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OUR VIEW

A smarter way to test for smarts?

The Oregon Department of Education should do more to address the concerns of educators and parents about Smarter Balanced testing and Common Core state standards.

At least that’s what the Oregon Secretary of State argued Wednesday in releasing the results of a mandated state audit.

Jeanne Atkins reported there were problems with the test rollout and results, and ODE has not done a good enough job communicating the need for the test.

And, Atkins said, it needs to better administer Smarter Balanced and address legitimate concerns about standardized testing in general.

“It is apparent that there is not a clear understanding about the test’s purpose and that administering the test is presenting challenges to some schools,” wrote Atkins.

Much of the audit’s results are lost in education-speak gobbledegook, and Atkins expressed hand-wringing worries that Smarter Balanced can cause students to “experience additional stress and that could negatively impact their self-esteem.”

That’s pretty high irony for a state that is among the lowest in the country for graduation rates. If anyone should have low self-esteem, it’s Oregon Department of Education and state legislators, who run and fund our well-below-average education system.

We’re not strongly for or against Common Core, and we understand the need for testing while also understanding that hundreds of other skills need to be taught each

school year. And we know Oregon has among the fewest hours of classroom time in the country, so we can’t be setting aside too many of those hours to meet arbitrary federal requirements.

But the deeper problem is an inability to stick with any specific standard. That means we have not allowed students and teachers to understand what is expected of them, and allow them to learn from mistakes and improve. We’ve bounced students between too many state and federal guidelines, from No Child Left Behind to Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) to Common Core. No wonder scores are low — children are being taught differently every few years, with different end goals in mind each time. Teachers face the same churn, spending time learning what new tests will require instead of how to better educate their students.

Another real problem is creating patently unrealistic standards, whether from NCLB or Oregon’s once-touted, now-derided 40-40-20 plan.

There are problems with standardized testing and there are problems with coddling our students, not allowing them to be pushed and even to fail.

We must find a middle ground. Children need to be both supported and challenged in the classroom. And we cannot hide them or us from the hard truths — that America is falling behind its global competitors in education, and that Oregon is among the bottom of the barrel in this country.

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

The impact of Measure 97

The (Salem) Statesman Journal

Here’s a question for you: Should Oregonians fundamentally change our economy by taking \$3 billion a year from private businesses and giving that money to state government?

That is the basic question underlying Measure 97, which voters will decide at the Nov. 8 election.

Another way of phrasing that question is this: Should Oregon create thousands of government jobs by eliminating thousands of private-sector jobs?

The question deserves more attention than it is receiving. Maybe that’s because Measure 97 is so complicated and raises so many issues.

For example, Friday’s presenters at the Salem City Club debate — Tonia Hunt, executive director of Children First for Oregon, in favor of the tax increase, and Sandra McDonough, president and CEO of the Portland Business Alliance, opposing the tax — touched on a number of areas.

As audience members said afterward, it was refreshing to hear a civil debate instead of the mudslinging that has dominated national politics.

Measure 97 would increase the minimum tax on so-called C corporations with more than \$25 million in annual Oregon sales. The measure’s wording says the tax receipts would go for schools, health care and senior programs. However, the reality is that the Legislature could change the law and spend the money anyway it wanted.

Because this is a type of sales tax, it could be paid several times.

For example, the Tillamook County Creamery Association, which opposes the measure, is among the businesses expected to pay the higher tax.

Tillamook sells its cheese, ice cream and other products through distributors, who also would pay the higher tax if they do more than \$25 million in annual Oregon sales to grocery stores and other outlets. Grocery-store companies — including some well-known Oregon companies — that sold the Tillamook products also would pay the higher tax if their annual sales topped the \$25 million threshold.

Grocers are a good example of the economic effects, because they operate on thin margins. To stay competitive with similar stores, they cannot always raise prices when their costs — such as taxes — go up. They have to save money elsewhere, such as by reducing jobs.

In fact, a study commissioned by supporters of Measure 97 indicates that it would create more than 33,000 government jobs during the next 10 years while eliminating more than 13,000 private-sector jobs.

Opponents cite the nonpartisan Legislative Revenue Office’s study, which says Measure 97 would cost 38,000 private-sector jobs. Prices also would go up, according to that study, costing the average Oregon household more than \$600 a year.

Those statistics are illustrative of the battle lines for the measure. It was written and supported by public-employee labor unions, which presumably would gain membership through government job growth, and their allies. It is opposed by many businesses, chambers of commerce and trade groups.

Each side has analyses and testimonies to support its position. But a basic question remains for voters: Does it serve Oregon’s economic future to increase public jobs at the expense of private jobs?

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

The avalanche of distrust

I’m beginning to think this whole sordid campaign is being blown along by an acrid gust of distrust. The two main candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, are remarkably distrustful. They have set the modern standards for withholding information — his not releasing tax and health records, her not holding regular news conferences or quickly disclosing her pneumonia diagnosis. Both have a problem with spontaneous, reciprocal communication with a hint of vulnerability.

Both ultimately hew to a distrustful, stark, combative, zero-sum view of life — the idea that making it in this world is an unforgiving slog and that, given other people’s selfish natures, vulnerability is dangerous.

Trump’s convention speech was the perfect embodiment of the politics of distrust. American families, he argued, are under threat from foreigners who are as violent and menacing as they are insidious. Clinton’s “Basket of Deplorables” riff comes from the same spiritual place. We have in our country, she jibed, millions of bigots, racists, xenophobes and haters — people who are so blackhearted that they are, as she put it, “irredeemable.”

The parishioners at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, felt that even the man who murdered their close friends was redeemable, but Clinton has written off vast chunks of her fellow citizens as beyond hope and redemption.

But these nominees didn’t emerge in a vacuum. Distrustful politicians were nominated by an increasingly distrustful nation. A generation ago about half of all Americans felt they could trust the people around them, but now less than a third think other people are trustworthy.

Young people are the most distrustful of all; only about 19 percent of millennials believe other people can be trusted. But across all age groups there is a rising culture of paranoia and conspiracy-mongering. We set out a decade ago to democratize the Middle East, but we’ve ended up Middle Easternizing our democracy.

The true thing about distrust, in politics and in life generally, is that it is self-destructive. Distrustful people end up isolating themselves, alienating others and corroding their inner natures.

Over the past few decades, the decline in social trust has correlated to an epidemic of loneliness. In 1985, 10 percent of Americans said they had no close friend with whom they could discuss important matters. By 2004, 25 percent had no such friend.

When you refuse to lay yourself before others, others won’t lay themselves before you. An AARP study of Americans ages 45 and up found that 35 percent suffer from chronic loneliness, compared with 20 percent in a

similar survey a decade ago. Suicide rates, which closely correlate with loneliness, have been spiking since 1999. The culture of distrust isn’t the only isolating factor, but it plays a role.

The rise of distrust correlates with a decline in community bonds and a surge of unmerited cynicism. Only 31 percent of millennials say there is a great deal of difference between the two political parties. Only 52 percent of adults say they are extremely proud to be Americans, down from 70 percent in 2003.

The rise of distrust has corroded intimacy. When you go on social media you see people who long for friendship. People are posting and liking private photos on public places like Snapchat and Facebook.

But the pervasive atmosphere of distrust undermines actual intimacy, which involves progressive self-disclosure, vulnerability, emotional risk and spontaneous and unpredictable face-to-face conversations.

Instead, what you see in social media is often the illusion of intimacy. The sharing is tightly curated — in a way carefully designed to mitigate unpredictability, danger, vulnerability and actual intimacy. There is, as Stephen Marche once put it, “a phony nonchalance.”

It’s possible to have weeks of affirming online banter without ever doing a trust-fall into another’s arms.

As Garry Shandling once joked, “My friends tell me I have an intimacy problem, but they don’t really know me.”

Distrust leads to these self-reinforcing spirals. As Alex Tabarrok of George Mason University observed recently, in distrustful societies parents are less likely to teach their children about tolerance and respect for others. More distrust leads to tighter regulations, which leads to slower growth, which leads to sour mentalities and more distrust.

Furthermore, fear is the great enemy of intimacy. But the loss of intimacy makes society more isolated. Isolation leads to more fear. More fear leads to fear-mongering leaders. And before long you wind up in this death spiral.

The great religions and the wisest political philosophies have always counseled going the other way. They’ve always advised that real strength is found in comradeship, and there’s no possibility of that if you are building walls. They have generally championed the paradoxical leap — that even in the midst of an avalanche of calumny, somebody’s got to greet distrust with vulnerability, skepticism with innocence, cynicism with faith and hostility with affection.

Our candidates aren’t doing it, but that really is the realistic path to strength.

■

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in 2003.

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

Distrustful politicians were nominated by an increasingly distrustful nation.

YOUR VIEWS

Confederate flags on Main a reminder of hateful place

I love Round-Up and the energy it brings to our town. I don’t love walking down Main Street and seeing Confederate flags stretched across a vendor’s booth.

Pendleton has a history of discrimination. Native Americans were sent to boarding schools to become “civilized,” and racial housing covenants denied homes to African Americans, to name a few.

Given our history and continuing need to heal racial divisions in America today, it is sad to see flags that stand for the oppression of our brothers and sisters displayed to entice people to buy them.

So when you look at those flags, remember the damage that hate and oppression cause to our communities. Then say a word of encouragement to someone and share an act of kindness.

Kathryn Hansen
Pendleton

All parties deserve a spot in presidential debates

We really do need to broaden the national debates to include all four major parties: Democrats, Republicans, Progressives and Libertarians.

Obviously nobody is going to like all their ideas equally and that is not the point. The elections commission should allow Americans to choose which are the best ideas for governing our nation, but we will not know which are best if we never hear from all viable candidates.

Neither the Republican nor the Democratic candidates want Americans to hear what Progressives like Jill Stein or Libertarians like Gary Johnson have to say, and that alone is reason enough to include them in the national debates.

The present, two-party system has resulted in a plutocracy that only fresh approaches can fix. It is imperative that we hear alternatives to the Neocons and Neoliberal faux progressives.

Please push to include all four viable candidates in the national debates: Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, Jill Stein and Gary Johnson.

Frank Lockwood
Richland, Wash.