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OUR VIEW

# Back to school means back to unfunded mandates

In politics, it's easy to pass the buck — or the blame — through the age-old practice of unfunded mandates.

It's the practice where one government orders an agency or a lesser governmental entity to take a specific action to fix a problem, but doesn't supply the money to make it happen. The mandate makes the agency or the community fix the problem out of their own budgets, which is often nearly impossible to accomplish without raising taxes, cutting services or both.

Even more, this practice usually rears its head at election time to give voters the idea that leadership is truly addressing problems rather than letting them slide. But the fact that those leaders have to issue a mandate in the first place shows the problem did slide. And sometimes, those same state leaders avoid transparency by using mandates as a scare tactic to get legislative or voter approval for unpopular or controversial legislation that they support.

That's the case currently with two state mandates in the past three weeks.

And to no surprise, the mandates surfaced as Gov. Kate Brown endorsed Measure 97, the highly controversial ballot measure that would create a 2.5 percent tax for some corporations on gross sales of more than \$25 million, rather than taxing those corporations on their profits as now is the case. The measure is expected to bring in \$3 billion to be spent on schools, seniors and health care, though the text doesn't stipulate those uses exclusively.

The first mandate came in early August when the state Treasury announced that the bill for schools, cities, state agencies and other public employers in Oregon will rise by \$885 million next biennium to fund the state's public employee pension system. The \$885 million is much higher than was forecast and represents a 44 percent increase from what public employees are currently paying into the pension plan to support it.

Next came an order from the Oregon Board of Education after it adopted a new, fast-tracked rule at the behest of the governor that requires testing for lead and radon in schools, public disclosure of problems that are found and the elimination of each problem when discovered. School districts are required by the mandate to have a

preliminary plan in place by October and a finished plan by January. While parents and educators all agree that fixing those problems needs to happen and happen quickly, the order came without a funding mechanism in place. The state School Boards Association predicts the mandate could cost districts hundreds of millions of dollars statewide. Districts in Eastern Oregon have ponied up the money over the summer to test their water and are expecting the state to cover the bill for that lab work.

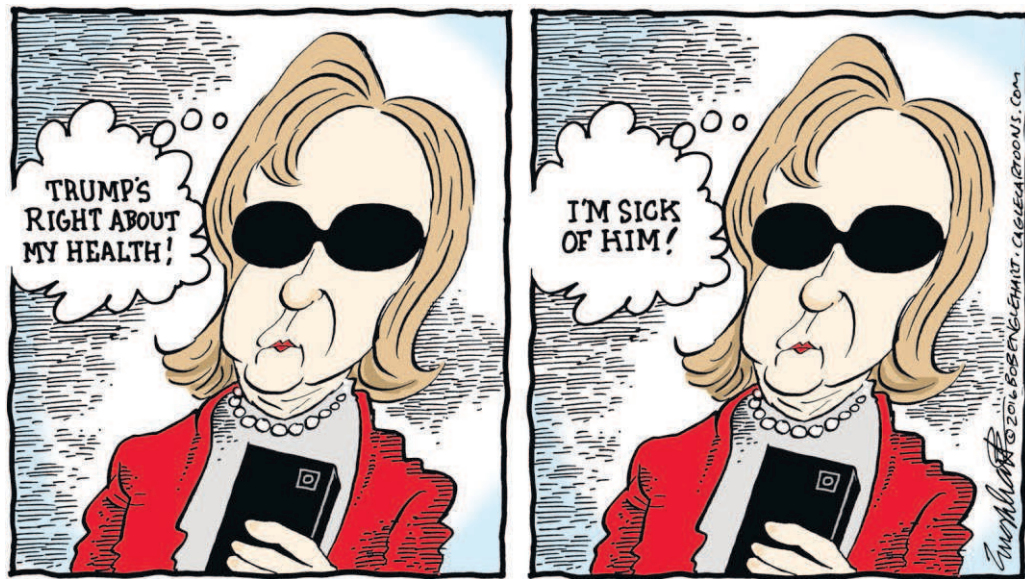
Public schools are also facing another challenge that was mandated by the Legislature in 2007. It requires they provide a minimum of 150 minutes of physical education instruction per week for kindergarten through fifth grade and 225 minutes for sixth through eighth grade. Schools must meet the standard by 2017, but less than 10 percent of 1,080 public schools with some or all grades K-8 are in compliance. School advocacy groups are asking lawmakers to either push back the 2017 deadline or to allow a phase-in. Funding for additional PE teachers is one of the reasons the advocacy groups have cited for the poor compliance rate.

Real leadership is needed in addressing each of these problems. PERS in its present form simply isn't sustainable, and there are a number of reform options available. The governor and legislators, however, have been reluctant to attack the problem head on. Lead in drinking water at schools is curable, and the fact that there was no statewide requirement for even testing until 2016 says the state Board of Education and those who oversee the board from the governor's office were asleep at the wheel. The problem of physical education for children in K-8 is even more curable with innovation and creativity at the local level and the proper leadership and focus at the state level.

Each of those problems have their own individual solutions, and state leaders, especially those at the top, should be just that. They should be visible to the public and transparent with their motives and actions instead of using unfunded mandates as their method of operation. And importantly, they should quit looking for the easy cure-all fixes for problems the state faces. They should know from experience that easy fixes aren't always the right fixes.

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



## Let them eat truffles

RENO, Nev. — Hillary didn't hang her head and cry, after she shot a man in Reno just to watch him die.

She went outside with a big smile and sampled chocolate truffles served on silver and gold trays by a local sweets shop.

After getting steadily bolder at rallies about puncturing her former friend Donald Trump, Clinton channeled Johnny Cash's song and delivered a coup de grâce so devastating that commentators predicted it will be known simply as the Reno speech. A senior citizen in the crowd raised his fist as he passed the press pen at Truckee Meadows Community College and used a vulgarism to brag that Clinton had kicked Trump in a highly sensitive place.

"Of course there's always been a paranoid fringe in our politics, steeped in racial resentment," Clinton said. "But it's never had the nominee of a major party stoking it, encouraging it, and giving it a national megaphone. Until now."

In this insane campaign year, Clinton doesn't even need an oppo-research team digging up nasty stuff about her opponent's record. She just has to stand there and wait for Trump to open his mouth. Or wait for his wacky entourage to weigh in. Asked on CNN about his undulating immigration position, Trump spokeswoman Katrina Pierson offered this classic bit of spin: "He hasn't changed his position on immigration. He's changed the words that he's saying."

In Reno, Clinton simply pointed out the obvious: Trump, who has no fixed ideology of his own except winning, has let himself become a host body for an ugly mélange of people and groups that spew poison, from Breitbart News — its chief, Stephen Bannon, is now helping run Trump's campaign — to white supremacist David Duke to radio host Alex Jones.

When Anderson Cooper asked Trump on Thursday if he was embracing the alt-right movement, Trump replied like a perfectly oblivious vessel: "I don't even know — nobody even knows what it is."

In the same way that the neocons used the uninformed George W. Bush as a host body to instigate the Iraq War, the alt-right has staged an Occupy Trump movement, purloining his unmoored campaign as brazenly as cat burglars.

"Racists now call themselves 'racialists,'" Clinton said. "White supremacists now call themselves 'white nationalists.'" The paranoid fringe now calls itself alt-right. But the hate burns just as bright."

She read some headlines from Breitbart, including "Birth Control Makes Women Unattractive and Crazy" and, to the gasps of audience members, "Gabby Giffords: The Gun Control Movement's Human Shield."

She noted that Trump has retweeted from white supremacists and she ran through his greatest hits of bigotry.

If Clinton had a normal opponent, her vulnerabilities would be more glaring. She would have spent the last week getting peppered with questions about how the FBI discovered 14,900 more emails from her private server, which are going to drip out through the fall.



MAUREEN DOWD  
Comment

Letting her rise above everything for the good of the country is not good for the country.

But Clinton does not have a normal opponent. She has one who manages to self-destruct in every news cycle. So instead she was soaring above her own paranoia and mocking Trump's paranoia, soaring above her egregious messes and gamboling through Trump's egregious messes.

In Reno, instead of having to talk about the email marked "C," the ones classified as confidential, she talked about a very different "C": She recalled the Justice Department's housing discrimination suit against the real estate developer and his father in the '70s, charging that the applications of black and Latino residents were "marked with 'C' — 'C' for colored."

After the Monica Lewinsky affair, she deflected questions about Bill's cheesy behavior by summoning up the specter of the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy. Now she deflects questions about the emails and foundation ethical tangles by summoning up the specter of the Vast Alt-Right Conspiracy.

Extremists always ride to Hillary's rescue. Just as Ken Starr and impeachment-crazed conservatives in the House pushed it way too far and made laughingstocks of themselves, succumbing to Clinton Derangement Syndrome, so the alt-right allows Hillary to have an easy target that occludes the Clintons' own transgressions.

It's a symbiotic relationship: The Clintons benefit, hailed by many Democrats and Republicans who regard them as the white hats who will keep out brownshirts. And the alt-right is jubilant at being given a bigger platform to be sulfurous.

"Thanks for the free PR Hillary," tweeted a self-described alt-righter. "The #alt-right will long remember the day you helped make us into the real right."

The only one who doesn't benefit is Trump, who has been seduced by the roar of the crowd and hijacked by a dark force he doesn't seem to fathom. Ultimately, the stain will extend beyond a campaign loss to damage his business brand.

Clinton is more easily able to continue to cold-shoulder the press on serious issues, which really is an outrage and will hurt her in the end, because she's building up a giant bubble of hostility that will follow her into the White House. When reporters approached Clinton after her Reno speech, she ignored the questions being served up and told the press to have some of the chocolate being served up. "Love the truffles," she said in a condescending let-them-eat-chocolate moment.

Many people believe that Trump is so demented and dangerous that any criticism of Clinton should be tabled or suppressed, that her malfeasance is so small compared to his that it is not worth mentioning. But that's not good for her or us to leave so many things hanging out there, without her ever having to explain herself.

Letting her rise above everything for the good of the country is not good for the country.

Maureen Dowd, winner of the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for distinguished commentary, became a columnist on The New York Times Op-Ed page in 1995.

## Culture Corner 'Fourth of July Creek'

Portland-based writer Smith Henderson's debut novel, "Fourth of July Creek," was published in 2014. But thanks to the current presidential race, this year's occupation at the Malheur refuge and the growing tension between government and those who wish not to be governed, the book seems all the more timely right now.

Set in the backwoods of northern Montana, it could just as well take place anywhere in the American West where those living on the land — and those making the rules on that land — find themselves at odds.

The main character is a government-employed child welfare worker with a knack for the job, who sticks his nose into the homelife of the American fringe. We see disturbing vignettes of those who need help, and we see vulnerable families go without any. We also meet a mountain man (imagine a long-haired, antisemitic John Wayne)

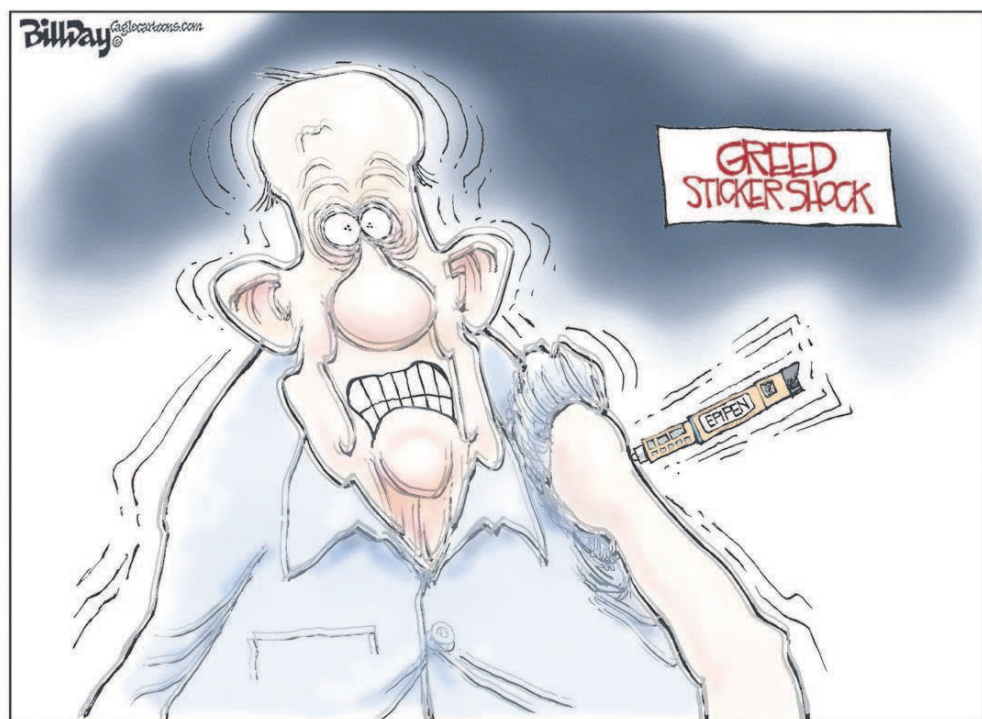
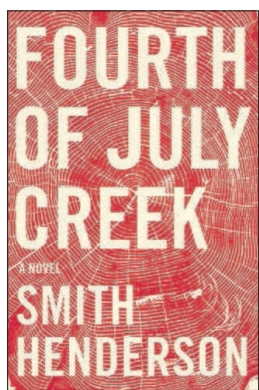
who leads a mysterious family through the wilderness and threatens society both literally and figuratively.

Henderson's writing is sharp and clear throughout, but also refined. You'll hear rural rhythms in the dialogue. And the narrative moves breathlessly, with Henderson navigating some sharp plot twists without even tapping the brakes.

It might seem unsavory to have a Wieden+Kennedy Portlander tell this sort of tale — of the poor and hurt and paranoid and forgotten. Of those content with a cabin in the woods, who could take it or leave it on the running water. Of those scared of vaccines and airplanes and government schools.

But Henderson navigated the potential pitfalls to create something engaging and empathetic, something brimming with moral quandaries and light on the easy answers we hold dear.

— Tim Trainor is opinion page editor of the East Oregonian.



LETTERS POLICY

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