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OUR VIEW

Cities of brotherly love

The relationship between Hermiston and Pendleton is difficult to describe.

Author Jess Walter recently shared a poem on his podcast "A Tiny Sense of Accomplishment" about his hometown Spokane and its relationship with cross-border counterpart Coeur d'Alene, and the analogy seems to fit here.

Instead of sister cities, think of Pendleton and Hermiston as brothers, sitting across the dinner table from one another.

Pendleton is the older brother and has always enjoyed the spotlight. First to play varsity football, first to get a driver's license, first to get a job. Friends and family all know about his accomplishments.

But now Hermiston has hit a growth spurt and even made first team all-state last season, and he has been working hard for years saving up some money and is about ready to buy a really cool car. People may still ask him "Hey, you're Pendleton's brother, right?" but he's no longer darkened by the heavy shadow.

We'll let you fill in the details of the metaphors, but suffice it to say the dining room dynamic has changed in the last couple of decades.

They've never been best buddies, but we hope as they enter maturity they'll develop a strong and beneficial relationship.

The last month has seen some high points for both towns and we're glad to see signs of mutual admiration.

For instance, Hermiston's 3-on-3 basketball tournament entered its 10th year last weekend and has become one of the keystone Main Street events in town. It came about from a small group of hoops enthusiasts turning their love of the game into a marketable event.

Travel Pendleton event recruiter Pat Beard has said he'd like to see something similar in Pendleton. And that's perfect. That's one brother taking the other's good idea and running with it.

Pendleton, meanwhile, has spent substantial time making its downtown into a tourist destination. Facades have been restored, helpful signs have been erected, statues have been installed — the difference between mid-recession Pendleton and today's city is remarkable. The hundreds of Harleys in town, and their riders, are getting a look at a city ready for visitors any day of the year.

As Hermiston begins down the same path in its urban renewal zone, it would be wise to look over what is working. And it seems to be doing so, with welcome signs and facade restoration at the top of the priority list.

The biggest two events of the year are yet to come, of course. The Umatilla County Fair is early next month in Hermiston, the last time it will be in the downtown area before moving up the hill to a sparkling new EOTEC grounds next summer. And the Pendleton Round-Up is just around the corner, an event any organizer could learn a lesson or two from.

Our suggestion: go check out your brother city before summer's over. See what they're doing well, what they're trying to accomplish and take those ideas back home.

There's no reason a little sibling rivalry should get in the way of mutual admiration and cooperation.

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

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.

OTHER VIEWS

The minimum wage muddle

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

Once upon a time there was a near consensus among economists that raising the minimum wage was a bad idea. The market is really good at setting prices on things, whether it is apples or labor. If you raise the price on a worker, employers will hire fewer and you'll end up hurting the people you meant to help.

Then, in 1993, economists David Card and Alan Krueger looked at fast-food restaurants in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and found that raising the minimum wage gave people more income without hurting employment. A series of studies in Britain buttressed these findings.

Today, raising the minimum wage is the central piece of the progressive economic agenda. President Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton champion it. Cities and states across the country have been moving to raise minimum wages to as high as $15 an hour — including New York state just this week.

Some of my Democratic friends are arguing that forcing businesses to raise their minimum wage will not only help low-wage workers; it will actually boost profits, because companies will better retain workers. Some economists have reported that there is no longer any evidence that raising wages will cost jobs.

Unfortunately, that last claim is inaccurate. There are in fact many studies on each side of the issue. David Neumark of the University of California, Irvine, and William Wascher of the Federal Reserve have done their own studies and point to dozens of others showing significant job losses.

Recently, Michael Wither and Jeffrey Clemens of the University of California, San Diego, looked at data from the 2007 federal minimum-wage hike and found that it reduced the national employment-to-population ratio by 0.7 percentage points (which is actually a lot), and led to a 6-percentage-point decrease in the likelihood that a low-wage worker would have a job.

Because low-wage workers get less work experience under a higher minimum-wage regime, they are less likely to transition to higher-wage jobs down the road. Wither and Clemens found that two years later, workers' chances of making $1,500 a month was reduced by 5 percentage points.

Many economists have pointed out that as a poverty-fighting measure the minimum wage is horribly targeted. A 2010 study by Joseph Sabia and Richard Burkhauser found that only 11.3 percent of workers who would benefit from raising the wage to $9.50 an hour would come from poor households. An earlier study by Sabia found that single mothers' employment dropped 6 percent for every 10 percent increase in the minimum wage.

A study by Thomas MaCurdy of Stanford built on the fact that there are as many individuals in high-income families making the minimum wage (teenagers) as in low-income families. MaCurdy found that the costs of raising the wage are passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. Minimum-wage workers often work at places that disproportionately serve people down the income scale. So raising the minimum wage is like a regressive consumption tax paid for by the poor to subsidize the wages of workers who are often middle class.

What we have, in sum, is a very complicated situation. If we do raise the minimum wage a lot of people will clearly benefit and a lot of people will clearly be hurt. The most objective and broadest bits of evidence provoke ambivalence. One survey of economists by the University of Chicago found that 59 percent believed that a rise to $9 an hour would make it "noticeably harder" for poor people to find work. But a slight majority also thought the hike would be worthwhile for those in jobs. A study by the Congressional Budget Office found that a hike to $10.10 might lift 900,000 out of poverty but cost roughly 500,000 jobs.

My own guess is the economists will never be able to give us a dispositive answer about who is hurt or helped. Economists have their biases and reality is too granular. It depends on what region a worker is in, whether a particular job can be easily done by a machine, what the mindset of his or her employer is.

The best reasonable guess is that a gradual hike in high-cost cities like Seattle or New York will probably not produce massive dislocation. But raising the wage to $15 in rural New York will cause large disruptions and job losses.

The key intellectual upshot is that, despite what some people want you to believe, the laws of economic gravity have not been suspended. You can't impose costs on some without trade-offs for others. You can't intervene in the market without unintended consequences. And here's a haunting fact that seems to make sense: Raising the minimum wage will produce winners among job holders from all backgrounds, but it will disproportionately punish those with the lowest skills, who are least likely to be able to justify higher employment costs.

■

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

YOUR VIEWS

GMOs safe?

Mr. Tolleson, in a recent letter to the editor, supported the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act (HR 1599) as an inexpensive means to solve the food labeling crisis. There are a couple of problems I would like to point out.

•The act is totally voluntary. This means we have to trust the corporations making most of our food to do the right thing. Right. Like they did for trans fats that has turned out to be carcinogenic and a heart attack waiting to happen. The FDA is currently banning these trans fats but food companies have been given a 3 year phase-out despite the damage they cause and the fact that trans fats have been known to cause health problems for years and are already banned in many countries.

•Mr. Tolleson states, "Every major scientific body and regulatory agency in the world has reviewed the research about GMOs and declared they are safe." Most of the studies have been by Monsanto and other producers of GMOs. Others have been prevented from researching due to patent laws and proprietary practices and ingredients rules that have protected GMOs from scrutiny. However, it has recently been stated in a paper that GMO soy contains formaldehyde, a carcinogen and agent used in embalming.

The following quote was taken from the Organic Consumers Association newsletter: "The study, led by Dr. V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai, Ph.D., an MIT-trained systems biologist, utilizes his latest invention, CytoSolve, a 21st century systems biology method to integrate 6,497 in vitro and in vivolaboratory experiments, from 184 scientific institutions, across 23 countries, to discover the accumulation of formaldehyde, a known carcinogen, and a dramatic depletion of glutathione, an anti-oxidant necessary for cellular detoxification, in GMO soy, indicating that formaldehyde and glutathione are likely critical criteria for distinguishing the GMO from its non-GMO counterpart."

The depletion of glutathione is as critical as the presence of formaldehyde. The problem is two-fold: The food plant is prevented from taking up vital nutrients so fewer nutrients are available when you eat the plant, and you are prevented from processing part of what is left for your body by the lack of glutathione. The nutrients are responsible for detoxifying your cells.

HR 1599 is nothing more than an attempt to do an end run around local entities who want to know what is in their food, referring it to the federal level where "voluntary" labeling is being preached and both the House and Senate have been bought with corporate cash. The bottom line, it seems, is more important than the health of the consumer.

Ira L. White
Retired USDA food inspector and director of "Food and Water Watch" for KBLU
Pendleton

Communities that care

Our society is all too often rocked by tragic public shootings apparently caused by deranged individuals. Thankfully, however, more the norm is the everyday acts of kindness and generosity of people helping people, often without any fanfare.

It was indeed a treat to read about the painting of the Bullocks' Pendleton house that a complete stranger, Josh Cyganik, instigated. After he asked for volunteers via Facebook it is astounding the people who responded, along with the donations of paint and other materials as well as cold drinks for that hot day. It was indeed "miracles at work" as expressed by Benjamin Olsen, who came all the way from Camas, Washington, to help.

Rolling on paint isn't the most difficult part. I can imagine the hours spent scraping that peeling paint, sanding, priming and pounding in nails or repairing a broken board. What a generous act of kindness, so typical of many people who go out of their way to help others. So often these acts go unnoticed except by the recipient. Thank goodness we live in communities where people care about one another.

Merlyn Robinson
Heppner