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OUR VIEW

Bipartisan ideas to reform PERS

Sens. Johnson and Knopp attempt to overcome leadership inertia

Two state legislators have offered an impressive list of ideas for fixing Oregon's ailing retirement system for public employees. Their suggestions are fair, constitutional and would protect government services. Their effort, notably, is bipartisan.

With all that going for it, the ideas are unlikely to be embraced by Gov. Kate Brown or Democratic leaders in the Legislature. They are focused instead on spending potential revenue from Measure 97 and gaining super-majority status for their party.

The challenges of Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) are well documented. The program's unfunded liability exceeds \$21 billion and continues to grow. Costs to school districts and local governments are scheduled to jump \$885 million next year, forcing massive cuts in staffing, programs and services.

Our state's political leaders cobbled together a so-called "grand bargain" in 2013 to save PERS. Predictably, many of the changes were struck down by the Oregon Supreme Court because they reduced accrued benefits for current retirees. The planned "savings" legislators counted on instead increased unfunded liabilities.

Two respected state senators realize the severity of the challenge and are attempting to create momentum for bipartisan change. Democrat Betsy Johnson from Clatsop County and Republican Tim Knopp of Bend have created

a work group to craft solutions that are legal, bipartisan, fair to retirees and protect essential government services. They have invited experts, government officials, retirees, and representatives from business and labor to participate.

Already, several reforms have been reviewed by the Legislature's legal counsel and deemed likely to survive a constitutional challenge. Among them:

- A \$100,000 cap on the final average salary used to calculate retirement benefits. This would significantly reduce the payouts to football coaches, university presidents and other highly compensated public employees.
- Move all new public employees to a defined contribution plan, much like those in the private sector.
- Prevent unused vacation and sick time from inflating final average salaries to artificially increase retirement benefits.
- Use market rates to calculate annuities. Currently, the PERS board assumes a 7.5 percent rate of return — far above current market rates.

Sens. Johnson and Knopp should be lauded for their efforts to reform PERS. Perhaps they can initiate the political momentum to get past the inertia in the state capital.

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Fixing PERS
What: Meeting of Bipartisan PERS Working Group
When: Sept. 21, from 3-5 p.m.
Where: Hearing Room 174, State Capitol Building

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YOUR VIEWS

Directors poor role models for smoking during parade

To borrow from the *East Oregonian's* lexicon: A tip of the hat to all those hometown businesses who represented themselves so effectively during the 2016 Dress-Up Parade.

But, a great big kick in the pants to those on the Round-Up and Happy Canyon boards who found it necessary to smoke while riding in the parade, providing a negative role model for all the youth in attendance. Shame on you.

Kathy Beck Pendleton

Broken bikes and budgets for Pendleton police

I have lived in Pendleton most of my life. Saturday was the kickoff for Round-Up, which I think was a good turnout. What caught my attention was police on bicycles.

I know years ago Pendleton Police Department got electric ones, but I only saw them used for about two years. This year I saw an officer riding a bike that looked like it was an impound bike. I asked him as he was fixing his bike: "Where are the electric ones?" His response: "They are broke."

I don't think that's acceptable. Our chief wants extra things like a new car, yet he has no care about how that makes Pendleton look, having new officers in our town also being stuck with junk bikes after thousands were spent on nice ones. Why can't they just fix them? Were they sold?

I want to give a "good job" to the officers out there in heat riding bikes. Pendleton needs a new chief, or the current one is going to run good officers out of this area to find other better places to work.

Where is all the city tax money going? The chief wants a new car yet he

uses that new Charger every day, even as his personal transportation, and taxpayer money for the gas. What would it take to see the electric bikes fixed and used more?

Robert Tally Pendleton

November votes can increase health, safety

The East Umatilla County Health District, from Tollgate to Helix and all points in between, is beginning its second phase of revitalization, also known as ASA No. 5. The boundaries will be revised with measure 30.120 to dissolve the current district and tax-base, and measure 30.122 will restructure the district to include all tax payers in the ASA No. 5 to pay taxes for the ambulance/health district with a new tax-base rate. The new name for the reconstructed district will be East Umatilla County Ambulance Area and Health District.

The board of directors is asking tax payers to pay \$1 per thousand of assessed property value to pay for the service of the new district. Our current 14 cents a thousand assessed property value is not enough to support a 24/7 ambulance service in the year 2016.

Please consider these other reasons to vote yes for Measures 30.120 and 30.122: Faster access to emergency care, which decreases life threatening situation; with an aging population, people can remain in their homes longer, knowing this service is there for them; personnel, maintenance and timely replacement of ambulances, equipment, and supplies are expenses that must be budgeted.

With your vote of yes, East Umatilla County can accomplish the second phase of revitalization our local ambulance service.

Vickie Jackson, Weston



OTHER VIEWS

Debates offer Trump a potential advantage

NBC's "Commander in Chief Forum," held Wednesday night aboard the USS Intrepid in New York, was the closest thing to a debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton until the real thing on Sept. 26. And it showed an advantage Trump might have when the two meet face-to-face: She has a record in government to defend, while he doesn't. On that score, Trump, at 70, a newcomer to politics, seems new, while Clinton, at 68, a veteran of decades in public life, seems, well, not new.

The format of the NBC forum, in which the two candidates were separated by only a commercial break, put that contrast into higher relief than ever before.

Clinton cited her experience right out of the blocks, when moderator Matt Lauer asked her, "What is the most important characteristic that a commander-in-chief can possess?"

"Steadiness," Clinton answered instantly. "An absolute rock steadiness, and mixed with strength to be able to make the hard decisions. Because I've had the unique experience of watching and working with several presidents..."

The problem for Clinton was that talk of her experience leads naturally to talk of what she has done — and that, in today's campaign environment, means talk of her mishandling of classified information as secretary of state. "Why wasn't it disqualifying?" was Lauer's second question of the evening.

Then, when it came time for the military audience to ask questions of their own, the first for Clinton, from a retired naval officer, was brutal. "Secretary Clinton, how can you expect those such as myself who were and are entrusted with America's most sensitive information to have any confidence in your leadership as president when you clearly corrupted our national security?"

Ouch. Clinton argued that she did not send or receive emails with a header marked "TOP SECRET" or the like. Maybe voters will find that convincing, and maybe they won't. But it was a rocky start.

The next question, from Lauer, was about Clinton's vote in 2002 to authorize the Iraq War.

Another audience member stood to ask: "You have had an extensive record with military intervention. How do you respond to progressives like myself who worry and have concerns that your hawkish foreign policy will continue?"

And then Lauer asked about Clinton's role in the Iran nuclear negotiations.

One common theme of all the questions: They focused on things Clinton did in her years in office, in the Senate and as secretary of state. She started out by citing her experience, so Lauer and the audience answered, in effect, "OK, let's talk about your experience."



BYRON YORK
Comment

Trump has no such experience. There's no Trump record in public office, no government decisions that went awry, no votes to back away from, no nothing. When running for public office, even for the presidency, that can be an advantage.

In a number of presidential elections in recent decades, especially races between two non-incumbents, the candidate with less governmental experience, especially less national government experience, won.

Barack Obama had a lot less experience in government than John McCain when he defeated McCain in 2008.

George W. Bush, midway through his second term as governor of Texas, had less experience in government than Al Gore, who by 2000 had served 16 years in the House and Senate and eight as vice president.

And Bill Clinton, a long-time governor of Arkansas, had nowhere near the experience that President George H.W. Bush had when Clinton defeated Bush in 1992.

That's not to say Obama, Bush I, and Clinton had no experience at all in government, as is the case with Trump. But in 2008, 2000, and 1992, less was more when it came to national government experience.

Democrats who try to pin Trump down on his record have a harder time than

Republicans going after Clinton. Look at what Clinton tried to do Wednesday evening with Trump on Iraq. "My opponent was for the war in Iraq," she said. "He says he wasn't. You can go back and look at the record. He supported it. He told Howard Stern he supported it."

On Sept. 11, 2002, Stern asked Trump, "Are you for invading Iraq?" Trump answered, haltingly, "Yeah, I guess so. I wish the first time it was done correctly."

Compare that brief exchange — on the Howard Stern show! — with Clinton's extended and carefully reasoned speech on the Senate floor supporting military action against Saddam Hussein, plus her vote to authorize the war, and it's not clear voters will see the equivalence Clinton is trying to sell.

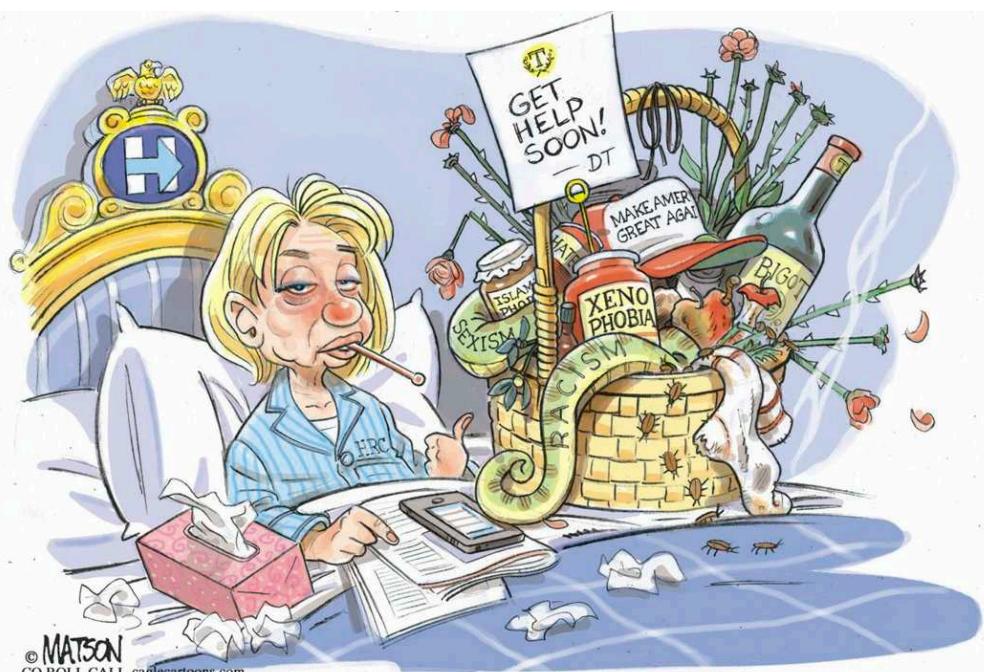
That's the challenger's advantage: The candidate who has done less on the national stage has less to answer for, and his hopeful promises and pronouncements are less weighted by an actual record.

Of course, Clinton has significant advantages of her own. But for Democrats hoping Clinton will land a knockout blow in the upcoming debate, Wednesday night was a cautionary moment.

It showed that Trump has some serious strengths of his own, and that in what could be the most asymmetrical matchup ever, Clinton's experience might not be the advantage her supporters hope it will be.

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

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