

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Salem's winners and losers

## Legislature wraps up busy session on education, pot and special interests

A list of accomplishments of the Oregon Legislature must start with this: It adjourned on schedule. Our neighbors to the north have gone into triple overtime, breaking the record for longest legislative session in Washington state history.

Count too as a major success that Oregon legislators brushed off like crumbs on a picnic table the early-session drama of Gov. Kitzhaber's resignation. Kate Brown deserves credit for leaving the drama behind and putting her head down to work. Legislators of both parties followed suit and got down to the people's business — or at least the business of the people who donate.

Eastern Oregon got some feathers for our cap: millions of dollars to help fund the Umatilla Basin water project, faster speed limits for our open highways, more lax rules for pumping gas in rural counties.

Higher education was a big winner. Lawmakers approved a stunning 22 percent increase in funding for community colleges and universities. Most of the funding will go for student financial aid and rebuilding administrative positions cut during the recession. Community colleges will test a tuition-free program for recent high school graduates.

Funding for K-12 education increased, but at a much lower rate. Public school buildings will get expensive, but needed seismic improvements.

With solid majorities in the House and Senate, Democrats were in firm control. As expected, Portland-area politicians controlled the agenda. Their liberal wing constituencies — environmentalists, public employee unions and social activists — secured important gains:

- Gov. Brown extended an order requiring a 10 percent reduction in carbon emissions from cars and trucks over the next decade. This was a huge win for environmentalists after Democrats failed to renew the standard two years ago. But the victory cost the governor an important transportation funding agreement.

- The Oregon Education Association pushed through HB 2655, which allows parents to easily get their children out of new standardized education tests based on Common Core

standards. The teachers' union is concerned how test results impact school accountability and teacher evaluations. Passage, however, jeopardizes \$140 million in annual federal funding for Oregon schools. The OEA also won big with money to implement full-day kindergarten, which will add more teaching jobs.

- Victories for special-interest activists included an expansion of background checks on gun sales and creation of an LGBT coordinator position within the Department of Veterans' Affairs to help veterans discharged because of their sexual orientation.

The session was notable for several firsts. Oregon became the first state to automatically register people to vote when they receive a driver's license. We also became the first to require health insurance plans to offer a year's worth of birth control supplies in a single purchase. A companion measure allows women to get oral contraceptives directly from a pharmacy without a doctor's visit.

There were also ample examples of trivial politics. Legislators tried, but failed, to remove the Mississippi state flag from Capitol grounds because it contains the Confederate symbol. There were proposals to ban the declawing of cats and allow dogs to ride in the beds of farm vehicles.

Marijuana dominated the session as lawmakers grappled with rules to govern its legalization. They reached difficult and clunky compromises on taxes and local sales of pot — and did so on bipartisan terms.

Oregon businesses dodged a staggering increase in the minimum wage. But proponents are already collecting signatures for an initiative measure, which is likely to get on the ballot. Employers were saddled with new paid sick leave requirements and restrictions on when to ask job applicants about prior criminal convictions.

Lawmakers showed remarkable restraint not spending all the projected tax revenue. They set aside \$300 million in reserves to help cushion the impact of much higher pension costs following the Supreme Court's rejection of cutting payments to public retirees. It's a small down payment. More will be required — from taxpayers, government and public employee unions — in the years ahead.

**Eastern Oregon got some feathers for our cap: Millions to fund the Umatilla Basin water project, faster speed limits and more lax rules for gas pumping.**

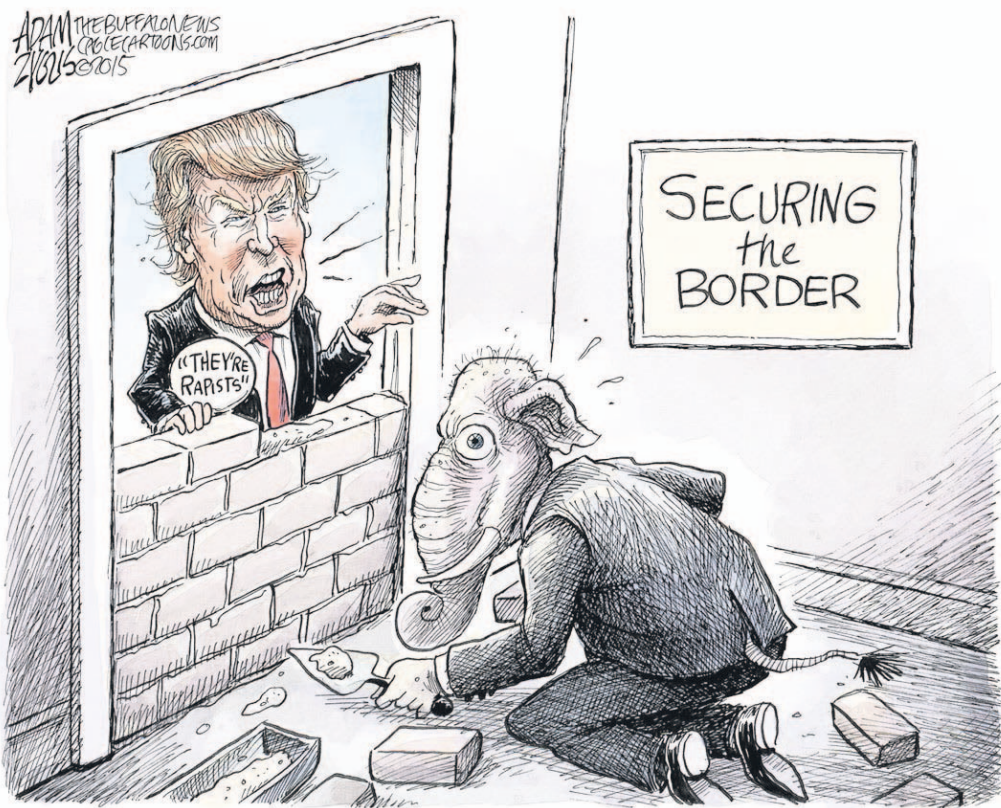
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## LETTERS POLICY

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.

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## OTHER VIEWS

# Building attention span

If you're like most of us, you're wondering what the Internet is doing to your attention span. You toggle over to check your phone during even the smallest pause in real life. You feel those phantom vibrations even when no one is texting you. You have trouble concentrating for long periods.

Over the past few years researchers have done a lot of work on attention span, and how the brain is being re-sculpted by all those hours a day spent online. One of the conclusions that some of them are coming to is that the online life nurtures fluid intelligence and offline life is better at nurturing crystallizing intelligence.

Being online is like being a part of the greatest cocktail party ever and it is going on all the time. If you email, text, tweet, Facebook, Instagram or just follow Internet links you have access to an ever-changing universe of social touch-points. It's like you're circulating within an infinite throng, with instant access to people you'd almost never meet in real life.

Online life is so delicious because it is socializing with almost no friction. You can share bon mots, photographs, videos or random moments of insight, encouragement, solidarity or good will. You live in a state of perpetual anticipation because the next social encounter is just a second away. You can control your badinage and click yourself away when boredom lurks.

This form of social circulation takes the pressure off. I know some people who are relaxed and their best selves only when online. Since they feel more in control of the communication, they are more communicative, vulnerable and carefree.

This mode of interaction nurtures mental agility. The ease of movement on the Web encourages you to skim ahead and get the gist. You do well in social media and interactive gaming when you can engage and then disengage with grace. This fast, frictionless world rewards the quick perception, the instant evaluation and the clever performance. As neuroscientist Susan Greenfield writes in her book "Mind Change," expert online gamers have a great capacity for short-term memory, to process multiple objects simultaneously, to switch flexibly between tasks and to quickly process rapidly presented information.

Fluid intelligence is a set of skills that exist in the moment. It's the ability to perceive situations and navigate to solutions in novel situations, independent of long experience.

Offline learning, at its best, is more like being a member of a book club than a cocktail party. When you're offline you're not in constant contact with the universe. There are periods of solitary reading and thinking and then more intentional gatherings to talk and compare.

Research at the University of Oslo and



**DAVID BROOKS**  
Comment

elsewhere suggests that people read a printed page differently than they read off a screen. They are more linear, more intentional, less likely to multitask or browse for keywords.

The slowness of solitary reading or thinking means you are not as concerned with each individual piece of data. You're more concerned with how different pieces of data fit together. How does this relate to that? You're concerned with the narrative shape, the synthesizing theory or the overall context. You have time to see how one thing layers onto another, producing mixed emotions, ironies and paradoxes. You have time to lose yourself in another's complex environment.

As Greenfield puts it, "by observing what happens, by following the linear path of a story, we can convert information into knowledge in a way that emphasizing fast response and constant stimulation cannot. As I see it, the key issue is narrative."

**When you're offline you're not in constant contact with the universe. There are periods of solitary reading and thinking.**

When people in this slower world gather to try to understand connections and context, they gravitate toward a different set of questions. These questions are less about sensation than about meaning. They argue about how events unfold and how context influences behavior. They are more likely to make moral evaluations. They want to

know where it is all headed and what are the ultimate ends.

Crystallized intelligence is the ability to use experience, knowledge and the products of lifelong education that have been stored in long-term memory. It is the ability to make analogies and comparisons about things you have studied before. Crystallized intelligence accumulates over the years and leads ultimately to understanding and wisdom.

The online world is brand new, but it feels more fun, effortless and natural than the offline world of reading and discussion. It nurtures agility, but there is clear evidence by now that it encourages a fast mental rhythm that undermines the ability to explore narrative, and place people, ideas and events in wider contexts.

The playwright Richard Foreman once described people with cathedral-like personalities — with complex, inner density, people with distinctive personalities, and capable of strong permanent attachments. These days that requires an act of rebellion, among friends who assign one another reading and set up times to explore narrative and cultivate crystallized intelligence.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at The Weekly Standard, a contributing editor at Newsweek and the Atlantic Monthly, and is currently a commentator on "The Newshour with Jim Lehrer."

## YOUR VIEWS

### Donald Trump is right about illegal immigration

As many of you, I first took Donald Trump's bid for president as just another chance to show his overgrown ego. I don't see it entirely that way any more, and his poll ratings have climbed despite his rhetoric.

His comments on Mexico brought a strong backlash from corporate sponsors and the Latino population. His honest talk, however, also woke up the segment of the U.S. population that has been quiet, but now is fed up.

The concept of continued thousands of impoverished people, from mostly poor Latin countries, coming here so they can have a better life has to end somehow.

Yes, we are all immigrants to some degree, but the poor old USA simply can not absorb this huge influx forever. Part of the reason our country is great is that there are still some places to breathe, get away and enjoy the serenity and beauty of our open spaces. I don't want apartments covering every square acre to house this continually increasing population. Besides, the USA already has critical issues with enough water, power, and food.

The trouble is that Trump is about right. Way too many immigrants are illegal and do bring in drugs and crime.

Take illegal Francisco Sanchez, for example. He has at least a dozen aliases, seven prior felony convictions in the U.S., and has been deported five times. He was recently released again, on probation. Kathryn Steinie, 32, was just walking on Pier 14 in San Francisco with her dad and a friend. She had no connection to Sanchez at all. He walked up behind her and shot her in the back. The bullet pierced her aorta and she died. It was a totally random shooting — just for fun, I guess. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case. Remember too, San Francisco is a "sanctuary city" that offers protection to illegal immigrants.

Every president since in recent times has promised to fix the immigration problem. Not one of them has done anything that works. So, good for you Donald Trump. Finally someone who doesn't have to be "politically correct" all the time and has so much money he can afford to be outspoken and independent. He is saying what a lot of Americans think.

David Burns  
Pendleton