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KATHRYN B. BROWN

Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER

Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON

Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR

Opinion Page Editor

OUR VIEW

Minimum wage bill doesn't work for Eastern Oregon

After an initial derailment, a proposal to raise Oregon's minimum wage is back on track in the waning days of the state Legislature. That's an unfortunate development for businesses outside the Portland metropolitan area.

We previously editorialized against such legislation. Our opinion has not been changed by arguments recently offered by Portland politicians and their supporters. Their pitch ignores our state's economic diversity and relies on benevolent assumptions not supported by science or math.

House Speaker Tina Kotek proposes to raise the minimum hourly rate to \$13 by 2018. It would be pegged at \$11 in 2016 and \$12 in 2017.

It does not matter to Rep. Kotek that Oregon's current rate of \$9.25 per hour already is the second-highest in the nation. And she conveniently sidesteps questions about the potential impact of such increases beyond her affluent Portland district.

Large Portland-area employers like Nike and Intel can easily absorb such payroll increases. But most private-sector jobs in Eastern Oregon and elsewhere in rural Oregon are found in small business — many of them family-owned and run on a shoestring. Such large increases will require them to cut hours, reduce staff size or pass on to customers those additional costs. Such outcomes would hurt the very people the minimum wage hike is designed to help.

A typical response to those likely scenarios is an activist rant: "The CEOs should take a pay cut!" Tell

that to mom-and-pop business owners who at times forgo their own paycheck in order to make payroll for their employees.

Oregon's economy is still recovering from the brutal recession. In May, the number of jobs in the state declined for the first time in three years. And while

the Portland area is humming, the rest of the state still is hampered by high unemployment and a lack of skilled workers. Raising the minimum wage by 37 percent over the next few years will exacerbate the challenges facing small businesses.

Rep. Kotek's proposal would rescind current law to allow for some cities to approve larger increases in the minimum wage. That plays to the good citizens of Portland and Eugene, but does nothing for those in the small communities of Eastern Oregon.

Oregon's minimum wage is half the median hourly wage for

all Oregon hourly workers. That is a reasonable level for a wage meant for entry-level workers when compared with those with years of experience or specialized skills.

If there is good news for workers in Oregon, it is this: "Real wages are growing ... Average hourly earnings increased 2.2 percent over the year for Oregon's private-sector payroll employees. These wage gains were above the rate of consumer price inflation."

That recent report from state government shows that the free market is responding to economic conditions without interference from Rep. Kotek and her Portland colleagues.

Large Portland-area employers can easily absorb such payroll increases. But most private-sector jobs in Eastern Oregon and elsewhere in rural Oregon are found in small business — many of them family-owned and run on a shoestring.

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.

LETTERS POLICY

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OTHER VIEWS

Cold War without the fun

Let's see, America is prepositioning battle tanks with our East European NATO allies to counterbalance Russia; U.S. and Russian military planes recently flew within 10 feet of each other; Russia is building a new generation of long-range ballistic missiles; and the U.S. and China are jostling in the South China Sea. Did someone restart the Cold War while I was looking the other way?

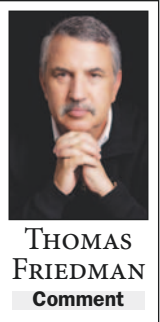
If so, this time it seems like the Cold War without the fun — that is, without James Bond, SMERSH, "Get Smart" Agent 86's shoe phone, Nikita Khrushchev's shoe-banging, a race to the moon or a debate between American and Soviet leaders over whose country has the best kitchen appliances. And I don't think we're going to see President Barack Obama in Kiev declaring, à la President Kennedy, "ich bin ein Ukrainian." Also, the lingo of our day — "reset with Russia" or "pivot to Asia" — has none of the gravitas of — drum roll, please — "détente."

No, this post-post-Cold War has more of a WWE — World Wrestling Entertainment — feel to it, and I don't just mean President Vladimir Putin of Russia's riding horses bare-chested, although that is an apt metaphor. It's just a raw jostling for power for power's sake — not a clash of influential ideas but rather of spheres of influence: "You cross that line, I punch your nose," "Why?" "Because I said so." "You got a problem with that?" "Yes, let me show you my drone. You got a problem with that?" "Not at all. My cyber guys stole the guidance system last week from Northrop Grumman." "You got a problem with that?"

The Cold War had a beginning, an end and even a closing curtain, with the fall of the Berlin Wall. But the post-post-Cold War has brought us full circle back to the pre-Cold War and the game of nations. There was a moment when it seemed as though it would all be otherwise — when it seemed that Arabs and Israelis would make peace, that China would evolve into a more consensual political system and that Russia would become part of Europe and the G-8. That was a lifetime ago.

Now Western reporters struggle to get visas to China, no American businessman with a brain takes his laptop to Beijing, Chinese hackers have more of your personal data now than LinkedIn, Russia is still intent on becoming part of Europe — by annexing a piece here and a piece there — and the G-8 is now the G-1.5 (America and Germany).

When did it all go sour? We fired the first shot when we expanded NATO toward the Russian border even though the Soviet Union had disappeared. Message to Moscow: You are always an enemy, no matter what system you have. When oil prices recovered, Putin sought his revenge for this humiliation, but



THOMAS FRIEDMAN
Comment

This post-post-Cold War has more a WWE feel to it, and I don't just mean Vladimir Putin riding horses bare-chested.

now he's just using the NATO threat to justify the militarization of Russian society so he and his fellow kleptocrats can stay in power and paint their opponents as lackeys of the West.

NATO's toppling of the Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, the Arab Spring and the Moscow street protests that followed rattled Putin, said Sergei Guriev, the noted Russian economist now based in Paris. "Putin understood that he lost the Russian middle class

and so he started to look for legitimacy somewhere else" — in hypernationalism and anti-Americanism.

But Guriev makes an important point. "If not for the Western sanctions on Russia, East Ukraine would already have been part of Russia today," he said, adding that there is nothing Putin fears more than Ukraine succeeding in diminishing corruption and building a modern economy that would be everything Putin's Russia is not. Guriev is worried, though, that the anti-Western propaganda

Putin has been pumping into the veins of the Russian public will have a lasting effect and make his successor even worse. Either way, "Russia will be a big challenge for your next president."

The Chinese leadership is not as dumb or desperate as Putin — and needs access to U.S. markets more — so, for now, China's leaders still behave with some restraint in asserting their claims in the South China Sea. But the fact is, as the Asia expert Andrew Browne noted in *The Wall Street Journal*, "the U.S.-China relationship has lost its strategic raison d'être: the Soviet Union, the common threat that brought the two countries together." They have not forged a new one, like being co-managers of global stability.

In short, the attraction of the U.S. economy and the bite of U.S. sanctions are more vital than ever in managing the post-post-Cold War game of nations, including bringing Iran to nuclear talks. We may be back to traditional geopolitics, but it's in a much more interdependent world, where our economic clout is still a source of restraint on Moscow and Beijing. Putin doesn't disguise his military involvement in Ukraine for nothing; he's afraid of more U.S. banking sanctions. China doesn't circumscribe its behavior in the South China Sea for nothing; it can't grow without exporting to America. It's not just our guns, it's our butter. It's why we should be expanding U.S.-shaped free-trade deals with Asia and Europe and it's why the most important source of stability in the world today is the health of the U.S. economy. We can walk softly only as long as we carry a big stick — and a big wallet.

Thomas L. Friedman won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, his third Pulitzer for *The New York Times*.

OTHER VIEWS

Confederate flag, symbol of hate, should be lowered

Medford Mail Tribune, June 25

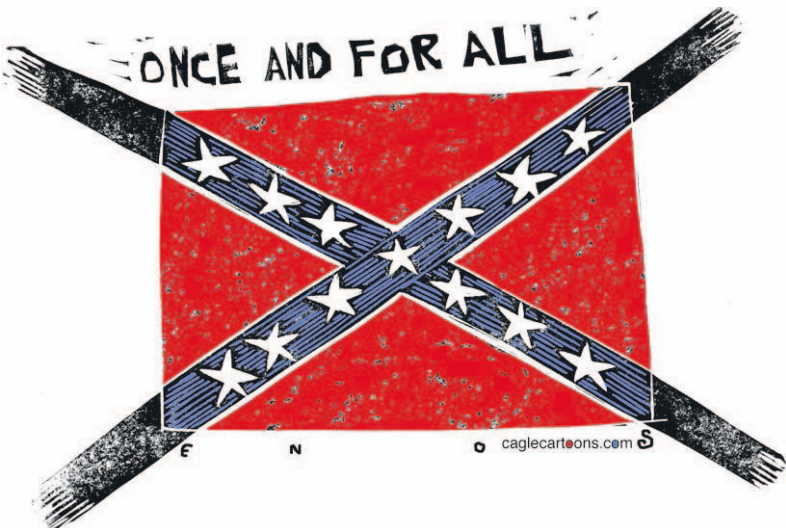
After decades of controversy, it took one racist young man with a handgun to galvanize public opinion around that ubiquitous symbol of misplaced Southern identity, the Confederate battle flag.

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, reeling in the aftermath of the massacre of nine worshipers at a historic black church in Charleston, on Monday called on her state's Legislature to stop flying the Confederate flag on the state Capitol grounds.

The nation's largest retailer, Walmart, suddenly saw fit to declare it would no longer sell Confederate-flag merchandise. Sears, Target and eBay followed suit, and then Amazon, after flag sales skyrocketed.

Even Oregon has been swept up in the anti-flag frenzy. How, you ask?

In Wilson Park, just outside the state Capitol building in Salem, is an outdoor display of the flags of



all 50 states. The Mississippi state flag is the last one in the country to include the Confederate battle flag in its design.

State Rep. Tobias Read, D-Beaverton, has called for the Mississippi flag to be taken down and replaced with that state's first official state flag, the "Magnolia Flag," used from 1861 to 1894.

There's just one problem with that idea. Well, more than one.

For starters, it makes little sense to single out Mississippi for shaming by removing its flag when several other Southern states' flags incorporate elements of Confederate imagery, while stopping short of the familiar blue X with white stars on a field of red.

The Confederacy adopted a succession of flags as the Civil War progressed. The battle flag familiar to most Americans, and the one still flying in Charleston, S.C., was never the official symbol of the Confederacy. It was the battle flag of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Some of the official national flags of the Confederacy included that battle flag design, but in the upper left corner on a field of white, or, later, white with a vertical red stripe.

The state flags of Alabama and Florida use a red Cross of St. Andrew, and historical documents make it clear that design was intended to preserve some symbol of the Confederacy. The Arkansas flag includes white stars on a blue diamond against a red background, an unmistakable nod to the battle flag.

Most problematic in Rep. Read's proposal is that the "Magnolia Flag" incorporates a solid blue square with a single white star. That symbol echoes

the "Bonnie Blue Flag" that flew over the Confederate batteries that opened fire on Fort Sumter to start the Civil War.

You can denounce Confederate symbolism, but it would seem you cannot escape it — at least in the South.

If the Mississippi flag should be changed — and it should — Mississippi ought to do it, not the Oregon Legislature. Already, there are calls in that state to remove the offending Confederate imagery. If our legislators feel compelled to weigh in on Mississippi's flag, they should send a letter encouraging that change. But a display of the nation's state flags should include all the nation's state flags.

Meanwhile, no one should imagine that the racist hatred that prompted a dead-eyed 21-year-old to slaughter innocent worshipers will disappear just because a symbol of slavery and oppression is removed from government property. The stain of that massacre cannot be wiped away so easily.