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OUR VIEW

Plan offers hope on rural Oregon’s minimum wage

Oregon’s poorly conceived minimum wage law — like so many Oregon laws the product of a half-baked ballot initiative — has abused farmers, ranchers, food processors and other businesses large and small since it went into effect 11 years ago. It has also abused their employees.

The law calls for Oregon’s minimum wage to automatically increase each year based on the U.S. City Average Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers. That means when the cost of living goes up in U.S. cities, the minimum wage across Oregon must increase by the same percentage. Whether a business is in booming Portland or tiny Heppner, the minimum wage must be the same.

The problem: Oregon’s minimum wage often goes up even when the rural cost of living goes down or stays the same.

The impact can be significant. In John Day, the McDonald’s recently closed its doors because of the “low economics of the situation,” its owner said. In an area with 9.1 percent unemployment the loss of 18 jobs was a big deal.

While minimum wage increases over the years are not the sole reason for the loss of those jobs, they were a contributing factor.

Across Oregon, farmers who depend on temporary workers for harvest and other hand work have had to tighten their budgets to cover higher minimum wages.

We remind those of our readers unfamiliar with agriculture that farmers and ranchers are generally

price-takers, meaning they cannot unilaterally raise prices as expenses such as payroll increase.

Comes now an idea that at least acknowledges the fact that the economy in Portland is vastly different from elsewhere in the state. Sen. Michael Dembrow, chairman

of the Oregon Senate Workforce Committee, has proposed three regional minimum wages in Oregon. The minimum wage would be highest in Portland and lowest in rural Oregon.

“We needed to take into account cost of living and economic vitality in different parts of the state,” he told reporter Paris Achen of our Capital

Bureau, a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

The proposal, the details of which have not yet been determined, is aimed at averting a ballot initiative that would jump Oregon’s statewide minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Another initiative would increase it to \$13.50 and give cities the authority to increase it more.

Either initiative would hammer farmers, ranchers and food processors. Dembrow’s proposal represents a compromise that would soften the blow to the rural economy.

We’re against efforts to increase the minimum wage in ways the drastically and unfairly jolt rural Oregon, and appreciate the senator’s recognition that Oregon’s rural economy is in a far more precarious condition than the state’s urban economies.

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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.



Much to learn from school threats

The Boston Herald, Dec. 16

These are indeed scary times in which we live — and no one wants to put lives on the line, especially the lives of children in the nation’s second largest school district.

No one wants to be wrong. And so it’s understandable in the wake of the San Bernardino, Calif., terror attack that Los Angeles school officials and police yesterday should act out of an abundance of caution, closing down a system of 900 schools, serving 640,000 students.

Across the continent, New York City police and public officials received a similar threat and made a very different call, insisting the threat was “not credible.”

New York Police Commissioner Bill Bratton — who previously headed the L.A. force — said the NYPD began an immediate investigation with the Joint

Terrorism Task Force and the FBI.

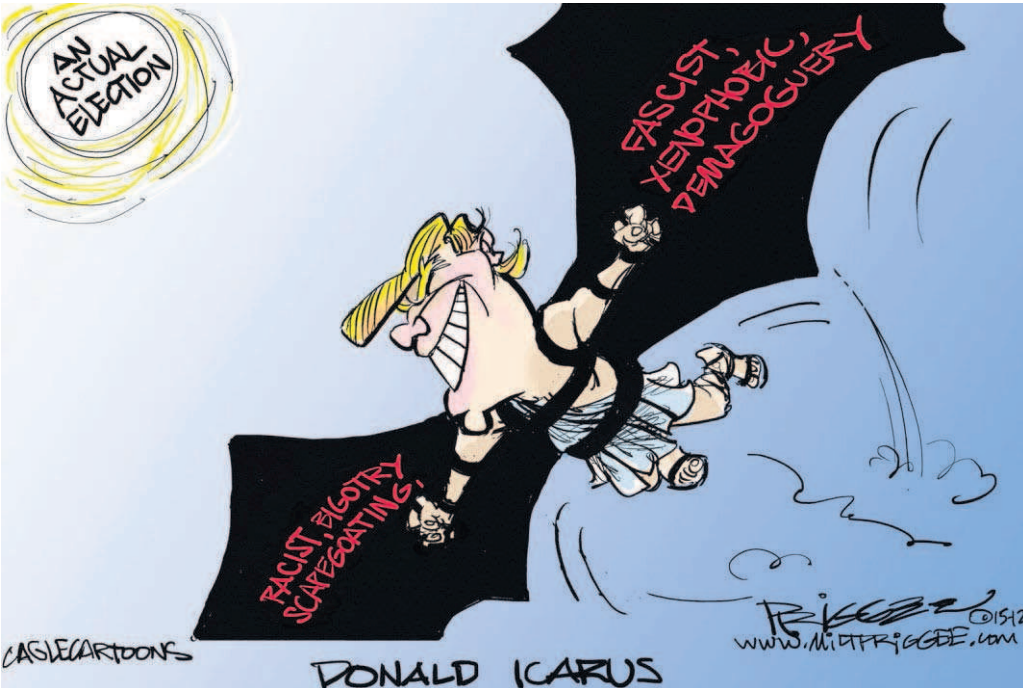
Then Bratton added, “The language in the email would lead us to believe that this is not a jihadist initiative. That would be incredible to think that any jihadist would not spell Allah with a capital ‘A.’?”

Gosh, maybe a little too much information to provide to either future hoaxers or serious would-be jihadis.

And that’s the problem with both responses — from what appears to be an overreaction in L.A. to the New York exercise in bravado. They both provide, however unwittingly, lessons for those with malicious intent on how to do it better the next time — and how to throw a major American city into chaos.

The ripple effect of such terror threats — lives disrupted, students missing a day of learning, lost productivity — are very real whether the threat is or not. It was a cautionary tale from which all public officials can learn a little about living with fear while not giving in to it.

OTHER VIEWS



The Donald and the Decider

Almost six months have passed since Donald Trump overtook Jeb Bush in polls of Republican voters. At the time, most pundits dismissed the Trump phenomenon as a blip, predicting that voters would soon return to more conventional candidates. Instead, however, his lead just kept widening. Even more striking, the triumvirate of trash-talk — Trump, Ben Carson, and Ted Cruz — now commands the support of roughly 60 percent of the primary electorate.

But how can this be happening? After all, the antiestablishment candidates now dominating the field, aside from being deeply ignorant about policy, have a habit of making false claims, then refusing to acknowledge error. Why don’t Republican voters seem to care?

Well, part of the answer has to be that the party taught them not to care. Bluster and belligerence as substitutes for analysis, disdain for any kind of measured response, dismissal of inconvenient facts reported by the “liberal media” didn’t suddenly arrive on the Republican scene last summer. On the contrary, they have long been key elements of the party brand. So how are voters supposed to know where to draw the line?

Let’s talk first about the legacy of He Who Must Not Be Named.

I don’t know how many readers remember the 2000 election, but during the campaign Republicans tried — largely successfully — to make the election about likability, not policy. George W. Bush was supposed to get your vote because he was someone you’d enjoy having a beer with, unlike that stiff, boring guy Al Gore with all his facts and figures.

And when Gore tried to talk about policy differences, Bush responded not on the substance but by mocking his opponent’s “fuzzy math” — a phrase gleefully picked up by his supporters. The press corps played right along with this deliberate dumbing-down: Gore was deemed to have lost debates, not because he was wrong, but because he was, reporters declared, snooty and superior, unlike the affably dishonest W.

Then came 9/11, and the affable guy was repackaged as a war leader. But the repackaging was never framed in terms of substantive arguments over foreign policy. Instead, Bush and his handlers sold swagger. He was the man you could trust to keep us safe because he talked tough and dressed up as a fighter pilot. He proudly declared that he was the “decider” — and that he made his decisions based on his “gut.”

The subtext was that real leaders don’t waste time on hard thinking, that listening

to experts is a sign of weakness, that attitude is all you need. And while Bush’s debacles in Iraq and New Orleans eventually ended America’s faith in his personal gut, the elevation of attitude over analysis only tightened its grip on his party, an evolution highlighted when John McCain, who once upon a time had a reputation for policy independence, chose the eminently unqualified Sarah Palin as his running mate.

So Donald Trump as a political phenomenon is very much in a line of succession that runs from W. through Palin, and in many ways he’s entirely representative of the Republican mainstream. For example, were you shocked when Trump revealed his admiration for Vladimir Putin? He was only articulating a feeling that was already widespread in his party.

Meanwhile, what do the establishment candidates have to offer as an alternative? On policy substance, not much. Remember, back when he was the presumed front-runner, Jeb Bush assembled a team of foreign-policy “experts,” people who had academic credentials and chairs at right-wing think tanks. But the team was dominated by neoconservative hard-liners, people committed, despite past failures, to the belief that shock and awe solve all problems.

In other words, Bush wasn’t articulating a notably different policy than what we’re now hearing from Trump et al; all he offered was belligerence with a thin veneer of respectability. Marco Rubio, who has succeeded him as the establishment favorite, is much the same, with a few added evasions. Why should anyone be surprised to see this posturing, er, trumped by the unapologetic belligerence offered by nonestablishment candidates?

In case you’re wondering, nothing like this process has happened on the Democratic side. When Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders debate, say, financial regulation, it’s a real discussion, with both candidates evidently well informed about the issues. American political discourse as a whole hasn’t been dumbed down, just its conservative wing.

Going back to Republicans, does this mean that Trump will actually be the nominee? I have no idea. But it’s important to realize that he isn’t someone who suddenly intruded into Republican politics from an alternative universe. He, or someone like him, is where the party has been headed for a long time.

Paul Krugman joined The New York Times in 1999 as a columnist on the Op-Ed Page and continues as professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.

YOUR VIEWS

Fire district isn’t unique

Bruce Naugher (fire board member) responded to my letter dated Dec 16.

Well, I do understand that the fire district is stretched, as is the sheriff’s department and the school district and street maintenance and Port of Umatilla and BMCC and library and the list goes on. However, my point is that most of the rural folks are willing to forgo all the “bells and whistles” services the city offers, thus less tax burden.

Furthermore, Hermiston is growing by leaps and bounds. To what end? Why not enough revenue increase to maintain services? Let the people promoting this growth and prospering from it pay for the costs of their “self interest.”

Just leave me out of the equation! And my name is not Ron.

Rod Triplett
Hermiston

Merry Christmas from the Wolf family

Merry Christmas to all our non-lethal control friends.

Our youngest pup, Kavik, was in the hills east of Madras recently and heard a noise box playing Christmas songs by Alvin and the Chipmunks. We appreciate the irony!

I scared a hiker earlier this month and he dropped his backpack in an effort to move faster. I found a copy of “The Real Wolf” in there along with some jerky and beer. I spent a couple of hours devouring my new-found treasures.

You might tell ODFW that they need some new traps and better bait.

A. Wolf, grand packmaster
(as told to Mike Mehren, wolf docent)
Hermiston

LETTERS POLICY

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