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OUR VIEW

Oil shipments no mere ‘uptick’

A press release announcing Washington’s and Oregon’s plans to update their responses to oil spills on the lower Columbia River describes increasing rail shipments of crude oil in the area as an “uptick.”

In fact, the volume of oil shipments by rail across both states has enormously expanded in recent years, going from essentially nothing at the start of this decade to tens of millions of gallons a year now. Even under the most optimistic of assumptions, derailments and spills are certain to occur. The U.S. rail industry has a good safety record, but there have been enough disasters in other states and Canada to confirm that its record isn’t anywhere close to perfect.

With proposals for new and expanded export terminals and refineries, there also are nearly certain to be additional ships carrying petroleum products up and down the Columbia, along with more oil flowing in pipelines. These, too, are subject to spills.

From being mostly just a recipient of fossil fuels, our two states will increasingly be integral parts of a national and international transportation and refining network. This is no mere “uptick,” but potentially a multidecade increase in risk that policymakers must do their best to confront. As always in such matters, prevention must be the first priority, accompanied by making certain those who profit are appropriately insured and bonded to pay for the damage done by spills.

The particular aspect of planning that is being updated is precisely how to respond in the immediate aftermath of spills, to contain damage and clean them up. The

existing plan was completed in 2003, long before the current crude-oil boom. Part of it is now more than 20 years old. Besides an intensely increased scale of risk, much has changed in these years. The old plan, ways to comment, and a link to a similar draft updated

plan for the Chehalis River are all accessible at tinyurl.com/NewOilSpillPlan. Spill plans are detailed geographical studies of every geographical element of a river, with maps showing how containment booms or other techniques can be used to keep oil where it is until it can be dealt with. The old plan rules

out some approaches in some places, such as burning large spills on the surface, due to the proximity to populated areas and the likelihood of air pollution. At the time of the 2003 plan, Washington state explicitly ruled out the use of surfactants to break up oil spills — probably still a good thing to forbid, considering increasing knowledge about the environmental risks of these complex chemicals.

The revised plan will pay special attention to several wildlife refuges along the lower river, places where oil could be especially disastrous. It would make sense to include Willapa Bay in these plans, considering the hydrology of the Columbia River plume, which carries fish, nutrients and other things into the bay from the Columbia, at least during some months when the current flows northward.

Comments are due to June 30. This is an important matter that warrants careful attention by citizens who care about local riverine and maritime resources.

Prevention must be the first priority, accompanied by making certain those who profit are appropriately insured and bonded to pay for the damage done by spills.

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.

YOUR VIEWS

Those who played for Req know he deserves a tribute

This is a reply to statements by Sams and Phinney printed May 9, 2015, in the *East Oregonian* (about the Don Requa bronze). The expression of their views is their right, but showed that they didn’t really know the man.

My feeling in this whole issue is that 97 percent of the opposition to the location comes from people that never played a minute for Req. He was more than a coach. He could see things that ordinary people didn’t see and feel. If you want quality at Brownfield you got it, and quit fooling with aesthetics.

My respect for him took a big jump in 1981. My son had played football from 1978 and academics in 1981 were interfering with football. Req told him he could use him but he understood. They still went to Rotary meetings together. Their friendship never ended.

The comparison of Req and (Stella) Darby is an insult. The whole statement seemed to be a political statement of sorts and not many facts.

Ed Tucker
Pendleton

a decade of school funding cuts. We have the option to put this year’s kicker in a rainy day fund to protect schools from the budget headed their way. That option requires a two-thirds vote of the legislature, i.e. bipartisan support.

Eastern Oregon legislators have been calling for more school funding this session. Maybe saving the kicker for schools is something the whole state can agree on.

Kathleen Pool
Portland

Ports need TPA to thrive

The Port of Morrow is well positioned to help attract jobs to the region and support local industry. Our location, infrastructure and advanced communications all make us an attractive option for shipping in and out of the Columbia.

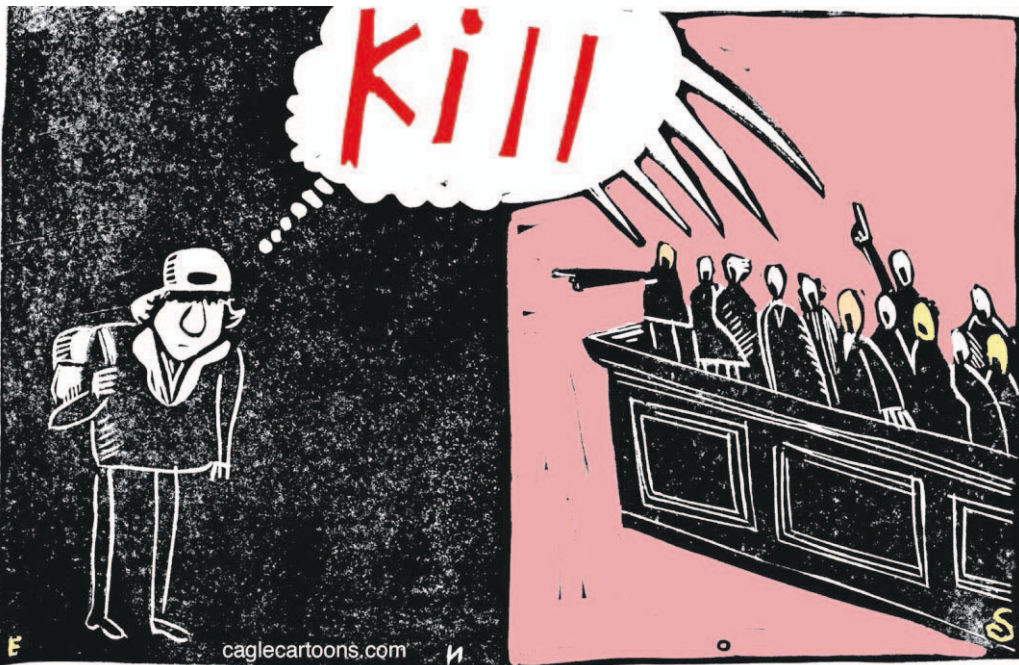
But growing economic activity at the port requires a market at the other end of the line for us to ship products to. That is why we are closely watching the votes in Congress for Trade Promotion Authority. TPA, as it is called, authorizes the negotiation of trade agreements with nations in Asia and elsewhere that will be key trade partners in the 21st century. That is why we are glad to see Senator Ron Wyden supporting this critical piece of creating a strong trade policy.

Running a successful port includes many critical factors, but having access to markets for our goods is a linchpin for economic success in Morrow County. We encourage our leaders to quickly approve Trade Promotion Authority.

Gary Neal
Manager, Port of Morrow
Port of Morrow Commission

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. 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

The PERS earthquake: A damage assessment

By ADAM DAVIS
For Oregon Capital Insider

Banner headlines, above the fold: Supreme Court Overturns PERS Changes.

Since the announcement a couple of weeks ago, the chattering class in Oregon has been focused on assessing the damage from the political earthquake. What do the billions of unfunded PERS costs mean for the state moving forward?

Many wonder if the earthquake has shaken the taxpayers enough that they are now willing to tax themselves to prevent cuts to important public services including schools and public safety.

DHM Research did some earthquake damage assessment of our own to determine where Oregon voters are on PERS and the question of higher taxes to prevent cuts to services.

Despite all the hoopla surrounding the Supreme Court’s decision, not all voters have heard about it. About a third of Oregon’s voters told us last weekend that they had not heard or read anything related to PERS within the last two weeks. When asked to identify the most important issue they want their state government officials to do something about, only 3 percent mentioned PERS.

Voters registered significant concerns about the state’s ability to pay for an adequate level of public services such as education and public safety. Good news if you think that the climate may be changing for tax reform. The magnitude of concern, however, remains moderate: Less than one half of Oregon’s voters are “very” concerned (45 percent Democrats; 37 percent Republicans; 22 percent Independents). Yes, despite the PERS decision.

Furthermore, voters listed high taxes among the top issues that they want their officials to address. School funding remains a top concern, but is mentioned by less than a majority and split between those who feel the schools already have enough money (and just need to spend it more wisely) and those who feel schools need more money.

Two more data points from this past weekend suggest it may take some earthquake aftershocks and a prolonged economic recovery before the political landscape shifts enough in Oregon to safely support building a request of the voters to increase their taxes.

The state remains very divided on the need for more state revenue, even after the PERS decision.

In the 2013 Oregon Values and Beliefs Survey, 43 percent agree that our current tax system with just income tax and property tax is too unstable to pay for public services. A similar 42 percent disagreed.

This past weekend, we asked voters to consider the state’s quality of life and low ranking compared to other states in many areas. When asked if now with the PERS decision there was a need to raise taxes, 43 percent



ADAM DAVIS
Comment

agreed and 47 percent disagreed. You want a party divide? While 72 percent of Democrats agreed that it is time to raise taxes, only 16 percent of Republicans and 34 percent of Independents felt so. That’s not good calculus for tax advocates.

Wonder if people view the situation differently when framed in terms of “my local schools?” That should tug at the heart strings, right?

Given four statements, only 24 percent felt the statement that comes

closest to how they feel is “my local public schools just don’t have enough money, and now with the recent Supreme Court ruling overturning PERS reform, the problem is worse. I’m prepared to pay more in taxes for my local schools.”

Slightly more, 28 percent, felt even with the PERS reforms being overturned, “I’m not prepared to pay more in taxes for my local schools until education reforms have been put in place to ensure that any additional money will increase student academic growth.”

The most common viewpoint, chosen by 31 percent, was that “I’m not prepared to pay more in taxes for my local schools. Even with the PERS reforms being overturned, I feel the schools have enough money; they just need to spend it more wisely.”

A smaller number, 10 percent, said “I just can’t afford it. Even though I feel my local school don’t have enough money, I can’t pay more in taxes for my local schools.”

At this point, it doesn’t look like the Supreme Court’s PERS earthquake has shaken things enough to mobilize Oregonians in support of increased taxes to maintain funding for public services. How many aftershocks would it take, and for how long would they need to happen, to change things? Hard to tell.

Also, consider that we’re only talking about the need for additional revenue to prevent cuts in services. How about the money needed to address new expenses such as our deteriorating water, sewer, and transportation systems?

We do know that any future earthquakes would have to be of seismic magnitude to penetrate the voters’ consciousness, significantly affect their attitudes about government and politics, and alter the political landscape. It will likely take more than one. Perhaps it may take a real earthquake.

Not likely to happen? OK then, let’s just go after the wealthy and big business. What a novel idea.

No wonder only about a third of Oregon voters feel that over the next 10 years we’ll find common ground and work together to make progress addressing the critical issues we face as a state.

Adam Davis, who has been conducting opinion research in Oregon for more than 35 years, is a founding principal in DHM Research, an independent, non-partisan firm. Visit www.dhmresearch.com.

OTHER VIEWS

A tale of three killers

On May 13 a jury in Seattle sentenced Joseph McEnroe, who was convicted of six murders, to life in prison instead of imposing the death penalty. Two days later, a Boston jury returned a death sentence in the Boston Marathon bombing case for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. Those two cases will now follow much different courses.

Mr. Tsarnaev’s case will be subject to multiple appeals. Each new filing will result in extensive renewed press coverage. Each news story will focus on what Mr. Tsarnaev, who has already appeared on the cover of several national publications, is doing now and then repeat the awful details of his crime.

Mr. McEnroe will be transferred to a prison where he will live the rest of his life forgotten by the media. His legal proceedings will be over and done.

After the jury returned a life without parole verdict for Mr. McEnroe, the mother of one and grandmother of two of his victims said she and her husband were happy about the verdict “because we don’t ever have to deal with it again.”

“It’ll be probably better for everybody involved to be able to just kind of put the McEnroe part of this case away,” she said.

That won’t be possible for the victims of

Mr. Tsarnaev. Bill and Denise Richards, whose 8-year old son was murdered whose 7-year old daughter was maimed by Tsarnaev, called on the government to withdraw the death penalty — a request that was not heard by the Boston jury. They wrote that “the continued pursuit of that punishment” will bring years of appeals “and prolong reliving the most painful day of our lives. We hope our two remaining children do not have to grow up with the lingering, painful reminder of what the defendant took from them, which years of appeals would undoubtedly bring.”

Here in Oregon on May 7, Jesse Fanus was sentenced to life without parole after 17 years of costly litigation following his original death sentence. The prosecutor told reporters: “Under this agreement, Fanus will have no legal avenue to seek release, and will die in prison.”

The common thread in these three cases is obvious. Pursuit of the death penalty is costly, both economically and psychologically speaking. Life without parole is a better alternative.

Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty is a non-profit organization whose mission is to repeal the death penalty in the state. For more information visit www.oadp.org.