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OUR VIEW

The Monsanto-Bayer merger and 'Big Ag'

Monsanto has agreed to a $57 billion cash offer from Bayer, the German pharmaceutical and chemical company. If shareholders and regulators approve, the merger will form a giant international seed and farm services company.

We expect a thorough vetting here and in Europe. The sheer enormity of the deal requires a thoughtful review for possible antitrust issues.

Beyond the legitimate legal concerns raised by the deal, supporters and critics have attached every conceivable meme to the potential consequences of the merger. Here are a few:

• "Big Ag" is getting bigger. Obviously. The Bayer-Monsanto deal comes as state-owned ChemChina is taking over Syngenta and Dow and DuPont are merging.

It's a legitimate concern. These are big companies with big market shares. As these companies consolidate and get bigger, farms in the developed world that are their customers are consolidating and getting bigger.

While bigger isn't necessarily better, it is not necessarily worse. It's the natural product of evolution. But so is the rise of small companies with bigger, better ideas.

• Bayer, a big company with lots of pull in Europe, could make GMO crops more acceptable to EU countries. Fearful critics and hopeful supporters have both floated this possibility.

It seems unlikely. Bayer has its supporters in ag circles, but large companies aren't always popular in Europe.

• Because Bayer is a big European company operating in countries that reject GMOs, it will move away from genetic engineering. This is a fear expressed by American farmers who have adopted the technology.

That seems unlikely, given Bayer is paying $57 billion for a company that is the leader in ag biotechnology. It's not spending that money to kill GMO agriculture. Without biotechnology and the patents from adopted varieties, Monsanto's assorted seed companies wouldn't be worth the price.

> The enormity of the deal requires a thoughtful review for possible antitrust issues.

• The merger will raise prices for farmers because there will be one provider instead of two. The isn't a lot of overlap in the product line, so it's hard to see why prices would necessarily increase. There will be just as many companies selling seed with traits under Monsanto's patents as there are today.

Bayer's LibertyLink pesticides and resistant seed are available for farmers who run into problems with glyphosate resistance. We would expect more seed developed with traits that complement the Bayer product line. Depending on what other traits are stacked on top, it could get pricey.

Farmers will have to decide for themselves if the cost is offset by the benefits.

• The merged company will take over the marijuana seed business. This is our favorite.

Pot industry observers say both companies have long eyed the legal marijuana market. Combine Bayer's pharma connections and Monsanto's proclivity for patent-protected genetically modified seeds and you get "Big Pot."

Reefer madness or viable business model? Only time will answer these and other questions raised by the merger.

We suggest stakeholders make an objective judgment after hearing from the regulators.

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.

LETTERS POLICY

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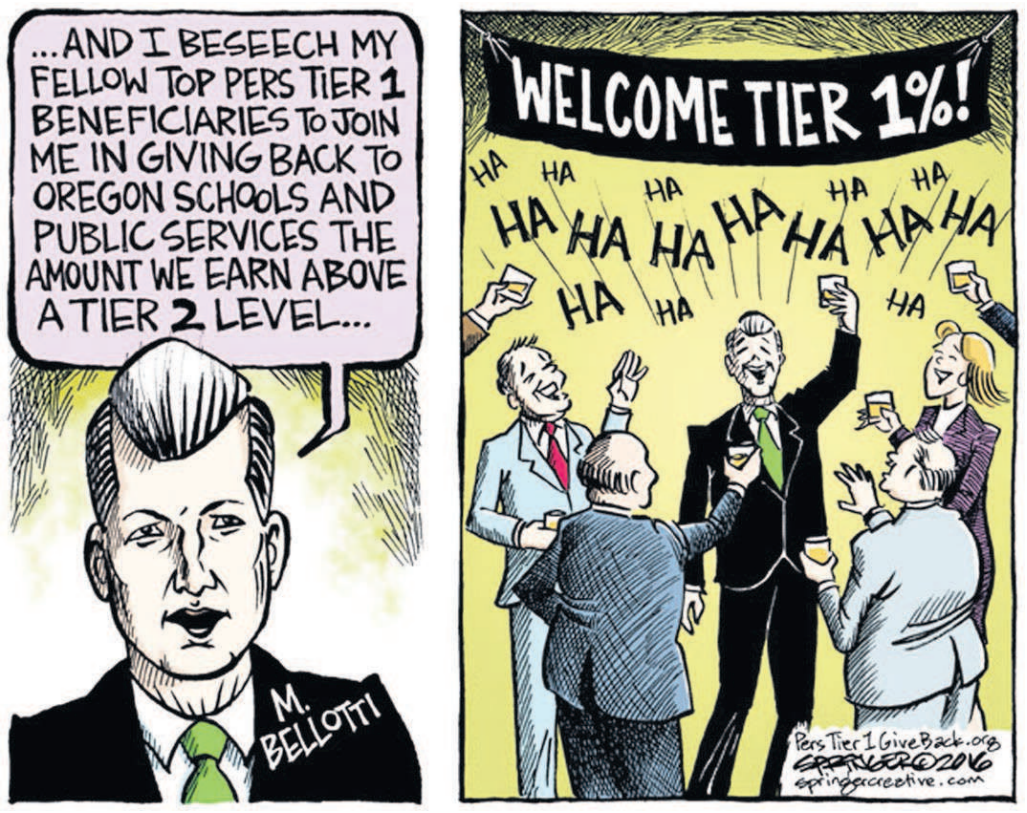

OTHER VIEWS

The Clinton calendar

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

Hillary Clinton made a very pertinent comment this week: "'Why aren't I 50 points ahead?' you might ask."

Indeed we might!

Clinton is running against a man whose approval ratings are under 40 percent and his disapproval rating is the highest of any candidate in American history. Only 38 percent of Americans think Donald Trump is even qualified to be president, according to a Quinnipiac survey.

Trump has practically no campaign to speak of while Clinton has a very professional one. Clinton is swamping Trump on the airwaves. Estimates vary by source, but according to Advertising Age, $145 million has been spent on pro-Clinton TV and radio ads while only $4 million has been spent on pro-Trump ads.

Meanwhile, the Trump scandals blow through like hurricanes in the tropics at peak season. Thanks to reporting by The Washington Post, we've learned that the Trump Foundation makes Trump University look like a model of moral rectitude. Donations Trump raised through that foundation went to pay his company's legal bills and to buy two portraits of himself.

Every week he manages to stain his character a deeper shade of black. Trump has filled the culture with lies for the past many decades, but all those lies must bow down in reverence before the epic, galactic, gravity-reversing lies he just told about the birther nonsense.

And still he is within 2 or 3 points of Clinton nationally and leading in a bunch of the key swing states. In Ohio by 5. In Iowa by 6. In Florida by 1. When you look at the secondary questions in the polls, Trump is doing miserably, but in the top-line "Who are you going to vote for?" question, he's doing decently.

What is going on here?

Tyler Cowen recently gathered some of the more interesting theories on his blog Marginal Revolution: America is not ready for a female president. The Democrats have a lot of policy proposals, but the Republicans are running on big ideas. A more diverse country is a more fractious and polarized country, and over the past few weeks white Republicans have been coming home to their candidate.

I see some truth in those theories, especially the last one. But my single explanation would be this: Clintonworld is a semi-closed system that operates according to its own calendar. Donald Trump is egregious, but at least he's living in the 21st century, as was Bernie Sanders. Clintonworld operates according to its own time-space continuum that is slightly akilter from our own.

In the 21st century, politics operates around a different axis. It's not left/right, big government/small government. It's openness and dynamism versus closedness and security. It's between those who see opportunity and excitement in the emerging globalized, multiethnic meritocracy against those who see their lives and communities threatened by it.

In the 21st century, the parties are amassing different coalitions. People are dividing along human capital lines, with the college educated flocking to the Democrats and the non-college educated whites flocking to the GOP. Democrats do great in America's 100 most crowded counties, but they struggle in the 3,000 less crowded ones.

Clintonworld is a decades-old interlocking network of donors and friends that hasn't quite caught up to these fundamental shifts. That's because Clintonworld, in the Hillary iteration, is often defensive, distrusting and oriented around avoiding errors. In each of her national campaigns, Clinton has run against in-touch-with-the-times men who were more charismatic and generated more passion than she did. She's always been the duller, unfashionable foil.

Her donor base and fundraising style is out of another era. Obama and Sanders tapped into the energized populist base, but Clinton has Barbra Streisand, Cher and a cast of Wall Street plutocrats. Her campaign proposals sidestep the cutting issues that have driven Trump, Sanders, Brexit and the other key movements of modern politics. Her ideas for reducing poverty are fine, but they are circa Ed Muskie: more public works jobs, housing tax credits, more money for Head Start.

Her out-of-time style costs her big with millennials. If she loses this election it will be because younger voters just don't relate to her and flock to Gary Johnson instead. It also leads to a weird imbalance in the national debate.

We have an emerging global system, with relatively open trade, immigration, multilateral institutions and ethnic diversity. The critics of that system are screaming at full roar. The champions of that system — and Hillary Clinton is naturally one — are off in another world.

There is a strong case to be made for an open world order, and a huge majority coalition to be built in support of it. But she is disengaged.

Don't get me wrong. I still think she'll eke out a win. I just hope her administration is less fogyish than her campaign.

■

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

YOUR VIEWS

Legislating anti-rural policies from Portland

If the liberal elite of Portland have been looking for a poster boy, Rep. Earl Blumenauer appears to be an outstanding candidate for that dubious title.

Just a week after Blumenauer wrote a letter to President Obama in support of turning much of Malheur County into a national monument and virtually destroying the county economically, he decided to propose legislation regarding the trapping of predators.

These are interesting pieces of critical policy for someone who could care less about Rural Oregon and would be better off minding his own business. Blumenauer has long been a no-show at anything that doesn't encompass the Portland city limits.

One wonders if he attended the block party earlier this summer sponsored in Portland's Pearl District by Keen Footwear and the Oregon Natural Desert Association in support of the Monument designation. The event included free beer, music and food trucks.

Ironically, 400 miles away in Malheur County that very same night, volunteer fire fighters were braving smoke and high winds to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands, just as they have for generations. Said one of the firefighters: "that was our block party and it pretty well portrays this whole issue."

Opponents of the designation, which would tie up half of one of the nation's largest counties, say they don't need yet another level of federal oversight.

As has been pointed out in the last two weeks, Rep. Blumenauer is leading the charge when it comes to widening Oregon's rural-urban divide. The economy of Rural Oregon has not kept pace with the more populated parts of our state and we need support, understanding and policies that enhance our future.

Oregon's current political agenda is sadly lacking in that department.

Now that he has taken a sudden interest in helping protect the predators who cost Oregon farmers and ranchers a fortune in losses each year while inflicting great pain and injury on their victims, one wonders what comes next.

Hopefully it will be something that actually has an impact on the district he was elected to represent rather than dabbling in the lives of people about whom he could care less.

George Murdock
Umatilla County Commissioner
Pendleton

PERS is an air-tight contract signed with state employees

I am a third-generation firefighter with about 20 years left to serve before I retire. I follow in the footsteps of my grandfather and great-grandfather who showed me the importance of public service and of keeping my word. I do my best to live up to their legacy every day as I work to protect my community here in Umatilla County.

Unfortunately, some politicians in Salem want the state to pay their obligation to retired firefighters. Instead they want to take money from my retirement to pay the state's debt. This rolls back the benefits I was promised when I was hired. It is also an unfair Ponzi scheme that allows state leadership to dodge responsibility.

My family would take a double hit because my wife is teacher. These attacks affect more than firefighters. Teacher pensions, public nurse pensions, all public employee pensions would be reduced.

If these proposals were to pass, our only hope will be the Oregon Supreme Court would once again tell the politicians in Salem that they can't go back on their word. They cannot reduce the benefits we were promised when we were hired. It is unfortunate that after two lengthy and costly lawsuits that lesson wasn't already learned.

Matt Fisher
Hermiston

Mandatory minimum sentencing equals higher taxes

I am responding to a *New York Times* op-ed entitled "Jailing old folks makes no sense." In my state of Oregon the death of 11 prisoners and the loss of six nurses so far in 2016 in just one of our 14 prisons is alarming. These medical shortages are having a great impact on all, especially the seniors, primarily the ones 75-85 years of age. Much of this mandatory minimum sentencing is due to Measure 11, passed in 1994 by public ballot.

Our state representatives and legislators need to realize that many of these seniors are non-violent, not a risk, first-time alleged offenders. The mandatory minimum sentences can end up being equivalent of a death sentence — NOT the purpose of Measure 11.

The access to adequate medical care is compromised by the shortage of medical staff and inmate overcrowding due to excessive sentences. The overwhelming cost to taxpayers to facilitate the medical needs is astronomical.

The lock-up of older, non-violent prisoners not only does nothing to reduce crime but is expensive and inhumane. Handcuffing, waist chains and ankle chains on 75- to 80-year-old non-violent prisoners while in a hospital critical care unit and/or wheelchair, attached to monitors and with a guard in the room, would seem unnecessary at best and overkill at worst.

More and more aging inmates are becoming seriously ill and dying in prison. Prisons are not equipped to be nursing homes! There is a 0-1 percent chance of recidivism in these older folks, much lower than that of the younger prison population there for the first time.

An immediate first step would be for parole boards to give more weight to prison transformation. The long time lock-up of those who pose no security threat is an inexcusable waste of taxpayers' money, human potential and loss of life. Release of these seniors is the most sensible and humane way to relieve the cost, overcrowding and inadequate staffing.

Merrie Lee Cummings Engstrom
Portland