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OUR VIEW

State budget looks bleak

Oregon's future looks bleak — at least per the Legislature's budget experts.

The Oregon State Police crime lab in Pendleton and the North Coast Youth Correctional Facility could close. Teachers, counselors and other school employees could lose their jobs; and class sizes could soar. Thousands of low-income Oregonians could lose medical and dental. Justice could move more slowly in the state courts.

The co-chairs of the Legislature's Ways & Means Committee — Democratic Sen.

Richard Devlin of Tualatin and Rep. Nancy Nathanson of Eugene — last week presented their state budget framework for the next two years.

Unlike Gov. Kate Brown's proposed budget, it would rely on existing revenue instead of new taxes. But unless the Legislature does raise taxes, Oregonians across the state would receive fewer services.

That debate — more taxes, cost efficiencies or both — will frame this year's legislative session, which begins Feb. 1.

The irony is that Oregon will have nearly \$1.3 billion more in revenue to spend during 2017-19 than during the current two-year budget period.

However, Oregon faces a \$1.8 billion shortfall between that revenue and what the state would need to keep agencies, programs and schools operating at the same level as today.

This gap was not a surprise. Many lawmakers, especially Republicans, had warned that the state budget was on an unsustainable path even though Oregon — especially urban Oregon — had emerged from the Great Recession.

The reasons have long been known. Federal funds that financed a vast expansion of the Oregon Health Plan are being cut back, leaving Oregon to either pay a larger share of that insurance or take coverage

away from some people. PERS bills continue to rise for schools and government agencies. Voters added more costs in the ballot measures they approved this fall.

Meanwhile, too many legislators expected the budget hole would be filled by Oregonians. They counted on voters this fall to pass the largest corporate tax increase in state history. Instead, voters wisely said no.

This budget crisis — this fiscal fiasco — illustrates why Oregon needs a more disciplined and long-term approach to budgeting. "We're uniquely good at identifying problems and spending money to solve them. We're not as vigorous at looking at efficiencies," state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, said.

The state lacks a guiding set of priorities for which programs and services are most important and most cost-effective. So interest groups — many of them representing worthy causes — fight to make their case with lawmakers every two years.

"The big challenge always is to provide the services people want and expect with the resources they give you," said Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, who is starting his 35th year as a public official.

The budget framework released Thursday leaves Hansell fighting to preserve the state police forensics lab in Pendleton and to ensure state funding to deal with wolves that prey on livestock.

On the other side of the state, Johnson again is trying to save the North Coast Youth Correctional Facility. And across the state, legislators and parents are worried that the state's financial roller-coaster will hurt schools.

The Legislature's No. 1 responsibility is to pass a balanced budget. That will happen. But will it be a responsible, forward-thinking budget?

Oregon will have nearly \$1.3 billion more in revenue, but still faces a \$1.8 billion shortfall.

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

What is a fair wage for teens?

The (Bend) Bulletin

Less than a year ago, Oregon's Democratic leadership forced a big hike in the state's minimum wage through the Legislature. Now lawmakers want taxpayers to pick up the tab to address one of its known disadvantages — a disproportionate impact on teen employment.

Oregon Senate Bill 290 asks taxpayers to pay part of the wages of young workers.

The proposal would allow employers of workers ages 16-25 to claim a credit for a portion of taxes owed to the state, thus lessening the employer's cost in hiring a younger person.

Young people are uniquely disadvantaged by minimum wage laws, because the rules force employers to pay the same minimum wage for a beginner as for an experienced adult.

SB 290 would lessen that negative impact, but taxpayers would be picking up at least part of the cost, as much as 3 percent of the wages of a 16-year-old. It's not a good approach.

Oregon already had one of the highest minimum wages in the nation when the 2016 increase was approved. The law created a three-tiered system that recognizes the different costs of living

across the state.

The disproportionate impact on teens was well-known when lawmakers debated the increase, which Republicans staunchly opposed. Research shows younger workers are severely affected, and that the youngest lose the most.

The new proposal was requested by the Senate Interim Committee on Workforce. It gives the biggest boost to hiring the youngest workers, with diminishing benefits after age 18 and again after age 21. Agricultural work in planting, cultivating or harvesting seasonal crops is not included.

If approved, the new law would take effect in January 2018, leaving time for the Department of Revenue to write rules and procedures to implement it. Those rules would cost time and money for government to understand and for businesses to understand and satisfy.

The bill implicitly acknowledges a critical problem that needs attention. The societal benefits of young people having jobs are many, including income and training, which helps build healthy citizens and healthy communities.

A far better approach would be scaling back minimum wage requirements and including provisions for a lower minimum wage for younger workers.

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city and phone number. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

Why 2017 may be the best year ever

There's a broad consensus that the world is falling apart, with every headline reminding us that life is getting worse.

Except that it isn't. In fact, by some important metrics, 2016 was the best year in the history of humanity. And 2017 will probably be better still.

How can this be? I'm as appalled as anyone by the election of Donald Trump, the bloodshed in Syria, and so on. But while I fear what Trump will do to America and the world, and I applaud those standing up to him, the Trump administration isn't the most important thing going on. Here, take my quiz:

On any given day, the number of people worldwide living in extreme poverty:

A.) Rises by 5,000, because of climate change, food shortages and endemic corruption.

B.) Stays about the same.

C.) Drops by 250,000.

Polls show that about 9 out of 10 Americans believe that global poverty has worsened or stayed the same. But in fact, the correct answer is C. Every day, an average of about a quarter-million people worldwide graduate from extreme poverty, according to World Bank figures.

Or if you need more of a blast of good news, consider this: Just since 1990, more than 100 million children's lives have been saved through vaccinations, breast-feeding promotion, diarrhea treatment and more. If just about the worst thing that can happen is for a parent to lose a child, that's only half as likely today as in 1990.

When I began writing about global poverty in the early 1980s, more than 40 percent of all humans were living in extreme poverty. Now fewer than 10 percent are. By 2030 it looks as if just 3 or 4 percent will be. (Extreme poverty is defined as less than \$1.90 per person per day, adjusted for inflation.)

For nearly all of human history, extreme poverty has been the default condition of our species, and now, on our watch, we are pretty much wiping it out. That's a stunning transformation that I believe is the most important thing happening in the world today — whatever the news from Washington.

There will, of course, be continued poverty of a less extreme kind, smaller numbers of children will continue to die unnecessarily, and inequality remains immense. Oxfam calculated this month that just eight rich men own as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity.

Yet global income inequality is actually declining. While income inequality has increased within the U.S., it has declined on a global level because China and India have lifted hundreds of millions from poverty.

All this may seem distant or irrelevant at a time when many Americans are traumatized by Trump's inauguration. But let me try to reassure you, along with myself.

On a recent trip to Madagascar to report on climate change, I was struck that several mothers I interviewed had never heard of Trump, or of Barack Obama, or even of the



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

United States. Their obsession was more desperate: keeping their children alive. And the astonishing thing was that those children, despite severe malnutrition, were all alive, because of improvements in aid and health care — reflecting trends that are grander than any one man.

Some of the most remarkable progress has been over diseases that — thank God! — Americans very rarely encounter. Elephantiasis is a horrible, disfiguring, humiliating disease usually caused by a parasite, leading a person's legs to expand hugely until they resemble an elephant's. In men, the disease can make the scrotum swell to grotesque proportions, so that when they walk they must carry their scrotum on a homemade wheelbarrow.

Yet some 40 countries are now on track to eliminate elephantiasis. When you've seen the anguish caused by elephantiasis — or leprosy, or Guinea worm, or polio, or river blindness, or blinding trachoma — it's impossible not to feel giddy at the gains registered against all of them.

There's similar progress in empowering women and in reducing illiteracy. Until the 1960s, a majority of humans had always been illiterate; now, 85 percent of adults are literate. And almost nothing makes more difference in a society than being able to read and write.

Michael Elliott, who died last year after leading the One Campaign, which battles poverty, used to say that we are living in an "age of miracles." He was right, yet the progress is still too slow, and a basic question is whether Trump will continue bipartisan U.S. efforts to fight global poverty. A four-page questionnaire from the Trump team to the State Department seems to suggest doubts about the value of humanitarian aid.

One reason for the Trump team's skepticism may be the belief that global poverty is hopeless, that nothing makes a difference. So let's keep perspective. Yes, Trump may cause enormous damage to America and the world in the coming years, and by all means we should challenge him at every turn. But when the headlines make me sick, I soothe myself with the reflection that there are forces in the world that are larger than Trump, and that in the long history of humanity, this still will likely be the very best year yet.

Remember: The most important thing happening is not a Trump tweet. What's infinitely more important is that today some 18,000 children who in the past would have died of simple diseases will survive, about 300,000 people will gain electricity and a cool 250,000 will graduate from extreme poverty.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. Kristof, a columnist for The New York Times since 2001, writes op-ed columns that appear twice a week. He won the Pulitzer Prize two times, in 1990 and 2006.

YOUR VIEWS

Death of the Pendleton Development Commission

What exactly is the Pendleton Development Commission and what is its function? We have a PDC advisory committee made up of eight citizen volunteers appointed by the mayor. Then we have the Pendleton Development Commission, which in essence is the city council. Confused yet?

Why is there a council, a commission and a committee? It seems this setup was designed to create a sense of confusion within city government. When the city council decided to move the PDC meeting to the same evening as the council meeting, they were also confused, to say the least. They even considered having the meeting in a different room so they wouldn't be confused about which meeting they were conducting. At the time, I thought about suggesting they just wear two different hats, but wisely held my tongue lest a new committee be proposed to decide the colors and appropriate lettering.

As I watched the drama unfold with the Quezada family on the fate of the old city hall, it was apparent that they also seemed confused after meeting both the council and

the commission that the two were one and the same.

Here's another shocker: Although city hall contends there is no parking problem, the downtown business association is pressuring the PDC director to put pressure on the city council to force the Pendleton Police Department to enforce the downtown parking ordinance that has been in place for years. I'm sure once the PPD moved to the airport location, downtown parking enforcement dropped off the chief's priority list altogether.

A simple solution: Sell all the surplus unused property the city/PDC owns, purchase the old city hall from the Quezada family, rebuild it with money from the PDC/property sales, and turn it into a police station. The taxpayers get idle property back on the tax rolls, the PD gets a new home in a central location, the downtown business association gets a meter maid that doesn't require a police cruiser, the Quezada family gets relieved of fines, and the PDC and council combine eliminating the confusion and the need for two hats and a meeting. Everyone wins but the hat company and, of course, the company that makes police cruisers.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton