

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

**Tip of the hat to the wildland firefighters** who are taking enormous risks to battle the blazes burning across the West, and especially those working here in Eastern Oregon.

The Canyon Creek Complex, which we have a dispatch from in today's paper, was for much of the week the highest priority fire in the country.



Dozens of homes have been destroyed and hundreds more remain in danger. Defending them — and the human life that surrounds them — is a dangerous and difficult proposal. Tragically, three firefighters were killed and others were injured earlier this week at the site of an inferno burning near Twisp, Washington.

Thus far, there have been no fatalities or serious injuries from the fire lines in Oregon, and we hope that remains the case for the rest

of this scorching, dry summer. There are more than 600 firefighters trying to get the Canyon Creek Complex under control, but fire officials said they should have more than 2,000 on site. That means the firemen and women who are on the lines are overworked and undermanned, and the job they have done under those pressure-filled circumstances is commendable.

We appreciate their bravery, and the long hours of hard work it takes to keep us safe and our livelihoods sound. And we know that work takes place far from hot showers, feather mattresses, WiFi signals and the other comforts of home.

A thank you and a hat tip is the least we can offer them.

**A kick in the pants to the goons who caused the closure of one of the best attractions in Astoria**, one of our favorite coast towns.

The Goonies House, made famous by the titular film, is now closed to the public. Our sister paper *The Daily Astorian* first reported the story, which quickly went viral and engendered all sorts of consternation from readers.

The home has always been in private hands. When the 1985 movie became a cult classic, the home became an accidental attraction smack dab in the middle of a residential neighborhood.

The decision by the Goonies house's owner to begin actively discouraging visitors is unfortunately understandable. Sandi Preston wanted a comfortable home but an increasing number of obnoxious — and sometimes violent — visitors made living in the home a headache.

She had foreknowledge that it had been used as a film set, which could have been a sort of slight brush with an Oregon celebrity, a fun thing to mention in conversations with family and friends. In no way could she have imagined what it would be like to try living in a house that is itself a celebrity. It must be a like having the high school sweetheart you married become a movie star — with all paparazzi, but none of the money.

We're sad that the estimated 1,500 tourists visiting the house each day made living in the house unbearable. But if there's one thing we know: Goonies never die. We suspect the legend of Chester Copperpot will live on, house open to the public or not.



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

# PERS remains a headache

*The (Eugene) Register-Guard*

The financial hydraulics of Oregon's Public Employee Retirement System are simple: If more money goes out, more must come in — and if less money comes from one source, more must come from another.

Similar principles govern the politics of the pension system: If nothing is done to control the cost of PERS, public frustration will be directed at other targets.

State and local governments will see both types of cause-and-effect sequence soon. The courts and the pension system's actuaries have delivered a double whammy that will increase the cost of PERS by \$1.7 billion per biennium starting in 2017. To soften the blow, the initial cost will be reduced, resulting in even larger increases later on. As pension costs soak up revenues, public resentment will rise: Voters won't be easily persuaded to pay more for public services if they have reason to believe that PERS is first in line for every tax dollar.

So far, Gov. Kate Brown and the Legislature have responded to this threat with a shrug of resignation. The attitude seems to be that nothing can be done: The 2013 Legislature passed a package of PERS changes, but in May the Oregon Supreme Court tossed most out, ruling that only pension benefits earned after the effective date of the legislation can be altered. That decision will add \$790 million to the cost of PERS in the 2017 biennium, and an additional \$250 million in subsequent biennia.

The biggest change at issue in the court case illustrates the toxic potential of PERS as a political issue. The 2013 Legislature reduced annual cost-of-living increases from 2 percent to 1.25 percent for retirees receiving pension benefits of less than \$60,000 a year, and to 0.15 percent for benefits exceeding \$60,000. To most Oregonians, a \$60,000 pension with COLA sounds like something from a dream world. Even the average

PERS pension of \$29,602 looks rich to someone with no pension at all.

More than 70 percent of those benefits are paid with income from investments. The rest must come from employers, meaning state and local governments and the taxpayers who support them.

A small change, compounded over time and applied to Oregon's \$70 billion in pension funds investments, has large effects. A slightly lower rate of return means employers will need to increase their contributions by \$760 million per biennium starting in 2017. That's money that will not hire public-health nurses, reduce class sizes or pave roads. And it will be paid by Oregonians whose own investments, if they have any, will be subject to the same market conditions that led the PERS actuaries to recommend more modest expectations of future returns.

Public resentment over these rising costs is sure to build, but would be contained somewhat if Oregonians were confident that the Legislature had done everything within its power to lighten the PERS burden. A basis for such confidence has not been established, and money left on the table, deepening the hole for state and local governments to fill. Oregonians also can't be confident that the Legislature has exhausted all options for controlling PERS costs.

Paying close attention to PERS is not just a matter of saving money, vital though that is. It's a matter of preserving public support for government. With big increases in PERS costs coming soon, people will be given reason to believe that pensions are more important than the services that state and local governments provide. Brown and the Legislature must do what they can to keep a corrosive and divisive cynicism from taking hold — even if little can be done, evidence of a sincere interest in reducing pension costs would be helpful. It would show those Oregonians who aren't entitled to PERS benefits that someone is on their side.



## OTHER VIEWS

# Jeb Bush and the dangers of re-fighting the Iraq war

Jeb Bush based his first major foreign policy address, delivered last week at the Reagan Library, on the classic Republican interpretation of the war in Iraq.

Yes, mistakes were made at the beginning, Bush conceded, but what really matters is that the surge succeeded in 2007-2008 and that President George W. Bush handed over a peaceful Iraq to Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton the next year. Then Obama and Clinton screwed it all up.

"No leader or policymaker involved will claim to have gotten everything right in the region, Iraq especially," Bush began, in one of the leading understatement of the campaign so far. But in spite of "failures of intelligence and military setbacks" in Iraq, Bush continued, "one moment stands out ... as the turning point we had all been waiting for." That was the "brilliant, heroic" surge, which "turned events toward victory."

The Iraq War was won. Then came Obama and Clinton, and events turned toward disaster. Their "premature withdrawal" of U.S. troops from Iraq was a "fatal error" that allowed the Islamic State and Iran to move in and fill the void. Now, all hell has broken loose.

The bumper-sticker version of Bush's interpretation is: "IRAQ? BLAME THE DEMOCRATS." A lot of Republicans believe that. But it is difficult to think the public will go along if Iraq becomes a major issue in the 2016 campaign.

Yes, the surge was a great success. But no matter how much they want to celebrate it, Republicans have learned: You don't score a lot of points for fixing something you messed up in the first place.

The doctor who saves a patient through heroic means after nearly causing his death through a horrific mistake is unlikely to receive praise and acclaim for saving the patient's life. That's especially true if the patient will require years of care to recover from the incident.

To press the analogy a bit, say another doctor comes in and decides that long-term care is no longer necessary. He stops it, and the patient again sinks into crisis. Who is to blame then? Most people would probably say both, but the second doctor's error is in failing to deal with the damage done by the first doctor. The bottom line is that "IRAQ? BLAME THE DEMOCRATS" won't work.

And yet that is the case Jeb Bush attempted



BYRON YORK  
Comment

to make at the Reagan Library. Then, two days later, Bush doubled down during a national-security forum in Davenport, Iowa, insisting that "taking out Saddam Hussein turned out to be a pretty good deal" and that post-surge Iraq was "fragile but secure."

That Bush even chose to focus a much-ballyhooed foreign policy address on Iraq is notable.

In fact, the two most memorable foreign policy moments of the Bush campaign were both about his brother's war — the Reagan Library speech and his painful inability to say whether he would have invaded Iraq, knowing what he knows now.

"I think Iraq is a much bigger problem for Bush than for other candidates, and Bush's team seems to recognize that," says a strategist for a rival Republican campaign. "He could

have given a speech about China or Russia or some other hot spot — but the first speech was revisiting the decisions made by his brother in Iraq."

"I think it's the wrong decision by Jeb to go and re-litigate the Iraq War," rival Chris Christie told radio host Laura Ingraham recently. "It makes no sense for us as a party. We know what the answer to that question is; we should just move on to the other issues that are of real concern."

"Common sense will tell you that this is not a fight we want to have again," Christie said.

Of course, that's easier for Christie and other Bush opponents than for Bush himself. Christie entered the national political conversation in 2009, Marco Rubio and Scott Walker in 2010, Ted Cruz in 2012. Most of Bush's rivals came to high office after the Iraq War decisions had been argued and re-argued. They can treat Iraq and the Islamic State as an issue to address going forward — not looking backward.

None of this is particularly fair to Jeb Bush, who did not invade Iraq. But because of his family, Bush seems somehow driven to re-argue the war.

"If Jeb Bush is the nominee, that allows Hillary Clinton to turn this conversation into the Bush foreign policy versus the Clinton foreign policy," Ingraham said in that interview with Christie. "I don't think that's going to be a winning dialogue for the Republicans."

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

Republicans have learned: You don't score a lot of points for fixing something you messed up in the first place.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Marijuana debate is more emotional than practical

Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering made some astute comments regarding the county's tentative marijuana ban (*East Oregonian*, Aug. 11). The committee, formed to study the use of medical marijuana dispensaries and make recommendations to the County Board of Commissioners, are citizens who know how to draft a proposal and who are willing to enforce regulations within the limits of the law.

Members of the committee have taken hours to study this issue. They realize they are dealing with a very sensitive issue that can and will affect citizens of the county, city, and those (police) who must deal with their decision.

In some ways, the issue regarding the establishment of retail marijuana stores and medical marijuana dispensaries is more

emotional than practical. The committee members have received information from Washington and Colorado regarding their good and bad conflicts since they began selling the product. Apparently the money is fine, but medical marijuana has not been able to ease the headaches.

The committee's recommendation to the county commissioners that the drug not be sold in Umatilla County for recreational or medical purposes is commendable. Can it be enforced?

Commissioner George Murdock and his board try, with difficulty, to fulfill the needs of people of Umatilla County. Their decisions are not always appreciated.

It's more fun to go horseback riding. Horses stay sober and they don't like marijuana or Pendleton Whisky, even if some of us do!

Dorys C. Grover  
Pendleton

## 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.