

Quick takes

Wallowa wolves killed

Who would of thought that wolves were going to act like wolves?
— Rob Schaefer

Wolves are cool animals but to coexist in this landscape there must be management.
— Mark Woolbright

You know the state could make a lot of money by selling tags to hunters and make a little money while resolving the problem.
— Diego Mendoza

Landlords say Pendleton needs jobs, not housing

Businesses won't come to Oregon because of the minimum wage and the tax structure. Watch how many start leaving the state just like in California.
— Maryl Featherstone

Affordable housing and workforce development, and more entry level jobs is what is needed
— Mandie Bates

Of course the owner of the multiple apartment complexes doesn't want more housing basic economics.
— Kevin Dunham

Pendleton goat quintuplets

Wow, poor little lady needs some rest now.
— Linda Case Meier

Only in Pendleton does the birth of goats make headlines!
— John W. Cohn

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

Unemployment hits record low in Eastern Oregon

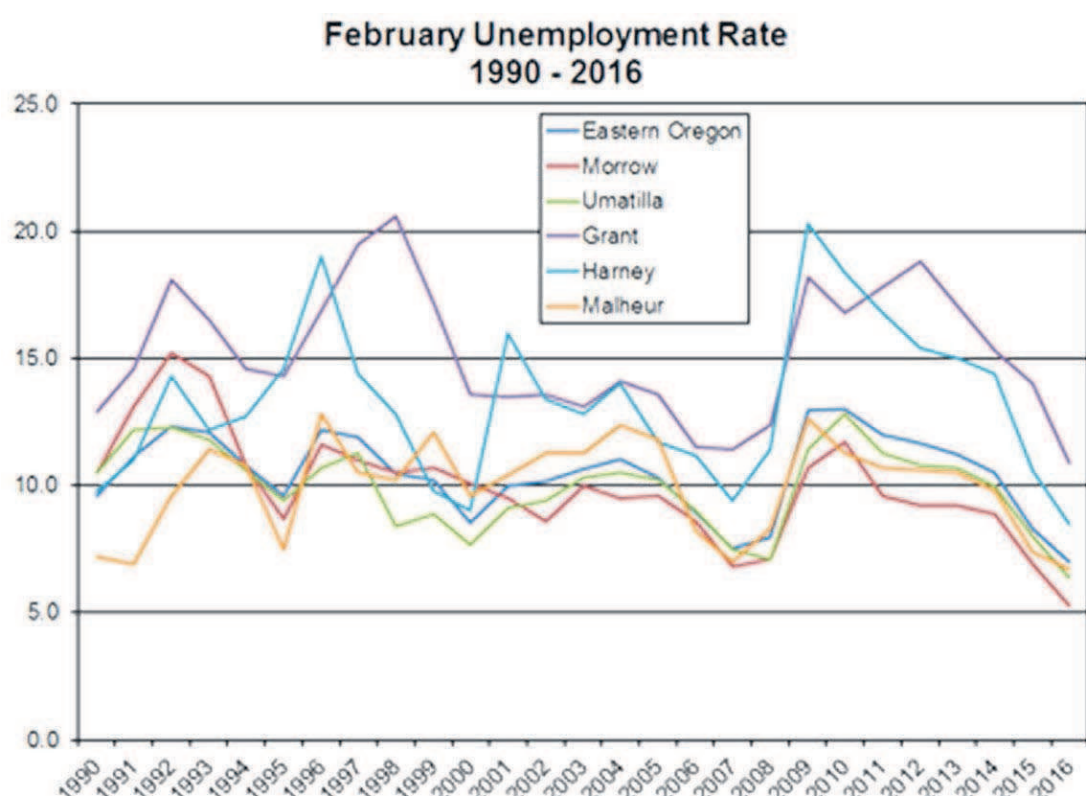
by CHRISTOPHER RICH
Oregon Employment Department

The unemployment rate is likely the most talked about statistic when it comes to labor market information and economic jargon. It's quoted and tossed around by government officials, reporters and especially economists. And while you may not know your current county, state, or county rate, chances are good that if you're reading this you have an interest in whether it's up or down.

In general, people recognize that a high unemployment rate is bad, while a low unemployment rate is good. A high rate indicates a struggling economy because a high percentage of people who are willing and able to work are actually without a job. A high rate implies that people seeking work have a tough time finding employment. A low rate indicates that the economy is well off because fewer people are out of work. A low rate implies that people seeking a job have an easier time finding employment.

The unemployment rate can't tell us which jobs are available, what wages are, or how many jobs are full or part time. But it can help us understand the likelihood of finding a job, and it offers insight into the state of our economy. One of the most important things to remember about the unemployment rate is that high and low are relative to the region and its history.

In January and February



2016, the non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Eastern Oregon was at a record low 7 percent. It's the lowest rate for the region since at least 1990, when the official Bureau of Labor Statistics series started. Looking back over the previous 26 years, the average January rate was 10.5 percent and the average February rate was 10.4 percent. The high January rate (13.5 percent) and February rate (13 percent) both came in 2009 at the height of the recession.

And the previous record-setting January and February

lows of 8 percent and 7.5 percent, respectively, were in 2007 at the height of economic expansion. The 2016 marks improve on 2015 by 1.5 and 1.3 percentage points, respectively.

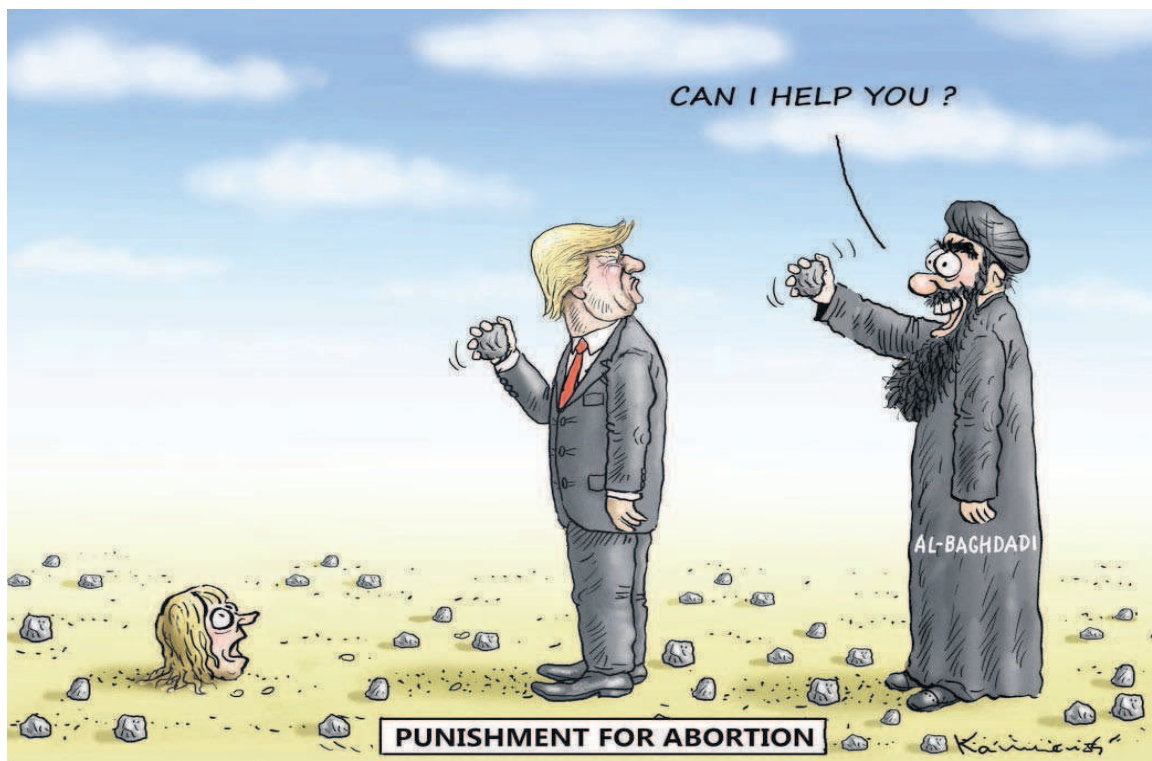
If you read my latest labor trends article "Growth, decline, and the shift effect in Eastern Oregon industry employment," then you might wonder if the region's record rate was caused by dramatic growth in Morrow or the size of Umatilla.

In short, no! Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow and Umatilla each

had a February unemployment rate that was a record low for the county. Baker and Union both had their second lowest February rate since 1990.

Wallowa's rate came in as worst of the group; fifth lowest for the county over the period. As for the January rate, results were similar.

Christopher Rich is a regional economist for the Oregon Employment Department. He studies Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Union and Wallowa counties.



Donald Trump and abortion

Just when you thought Donald Trump couldn't say anything more shocking, he suggested that women who get abortions should be punished.



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

On MSNBC, he said abortion must be banned and then "there has to be some form of punishment" for women who manage to get abortions. He declined to say what the punishment should be, dodging a question about whether it should be "10 years" in prison or something milder. But his comment raised the possibility of following the lead of countries like El Salvador, where women can be dragged off from a hospital to prison for getting an abortion.

Indeed, rights groups say that women were wrongly imprisoned in El Salvador simply for having miscarriages. Trump doesn't seem to have thought deeply about the issue — what a surprise! — and he departed from the mainstream anti-abortion position of targeting not women but abortion providers. As one person said on Twitter: "He's a walking cartoon parody of every leftist accusation against Republicans."

After the TV interview was over and the backlash had begun, Trump tried to back off his comment, saying in a statement, "The doctor or any other person performing this illegal act upon a woman would be held legally responsible, not the woman."

Who knows where that leaves us! One lesson is that Trump is an uninformed opportunist, but the episode does highlight two basic problems for the anti-abortion movement.

First, as long as the focus is on the fetus or on the claim of "protecting women," many in the public are sympathetic to the anti-abortion view. The moment the focus shifts to criminalizing

women, sympathy shifts. Anti-abortion activists have generally taken a savvy approach over the years by concentrating on extreme situations — such as late-term so-called partial-birth abortions — and on legislating obstacles that in practice reduce access: Of the 1,074 state restrictions on abortion put in place after Roe v. Wade

in 1973, more than one-quarter were enacted since 2010, according to the Guttmacher Institute. Many Americans are ambivalent on abortion. But Trump has now turned the attention back from the fetus to the woman. And remember that 3 in 10 American women get an abortion at some point in their lives.

Second, the data suggests that one of the most effective ways to reduce the number of abortions would be to increase the availability of publicly funded family planning. In 2013, publicly funded family planning prevented 2 million unintended pregnancies, including almost 700,000 abortions, according to the Guttmacher Institute.

Yet Republicans try to defund Title X, the traditional family planning program in the United States. After inflation, its funding level is less than one-third what it was in 1980. In truth, Trump's stance — whatever it is — would matter only if a more conservative Supreme Court revisited Roe v. Wade and some states were allowed to ban abortion altogether.

Moreover, medical abortion, achieved by taking two kinds of pills, is gaining ground on surgical abortion and is much more difficult to stop. In particular, one of the pills, misoprostol, is very cheap, has other uses and is at least 80 percent effective on its own in inducing an abortion early in pregnancy. The upshot is

that early abortions will be increasingly difficult to prevent.

Trump's comments about punishing women are worth pondering because they reflect the logical conclusion of equating a fetus with any other human being.

This penalizing approach has been tried before and failed. A dozen years ago, I went to Portugal to cover such an effort. The police staked out women's health clinics, looking to arrest women who appeared likely to have just had abortions based on being pale or seeming upset. Some 48 women and a 16-year-old girl were prosecuted, along with accomplices such as husbands, boyfriends, parents and even a taxi driver who drove a woman to a clinic.

The women were humiliated at trial, their most intimate gynecological history revealed to the public. And the public was revolted. The women were all acquitted, and the public turned decisively in favor of abortion rights, by a majority of 79 to 14 percent.

"Forbidding abortion doesn't save anyone or anything," Sonia Fertuzinhos, a member of the Portuguese Parliament, told me at the time. "It just gets women arrested and humiliated in the public arena."

The episode left many Portuguese both anti-abortion and pro-choice. They were distressed by abortion, especially late in pregnancies, but they were aghast at the idea of prosecuting young women for making wrenching personal choices. I think many Americans feel the same way.

So maybe Trump, in his flip-flopping wavering about women's issues, can at least remind us of a larger truth. Whatever one thinks of abortion, criminalizing it would be worse.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. A columnist for The New York Times since 2001, he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1990 and 2006.

Road rage on the superhighway

The term "information superhighway" was coined in the late 1970s by then-Sen. Al Gore to describe the totality of electronic communications. Even Gore, technologically years ahead of his fellow statesman during his time in office, likely didn't imagine how spot on the metaphor would be in 2016.



DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Comment

The Internet has always been a tool for connecting people to information, but only recently has it become a massively shared experience — much like a crowded freeway. When things are running smoothly in either case, it's a beautiful experience. Drivers, each with their own destination in mind, are also mindful and courteous of everyone else on the road. Users, looking for information or entertainment or simply a little interaction, try to be helpful and enhance the experience for others.

But it doesn't take widespread stupidity to ruin either experience, just a few knuckleheads who don't care that there are people in the other vehicles, or on the other end of the Internet connection. And it's a shame, because the interstate and the Internet are so valuable in our daily lives.

Websites that allow commenting, from news sites like ours to Facebook to Reddit, often become victims of the reckless users, cutting others off with a middle finger out the window and a heavy hand on the horn. They inevitably collide with another driver, and as they shout back and forth in the middle of the road the rubberneckers can't help but slow down to see what's going on.

It's free speech and human nature to crave that kind of conflict and attention, but it ultimately ruins what should be a good thing for the rest of us. Because instead of a place that allows us all to get to where we want to go, we're stuck in gridlock. That gridlock is then fed by

outside sources — websites that cater to clicks and post news that is highly biased at best, completely fabricated at worst. But the links and memes and clickbait cause pileups, and we suddenly realize we took the wrong exit off the superhighway.

The result is an environment that no rational person would want any part in, so those people with something thoughtful to say stay out of it and the knuckleheads control the conversation. It's asking a lot to expect someone to write a serious thought about a serious topic for an Internet audience, knowing they'll be shouted down by a small gang of anonymous people who disagree with them but won't bother articulating why, or will base their attack on a poor grasp of reality.

On the East Oregonian Facebook page, which has nearly 20,000 followers, we have a short list of users we have banned for aggressive and abusive behavior. The same on our website, which gets 150,000 or more unique visitors a month. We don't ban people for disagreeing with an opinion, questioning a story or generally being bothersome. We have no interest in playing online traffic cop.

And we have some great commenters who treat the online forum the same as a letter to editor — take a minute, make a point and be courteous. It's not about winning an argument, it's about increasing your knowledge of a topic, sharing your insight and understanding another point of view.

We don't have the answer yet as to how to get unclog the information superhighway. Social media is still in its infancy and the rules of the road aren't well defined. But as it grows, hopefully the novelty of doing cookies in the fast lane will wear off and we'll all be able to enjoy the ride.

Daniel Wattenburger is managing editor of the East Oregonian.

