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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

A kick in the pants to the Abeinsa, the multinational construction firm that effectively let go hundreds of employees from their construction jobs at the PGE generating station being built near Boardman.

There's nothing worse than losing your job. Well — unless you lose your job just two weeks before Christmas. That hurts just a little bit more.

Some employees were not only turned away from the construction site, but have yet to be paid for some work they've already done.

Roughly 500 employees were working on the station, which is 90 percent complete. But while the project will certainly get finished eventually, those hundreds of men and women will have a worrisome holiday season — not knowing when that next check will come.

A tip of the hat to everyone involved with the Holiday Music Festival at the Vert last Sunday. The Oregon East Symphony & Chorale, Hermiston High School's Majazzy choir, Pendleton High School's Swing Choir, the Sherwood/McKay Children's Choir and the Pendleton Men's Chorus performed a wonderful variety of music, from the sacred — "Ave Maria" — to the silly — "Text Me Merry Christmas." It was heartwarming to see the choirs of traditional rivals — Hermiston and Pendleton high schools — come together during this festive event.

Christmas Express in Hermiston also deserves a tip of the hat, and specifically the people who donate time and resources to collect, pack and distribute the food and gifts.

It's been coordinated by the police and fire department for years, but takes the help of many other organizations and individual volunteers. Too many to name. See the story on Page 3A today for a few.

There are dozens of other holiday events all throughout our readership area. Each helps make the Christmas season special in Eastern Oregon.

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

What do new federal education laws mean for Oregon?

The Oregonian

A few hours after President Barack Obama signed a new law that entrusts states with significant education-reform responsibilities, Gov. Kate Brown broadcast her own pledge to Oregonians.

In a short statement, Brown said she is "committed to ensuring every student graduates high school with a plan and opportunities for his or her future" and that under the new Every Student Succeeds Act, the state will continue its focus on "equity, high standards and continuous improvement in our schools." She lauded the "flexibility" granted by the new law, which, as *The Oregonian*/OregonLive's Betsy Hammond reported, transfers the authority to set goals, define progress and select other accountability measures from the federal government to states.

Healthy skepticism is warranted. Oregon does not do accountability well, whether it's in education or any other number of areas (see our Department of Energy editorial for an example of a state agency that has long escaped it). But more important, how states use their flexibility under the new law can be the difference between a tailored system that rigorously evaluates and seeks improvement for schools and one that hides its failures — such as Oregon's low graduation rate, chronic absenteeism and persistent gap in progress for low-income students with students overall — behind a façade of weak metrics. Oregon's success under the new law will require strong educational leadership from an administration that has, so far, shown little interest in making politically difficult decisions.

To be fair, there have been other fires to put out since Brown abruptly became governor last February when Gov. John Kitzhaber resigned amid influence-peddling accusations. But it didn't take long for legislators to roll back, with Brown's blessing, one of his key reforms. The Legislature dismantled the Oregon Education Investment Board created by Kitzhaber in 2011 as an effort to comprehensively remake the educational system for children from birth to age 20.

Personnel changes also set back educational initiatives. State Schools Chief Rob Saxton, a strong proponent of adopting higher standards and expectations in schools, retired from the state to take a lower-profile position with the Northwest Regional Education Service District. And the state's chief education officer, Nancy Golden, whose position was also pared down after Kitzhaber's resignation, retired three months ago. The position has been

filled on an interim basis by Brown's education policy adviser, Lindsey Capps, a former teachers' union leader who has no experience as an educator.

Brown then delivered her own blow as well. A teachers' union-led revolt against standardized tests took hold, resulting in a bill that would allow families to opt their students out of the new, tougher Smarter Balanced exam for any reason. Despite extolling the need for data from such standardized tests to track how well schools are teaching students — particularly low-income and disadvantaged students — Brown buckled and signed the bill. Both the old education law and the Every Student Succeeds Act mandate that at least 95 percent of students in tested grades take the exam. Participation for this year's test just met that minimum.

In an email, State Schools Chief Salam Noor told *The Oregonian*/OregonLive editorial board that both he and Brown value the data that such tests deliver and that they are committed to meeting the 95 percent minimum.

"First, whether there was a federal law or not, as sound practice and good stewardship, we need reliable student data," Noor wrote. "This data is one tool to drive school improvement efforts and aggressively close achievement and opportunity gaps. The Governor believes strongly in data informed policies."

In the meantime, the state will solicit feedback from parents, educators and the community about "the kind of inspiring and highly-engaging learning we want to see in our classrooms," Noor wrote. "We have to create learning that leads to greater motivation, critical thinking, creativity, and success for every student so students see a connection between their education and their future."

The flexibility that Noor and Brown welcome, however, also makes it easy for states to shortchange students, prop up school ratings and weaken teacher evaluations. The U.S. Department of Education is barred from prescribing what measures states should use to track progress or what goals they should set, notes Daria Hall, a vice president with Washington D.C.-based advocacy group, Education Trust. If a state includes school success indicators that mask a problem — for instance daily average attendance — students end up losing.

"States will need to take leadership of this," she said. "But also advocates in the state need to really keep states honest. Let's make sure this is about rigorous outcomes."

Considering Oregon — and Brown's — reaction so far to rigorous outcomes, education advocates face a lot of work ahead.



OTHER VIEWS

Fear, loathing and Republican debaters

Well, the big Republican presidential debate is over and the message is clear: Be afraid. Be very afraid.

"America has been betrayed," began Chris Christie, setting the tone for the night, which might be described as bellicose paranoia. The betrayers were President Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. His example of the terror they have wrought was the Los Angeles school system, which closed Tuesday after an email threat from someone who described himself as a Muslim terrorist.

"Think about the mothers who will take those children tomorrow morning to the bus stop wondering whether their children will arrive back on that bus safe and sound," Christie said darkly. "Think about the fathers of Los Angeles who tomorrow will head off to work and wonder about the safety of their wives and their children."

This is probably not the time to point out that the governor of New Jersey seems to have a rather retro view of the roles of mothers, who are likely to be heading off to work themselves. But here's the thing: The threat was a hoax. New York got the same message and kept classes going after officials determined that the writer was not only a phony, but a phony who had no clue how to sound like either a Muslim or a terrorist.

The lesson from Los Angeles would seem to be that the country needs to find a way to operate in a calm and rational manner, aware of the possibility of disaster but clear-eyed about the fact that the odds against a terrorist attack at any particular place or time are astronomical. We are most definitely not in need of politicians trying to scare the pants off the voting public.

"We haven't heard a lot about Ronald Reagan's city on a hill," questioner Hugh Hewitt said rather plaintively, yearning for some optimism. The audience was getting the Ronald Reagan who blew up a wagon full of gunpowder in "Cattle Queen of Montana."

The topic was national defense, and Donald Trump seemed stumped by a question about the three ways America could conduct nuclear attacks — from air, land or sea. "I think, I think for me, nuclear is just the power, the devastation is very important to me," the front-runner said.

Not a problem. He can hire somebody who knows about nuclear weapons. Somebody really great.

The campaign's current up-and-comer, Ted Cruz, expressed enthusiasm for carpet-bombing, a tactic he seemed to be unaware the United States hasn't used since Vietnam, and



GAIL COLLINS
Comment

one that he apparently imagines could be targeted so strategically that it would kill only terrorists.

On the plus side, Jeb Bush did perk up a bit. About time. I am privileged to be on the Jeb! campaign mailing list and his pre-debate missives were possibly the most pathetic in recent presidential history. ("... I need to know you're with me. Are you, Friend? Do you have my back? If so, please chip in just \$1 right now to say you're on my team tonight.")

Let's see, what else? Several candidates seemed to think terrorism on U.S. soil is entirely due to "political correctness." Carly

Fiorina promised to bring back "warrior class" generals like David Petraeus who "retired early because they told President Obama things that he didn't want to hear," skipping the part about giving classified materials to a biographer with whom he was having an extramarital affair.

But the real battle was over who could make things sound more dire, or offer solutions more drastic. Trump wants to target the families of terrorists, and he drove home the point by repeating his story about the World Trade Center attackers sending all their loved ones back to the Middle East in advance. ("... they wanted to watch their boyfriends on television.") The fact that the terrorists had no families or girlfriends in the United States never seems to take the steam out of this argument.

Christie got a Facebook question from a young woman who thought it was a little uncharitable to rule out accepting any refugees, including orphans under the age of 5. "Now listen, I'm a former federal prosecutor. ..." he responded. All told, Christie mentioned being a former prosecutor five times during the debate, giving the distinct impression that in the wake of 9/11, he was the only thing standing between New Jersey and oblivion.

His answer to the question was that the 5-year-olds have to stay out: "And it was widows and orphans, by the way, and we now know from watching the San Bernardino attack that women can commit heinous, heinous acts against humanity just the same as men can do it. And so I don't back away from that position for a minute."

In summary: Kill the families. Screw the orphans. Carpet-bomb Syria, but in a targeted way. Send Jeb Bush a dollar. On to 2016.

Gail Collins joined The New York Times in 1995 as a member of the editorial board and later as an Op-Ed columnist. In 2001 she became the first woman ever appointed editor of the Times's editorial page.

YOUR VIEWS

Hermiston fire bond will improve response times

I would like to comment on Ron Triplett's letter of Dec. 16. He makes it sound as though the rural folks in the fire district will be paying for everything, which is not true.

Everyone in the district will be paying the same rate, \$1.75 per \$1,000. And for that we get six more employees, which will help provide staffing for the Westland and Punkin Center stations. And the main thing will be, if you should need to call 911, your chance of a fast response will be much better.

We have been real lucky on ambulance calls at this time. No delays. But with the number of current firemen and ambulances, and more traffic on Interstate 84, Interstate 82 and Highway 395 — and with our growing population — if we don't do something, someone may be waiting a little while longer for the emergency people to show up.

Bruce Naugher
fire board member, Stanfield

Group celebrates extending national conservation fund

Founded in Oregon and now with membership in all 50 states and Canada, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers applauds the congressional three-year extension of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) with first year funding at a higher level than

in past years. We applaud senators Wyden and Merkley for their efforts to make this fund permanent.

Over the 50-year history of this tax-free fund, over \$300 million LWCF dollars has helped ensure access to our public lands in Oregon. It also helps fuel a robust \$10 billion dollar outdoor economy that employs approximately 100,000 people, according to Travel Oregon estimates. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is especially important to rural areas where the economy lags. Headwaters Economics studies show the closer a rural community is to public lands, the better the economy.

While the recent extension included in the year-end Omnibus bill is encouraging, BHA will continue to support full and permanent funding of this law, which has overwhelming bi-partisan support. Full and permanent funding was held up primarily because of one elected official — Congressman Bob Bishop of Utah, who wants to restructure and re-direct LWCF funds. LWCF expired in September because of Bishop. Had it not been for the insistence of senators Wyden and Merkley and others, this three-year extension would not have happened.

It's time for all those who love and support public lands tell Congressman Bishop to take a hike. He may find something worthy of support if he takes that hike in public lands.

Brian Jennings
Bend

LETTERS POLICY

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