

EAST OREGONIAN

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OUR VIEW

The power of the Post Office

Like the steady climb of gasoline prices, the price of stamps keeps going up. Obviously, there is a direct link between the two. Transportation costs help set the price of delivering a letter.

But there is another similarity between the price of gas and the cost of a stamp: we love to grumble about them both.

Yet as a nation, we have a point of pride with the U.S. Post Office (Pony Express and through sleet or snow or gloom of night, etc.) that we don't have for any oil and gas company. The USPS is as American as Norman Rockwell and apple pie, we imagine all three of which reside in one of the most patriotic wings in the Smithsonian.

Yet the Post Office faces attacks that other Americana seems immune from. Cutbacks and closures have already hampered the nationwide network that allows the USPS to operate efficiently and effectively. And more cuts are coming, many of them negatively impacting rural America. Eastern Oregon will not be immune.

Next on the slashing list is the mail distribution center in Pendleton, along with similar centers in Bend and Eugene. That means nearly all sorting of Oregon mail — inbound and outbound — will be done in one large facility in Portland.

The loss of local distribution abilities will have plenty of effects on the economy of Eastern Oregon, negatively impact local customers, result in the loss of jobs and continue the degradation of service.

The USPS tells us the decision has already been made, there is no

turning back now, and we guess we must operate under that assumption. But this sort of self-inflicted wound is not just debilitating to mail delivery, but to the fabric of life in rural America. We depend on the mail to be timely and efficient in order to pay bills, deliver goods and facilitate communication.

Heck, the EO Media Group is one local company that depends on our local mail distribution center. Our *Capital Press* newspaper is mailed each week to about 35,000 subscribers across the Northwest after we print it in Pendleton. The more time delayed as it shuttles between Pendleton and Portland, the less nimble we are in reaching our customers.

The USPS remains a sound business model, despite a national image to the contrary. Post-recession, the agency is back into the black, reaping more than \$1.4 billion in profit last year.

And now is a good time to remind Americans that the USPS uses no tax dollars to operate. These cutbacks are not some governmental belt tightening. It is, however, an enterprise that is forced to make cuts and layoffs in order to comply with onerous government regulation.

Congress doesn't have to bail out or prop up the USPS. Thankfully, it doesn't need it. What it does need to do is allow the USPS to operate like any other business: nix the regulation that it pre-fund future retiree health benefits.

Especially here in rural America, we rely on the USPS to make our economy hum and strengthen our connection to the larger world.

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

Give up on reforming PERS

(Salem) Statesman Journal

Give up on trying to "reform" the Public Employees Retirement System.

That was the unspoken subtext of the Oregon Supreme Court's unanimous ruling last week, which struck down most of the PERS reforms made by the Legislature in 2013.

The court ruled that PERS regulations at the time of employment and retirement are an ironclad contract with the public employees covered by those provisions. Changes can be made, but they will apply only to pension calculations based on employees' pay that is earned after the time of those changes.

Sound confusing? It will be a mess for PERS going forward, as future pensions will allow different cost-of-living allowances for different years of public employment.

We supported the PERS reforms but thought they did not go far enough. However, the Supreme Court sided with PERS recipients that a contract is a lifetime contract, even when lawmakers might not realize they're creating one.

No more changes

There is little chance that any future PERS reforms could pass constitutional muster.

State Senate President Peter Courtney confirmed that in a meeting with the *Statesman Journal* Editorial Board hours after the Supreme Court released its decision. PERS reforms are off the table, for now and probably forever.

"This isn't a flimflam decision. It's a well-thought-out decision," he said.

Workers vs. retirees

In effect, the decision pits current and future employees against current and future retirees. Governments must pay retirees for the cost savings that now have been deemed unconstitutional. The state, cities, counties, school districts and other entities — could owe as much as \$870 million during the 2017-19 budget cycle alone. That money can only be found by increasing government revenues, decreasing services or both.

During the Great Recession, and

before these short-lived reforms, school districts and government agencies were cutting jobs to find sufficient money for their PERS obligations. Unless the Legislature or the public provide more revenue, Oregon will face that situation again.

More complex pensions

The ruling creates a pension-system nightmare, with different levels of cost-of-living increases applying to current employees' work performed before and after the reforms took effect.

For example, employees hired since August 2003 are covered by the Oregon Public Service Retirement Plan, a hybrid, stripped-down version of the earlier PERS. When they retire, those employees likely will get far smaller benefits while bearing the societal baggage of being linked with PERS.

One positive aspect of the court ruling is that taxpayers no longer must provide special benefits for retirees who have moved out of state.

The answer

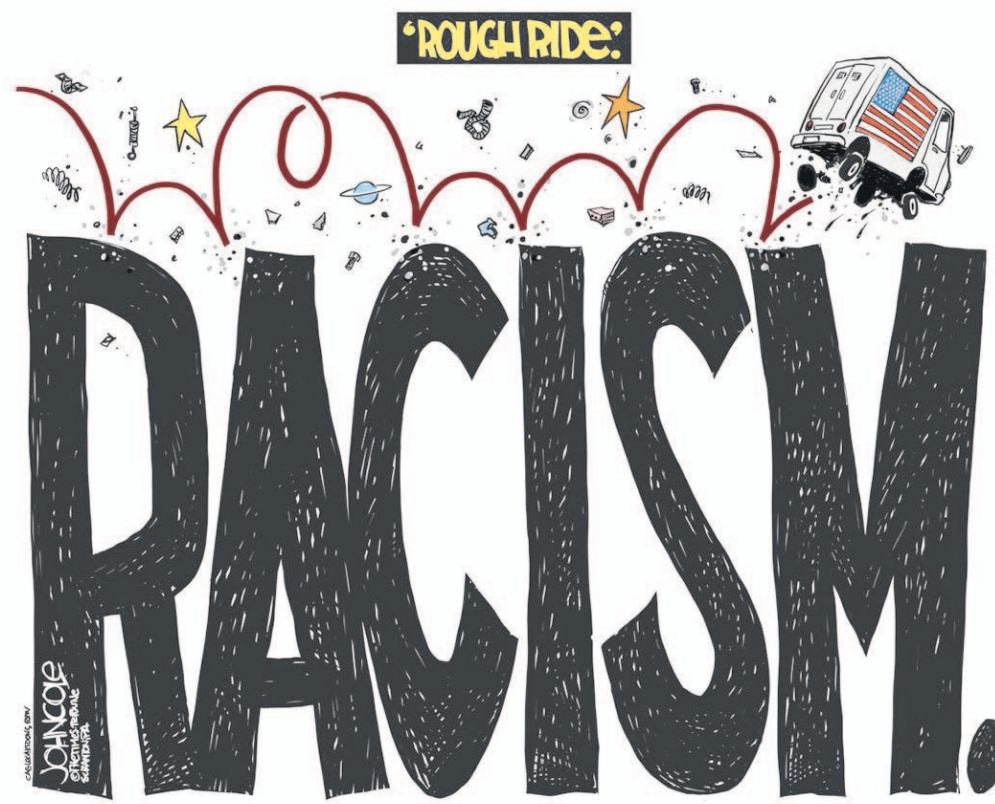
Yes, there is an answer to the court's ruling, and it involves Gov. Kate Brown and the Legislature. But it has little to do with PERS itself.

Oregon government is most dependent on the revenue from jobs — the income taxes paid by individuals, small businesses and, to some extent, corporations. Now, government faces an increased — restored, actually — PERS obligation that could top \$4 billion over the lifetimes of the affected retirees.

If the Legislature and the governor want to meet those obligations without sacrificing services, they must help Oregon businesses prosper, so they can create more jobs, especially middle-income jobs. Thus the overriding issue for the 2015 Legislature becomes strengthening the economy and supporting businesses — now and in the long term — which in turn will help enlarge the state coffers.

The only way for Oregon to achieve and maintain an economic advantage is for it to have the friendliest, healthiest business climate along North America's Pacific Rim.

Editor's note: Letters to the editor regarding issues on the May ballot must be received by the *East Oregonian* by 5 p.m. May 7 to ensure publication in our May 9 edition. Letters received after the deadline will be posted online but not in print. Email them to editor@eastoregonian.com or drop them at 211 S.E. Byers in Pendleton.



OTHER VIEWS

Secret's doomed script

In every episode of "Silicon Valley," the terrific HBO comedy series created by Mike Judge, there is always a moment, rendered utterly deadpan, that both mocks and explains the current, are-we-in-a-bubble-yet state of play in, well, Silicon Valley.

In one episode this season, for instance, the show's hero, Richard Hendricks, the nerdy founder of Pied Piper, mentions the plans he has "once we have a subscription-revenue model." His backer, an obnoxious billionaire, leaps out of his seat. "No, no, no!" he exclaims. "Why would you go after revenue?"

"To make money?" Richard answers meekly. "If you have no revenue, you can say you are pre-revenue," explains the billionaire. "You're a potential pure play. It's not about how much you earn; it's about what you're worth. And who's worth the most? Companies that lose money!"

In other episodes this season, we've been introduced to an app called "Bro" — its only function is to allow someone to send the word "bro" to someone else — and the coming of "datageddon," thanks to all the "selfies and useless files people refuse to delete."

And, of course, there is the way all the young, scruffy entrepreneurs on "Silicon Valley" profess to be in business to "make the world a better place" rather than get rich. "We're making the world a better place through Paxos algorithms for consensus protocols," says one company founder at a TechCrunch Disrupt conference.

"And we're making the world a better place through software-defying data centers for cloud computing," says another.

Which perhaps explains why I immediately thought of Judge's parody of life in techland as I read the real-life news last week that the social app Secret was shutting down after only 16 months. Like many of the fake companies on "Silicon Valley," Secret was based on a truly ridiculous idea: that an app that allowed people to send anonymous messages would not only be a hit but would "reduce the barrier to communication" and make it possible to convey the "raw truth" without that annoying filter of identity.

Anonymity was going to be the next big thing in "social," according to its founders, David Byttow, 33, and Chrys Bader-Wechsler, 31.

"It helps you become a better person if you want to be a better person," Byttow told the audience at — where else? — a TechCrunch Disrupt conference.

Internet anonymity can make you a better person? Since when? Hadn't we learned long ago that cyberbullying, gossip of the rankest sort, and the spreading of false rumors were the usual results of Web anonymity, crowding out other, more ennobling responses?



JOE NOCERA
Comment

But Byttow — who wears only black in public, to judge by his various YouTube appearances — and Bader-Wechsler were convinced that making it easy for people to post anonymous messages — to their friends, no less — would, indeed, make the world a better place. Or at least they convinced enough gullible venture capitalists of this that they were able to raise some \$35 million during their company's short life, giving it a valuation at one point of \$100 million.

As for revenue, it pretty much followed the "Silicon Valley" model. Any interviewer who asked how a completely anonymous "community" could serve as the foundation for a moneymaking business was told, quite matter of factly, that it was far too early to contemplate such mundane matters. Searching for a revenue model "would be a distraction at this point," Byttow explained to the technology journalist Kara Swisher, who occasionally plays her sardonic, all-knowing self on "Silicon Valley." "You have to build liquidity in your users," added Bader-Wechsler.

So what happened to Secret?

Cyberbullying was a problem from the start, which seemed to surprise the founders, who were in a constant struggle to keep control of the posts. Security and privacy were also issues. ("We have learned a lot!" Bader-Wechsler told an interviewer five months in.) Brazil ordered it shut down. Marc Andreessen criticized it. As the app's novelty wore off, people stopped using it. Byttow and Bader-Wechsler responded by redesigning the site so that it more closely resembled Yik Yak, a more successful competitor.

Employees started leaving, including Bader-Wechsler in January. Meanwhile, as *The Times* reported, the founders had each taken \$3 million off the table in the second round of financing, and Byttow had bought a red Ferrari (which, *The Times* also reported, he has since gotten rid of).

Most new tech companies that realize their business model is doomed spend the rest of their money "pivoting" to something more promising. Byttow instead decided to return the leftover money to his investors. A classy touch.

In the blog post in which he announced that he was shutting down the Secret app, Byttow promised that he would "publish postmortems so that others can learn from the unique mistakes and challenges we faced and the wisdom gained from such an incredible 16 months."

No doubt Mike Judge will be taking notes for future episodes.

Joe Nocera is an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times*. He joined *The Opinion Pages* in April 2011.

YOUR VIEWS

Remove cows from wildlands before Oregon delists wolves

I am in favor of delisting the wolf from the endangered species list when I no longer have to step around cow poop to go to a bathroom in a Forest Service campground. If I wanted to listen to cows lowing and walk around patties, I could stay home.

I want to see deer, elk, coyotes, owls, etc., and their scat. Not cow poop or cows.

Melissa Dunn
Irrigon

Oregon wolves share a laugh at state's population estimate

We got a good laugh at your population estimate for Oregon wolves.

At a our last pack meeting, all were present and your count was off. For example, Reginald lives over toward Mill Creek and when he hears or spots an ODFW rig, he lopes into Washington for a few days. Rico lives in the Steens now and chooses a hunt in Idaho.

Not to be outdone, Mary Alice takes the gang from the Klamath area to California. She doesn't stay too long because the pups ate something that made them sick last year.

The pack appreciates your concern, but a census report is out of the question.

A. Wolf, pack master
(as told to Mike Mehren, the wolf listener)
Hermiston

Outstanding BMCC program spans time, helps region

I would like to recognize the *East Oregonian* editorial staff with a tip of my hat for an article in the April 24 paper (Days Gone By 50 Years Ago column) that gave due recognition to the Blue Mountain Community College Dental Assisting Technician program.

Why? Because if you are looking for an established, well respected and successful workforce development program, here is one that for over 51 years has been offered on the Pendleton campus.

So how good is it? Only 17 students are accepted each year and in 2014, 14 of 14 graduates passed their national boards on the first try and each one was offered employment at graduation time.

Take that a bit further — if nearly 82 percent of BMCC graduates stay in the local area, then chances are pretty good your own dental hygienist could be a BMCC graduate.

So, while most letters supporting the May 2015 BMCC bond have talked about the creation of new programs, how about some recognition for a long-time existing program in need of new equipment and technology upgrades?

Please join me by voting yes on BMCC Measure #30-106 and let's help continue to build on this program's success for other 50-plus years.

Louie and Betty Carlson
Heppner