ken Kesey's writing elevates Oregon's rivers and rain into primal characters that makes his 1964 novel "Sometimes a Great Notion" resonate with so many readers. Maybe it's the similarity Oregonians see between the fictional Stamper family's "Never give an inch" mantra and the heroic stubbornness hardwired into the state's culture.

The reasons are as varied as the popular book's fans. But based on comments to an *Oregonian/OregonLive* editorial last week, most readers appeared to agree that Kesey's novel about a logging family bucking a union strike in a coastal Oregon town would best fill the role of an Oregon state book.

Not that anyone is actually pushing for an official state book the way that legislators have anointed, for instance, an official state microbe. The idea to solicit nominations stemmed from a recent discussion after Mississippi legislators introduced a bill to make the Bible their official state book.

According to many readers, the idea was a bad one — how can you pick just one book from a state that has produced dozens of worthy contenders?

A commenter under the name bendbrilliance argued that "Books are different than birds and rocks. So I say no to designating a state book. Just enjoy them all."

At the very least, readers' contributions make for an impressive anthology of recommended reading on a wide range of topics. The titles and their subjects reflect many cultures, themes and personalities of a state that cannot be defined by a single book.

Readers highlighted the familiar and the obscure: Craig Lesley's "Winterkill," Beverly Cleary's "Beezus and Ramona," and John Quick's "Fool's Hill." They named Bernard Malamud's "A New Life," the "Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition," and Ursula K. LeGuin's "The Left Hand of Darkness."

The list includes Terence O'Donnell's "An Arrow In The Earth: General Joel Palmer and the Indians of Oregon," Don Berry's "Trask," Katherine Dunn's "Geek Love," and Joe Blakely's "Bellfountain Giant Killers."

There were, of course, less-than-serious suggestions that commented

more on the state of Oregon politics than on its literary tradition, such as John Kennedy Toole's "A Confederacy of Dunces" and Marx and Engels' "Manifesto of the Communist Party."

But in the end, as flawed as the quest might be, we were in search of a single book that conveyed something universal about Oregon. And commenter Christopher Lord, a native Oregonian from Astoria who is a local author as well, rose to the challenge with this bit of introspective lit crit:

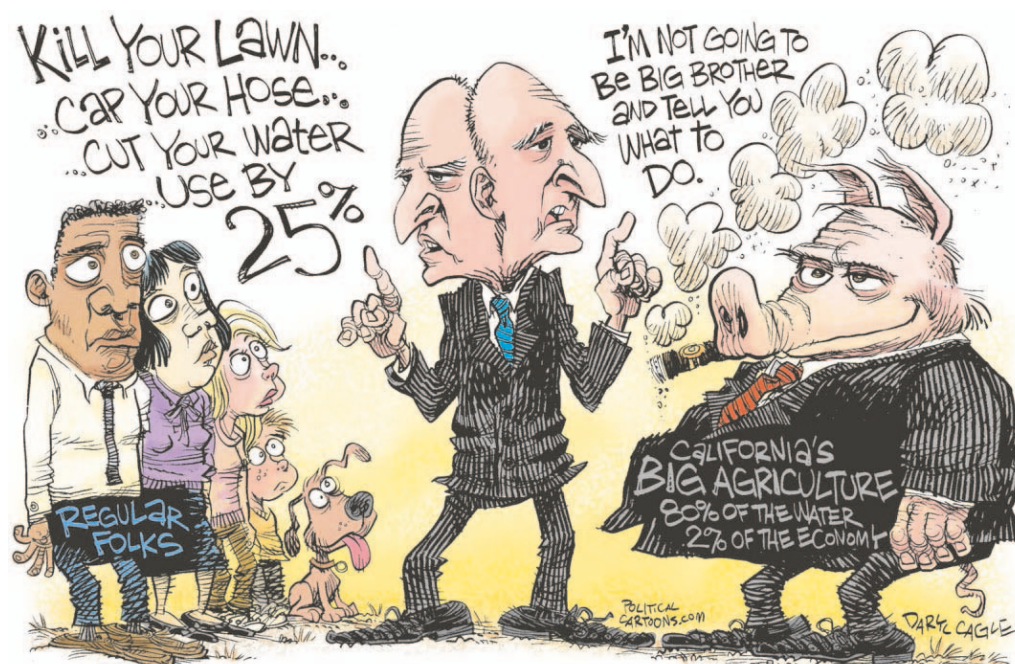
"Sometimes a Great Notion is in a class by itself, a grandiloquent impressionistic tour de force of its time with our prejudices, faults, and human limitations all on display. But the language is magnificent, from its opening lines that beckon 'come look:'

"Non-linear? Digressive? Flawed? Of course it is, in the same way that Huckleberry Finn and Moby Dick are flawed. But it is THE great Oregon novel, still read widely and discussed fifty years after publication and almost certainly destined to be read a hundred years from now. Every great book shows its age and the limitations of its time but I will defend this great crazy novel, and I'm apparently one of the horrible gay tree-hugging progressives described below that leans so far to the left that it's a wonder I can stand at all.

"What Kesey captures of a world that has changed is in itself enough of a reason to read, debate, and fulminate at the horrors of Oregon's past; that serves as a jumping off point for how we sustain the beauty of Oregon that no one has captured better than Kesey in this novel."

We would add one other reason to Lord's compelling argument. The book apparently possesses a unifying force that draws impassioned fans from across the political spectrum and bridges the urban-rural divide often apparent in comments on news and opinion sites. When else would some of these commenters — who can't even agree on their criticism of the editorial board as ultraconservative or hopelessly liberal — find common ground?

And that is really what the humble goal of a state book — or state anything for that matter — should be: The ability to shine a light on the similarities that bind us, for a time, before our entrenched divisions and rivalries set in again.



## OTHER VIEWS

# What candidates need

I have two presidential election traditions. I begin covering each campaign by reading a book about Abraham Lincoln, and I end each election night, usually after midnight, at the statue of the Lincoln Memorial.

I begin by reading a book about Lincoln not because it's fair to hold any of the candidates to the Lincoln standard, but because he gets you thinking about what sorts of things we should be looking for in a presidential candidate. Any candidate worthy of support should at least have in rudiments what Lincoln had in fullness: a fundamental vision, a golden temperament and a shrewd strategy for how to cope with the political realities of the moment.

Lincoln developed his fundamental vision in a way that seems to refute our contemporary educational practices. Today we pile on years of education. We assign hundreds of books over the years. We cluster our students on campuses with people with similar grades and test scores.

Lincoln had very little formal education. He was not cloistered on a campus but spent his formative years in daily contact with an astounding array of characters. If his social experience was wide, his literary experience was narrow. He read fewer books over his entire formative life than many contemporary students do in a single year. In literary terms, he preferred depth to breadth; grasp to reach. He intensely read Shakespeare, the King James Bible, "The Pilgrim's Progress" and Parson Weems' "The Life of Washington."

This education gave him a moral vision that emerged from life, not from reading.

He saw America as a land where ambitious poor boys and girls like himself could transform themselves through hard, morally improving work. He believed in a government that built canals and railroads and banks to stoke the fires of industry. He believed slavery was wrong in part because people should be free to control their own labor. He believed in a providence that was active but unknowable.

This Whiggish vision was his north star. He could bob and weave as politics demanded, but his incremental means always pointed to the same transformational end. Any presidential candidate needs that sort of consistent animating vision — an image of an Ideal America baked so deeply into his or her bones as to be unconscious, useful as a compass when the distractions of Washington life come in a flurry.

Lincoln's temperament surpasses all explanation. His early experience of depression and suffering gave him a radical self-honesty. He had the double-minded



DAVID BROOKS  
Comment

personality that we need in all our leaders. He was involved in a bloody civil war, but he was an exceptionally poor hater. He was deeply engaged, but also able to step back; a passionate advocate, but also able to see his enemy's point of view; aware of his own power, but aware of when he was helpless in the hands of fate; extremely self-confident but extremely humble. Candidates who don't have a contradictory temperament have no way to check themselves and are thus dangerous.

Lincoln's skills as a political tactician seem like the least of his gifts, but are among his greatest. It's easy to be a true believer, or to govern or campaign with your pedal to the metal all the time. It's much harder to know when to tap on the brake and when to step on the gas.

We study Lincoln's tactical phase shifts in the Grand Strategy class I help with at Yale. There's never enough time to cover them all.

Most of Lincoln's efforts were designed to tamp down passion for the sake of sustainable, incremental progress. Others would have delivered a heroic first Inaugural Address, but Lincoln made his a dry legal brief. Others would

have stuffed the Emancipation Proclamation with ringing exclamations, but Lincoln's draft is as dull as possible. Others wanted an immediate end to slavery. Lincoln tried to end it through unromantic, gradual economic means. He hoped that if he limited the demand for slaves (by halting the spread of slavery and by paying people not to keep them) he could drive down the price and render the whole enterprise unprofitable.

This year, Lincoln's strategic restraint is the most necessary of his traits. We live in a partisan time, with movements who treat trimmers, compromisers and incrementalists harshly. But, to pass legislation, the next president will have to perpetually disappoint the fervent and devise a legislative strategy that can consistently get a House majority and 60 Senate votes.

We will not get a Lincoln. A person with his face could not survive the TV age. A person with his capacity for introspection could not survive the 24/7 self-branding campaign environment. But we do need someone with a portion of his gifts — someone who is philosophically grounded, emotionally mature and tactically cunning.

Well, at least we can find the closest possible approximation.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*.

## YOUR VIEWS

# Gun background check bill manipulated the process

Senate Bill 941 was passed out of committee Monday. If you are not familiar with this bill, it calls for increased background checks on private party gun sales, similar to Washington's 1594. No matter how you feel about guns, you should be disgusted at the way the sponsors of this bill have manipulated the legislative process to ram this through. Similar measures have been rejected in the past when put to a vote, so the sponsors have declared it an emergency. By declaring an emergency, it prevents a vote of the people or changes through the initiative process. Oregon already has one of the lowest gun murder rates in the USA ranking at 41st, so I fail to see how this is an emergency.

Amendments proposed by Senator Kim Thatcher were rejected, even though they would have accomplished the stated goal of the bill sponsors, but would have been much less intrusive to the law abiding. It doesn't take much analysis to realize that felons will not obey this law, just like they ignore the laws against murder, theft, etc. They will get their weapons they way they always have,

through theft or the black market.

Many law enforcement agencies have publicly come out against this bill and the county commissioners in several counties have come out with statements supporting the Second Amendment. Unfortunately, our county sheriff and county commission have been notably silent.

It is hard for me to see how this passes a smell test when legislative tricks have to be used to enact this bill, especially with so many law enforcement agencies opposed to it. It is being driven by money from misguided outside interests like Michael Bloomberg. I reject the idea that someone from a state with one of the highest violent crime rates is relevant in Oregon with our already low and dropping rate. I urge you to email every senator (especially the Democrats, one or two swing votes will make a difference) in the Oregon Senate urging them to reject this bill. Before you say you don't like guns so you are in favor of this bill, remember the same manipulation of the legislative process could be used on something you are passionate about next.

Mike Navratil  
Pendleton

## 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.