

EAST OREGONIAN

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OUR VIEW

Education starts with the student, not in D.C.

While each of President Donald Trump's cabinet choices have received their share of scrutiny, none thus far have garnered as much pushback from the Senate and the public as Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.

Perhaps none was less important. The Department of Education didn't even exist until 1980. It has since grown into a \$68 billion a year operation with 4,400 employees who are tasked with creating education policy, collecting data and focusing national attention on our nation's schools.

It should be noted that American students have been falling behind worldwide leaders in education for the decades, and that has not changed since the invention of this top-most level of bureaucracy.

Betsy DeVos does seem, on the face of it, the most ill-prepared of Trump's picks. She has never held a position in public schools, nor in a classroom of any kind. And that she spread millions of her own personal dollars across nearly all of the Republicans who voted for her made the whole confirmation a dubious dog-and-pony show.

That teacher unions were heavy backers of nearly all Democratic senators, and the two Republicans who opposed DeVos, is just as much a show of the machinations of powerful donors.

But it is of little matter, now

that DeVos is installed. Arne Duncan, who was Barack Obama's appointment, spent \$7 billion implementing Common Core, though student outcomes have nothing to show for it. And we're not holding our breath.

The U.S. education system ranks 17th in student performance, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. We are falling behind Scandinavian and developed Asian countries faster than ever — including countries who modeled their system after the U.S. operation of decades ago. And Oregon is dragging down even our nation's middling mark.

The key to helping American students lies in overhauling the tax code, in revamping and empowering social programs, reviving a culture of responsibility and respect for knowledge, relying on good data yet minimizing federally-mandated tests.

If done right, all these endeavors put students first.

Education should be as local an operation as possible, with districts, teachers and administrators given the strength and space to educate their unique student populations. Federal oversight, if it is necessary at all, should be just that — a broad accountability that seeks to solve problems instead of creating them.

We will watch DeVos' leadership of the department through that filter as it trickles down to rural Oregon.



DeVos

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.

Culture Corner

In Donald Trump's inauguration speech, he made clear that he was going to put America first.

The crowd cheered heartily, but of course Americans make up just 4.4 percent of the world's population. The other 95.6 percent were left wondering, with the shakeup of old alliances, how they fit in the new world order.

In every stressful situation, comedy provides a relief valve. And comedians around the world have not let this moment go to waste.

The Dutch led the way, producing a video introduction to their country intended for the eyes of one President Trump. It included all the relevant facts about their tiny nation, was voiced by a Donald Trump impersonator and included all of his favorite words. Its goal was to convince the new president that, since America comes first, could The Netherlands please come second?

The video went viral, and other

countries acted fast to keep the Oranje from having a free run at America's heart. Satirical television shows from across the world produced their own videos, each in the same style, pleading for Trump's good graces. The videos have now been helpfully collected at www.everysecondcounts.eu. New additions seem to arrive every day.

Random clicks on videos from Israel, Namibia, Denmark and many others (even Iran!) result in lots of laughs. They also provide a short refresher on history, geography and world culture. In between jokes, they shed light on what political issues are at the forefront for different countries around the world, and what an important place America holds in the worldwide psyche.

And it's worth a tour of the world's comedy shows just to see who does the best Trump impression.

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

Pendleton School District values public input

The *EO* recently gave a "Kick in the Pants" to the Pendleton School District "for sending out a survey with unworkable choices ... (leaving) the public feeling ... misled and patronized."

On behalf of the Pendleton School Board, we completely disagree with that statement. All choices listed on our survey were actual choices. There was no misleading of anyone. What would have been misleading was if we had just listed our two favorite choices.

Every option received votes. The least likely options were getting a waiver without making up any of the seven missed days or holding school over spring break ... but they were still options.

Your statement that "The impossibility of some of the choices — which included doing away with late start Mondays..." is simply not true. That option, in fact, was one of the two final options being worked toward, and was not an impossibility. That was the option that over 50 percent of teachers and parents, along with some board members, wanted. That was the option that the certified union reps drafted a memorandum of understanding for on behalf of the teachers. Unfortunately, through some misunderstanding, that MOU did not give us enough hours to meet our obligations.

Oregon students already have one of the shortest school years in the country; we're not trying to give them the minimum just to get by.

Our contracts and considerations of Pendleton School District are not the same as other districts around the state. Some options available to other districts are simply not options for us. Conference days, for example, are not an option in our district without us paying more.

There are many considerations involved, including abiding by the contracts of our classified and certified staff, considering the costs involved in any decision in these hard financial times, and most of all, doing what is best for student learning.

In Pendleton, we value getting feedback from our staff, our families, and our community. We do not waste people's time by sending out pretend surveys.

We thank the 1,401 people that responded to our survey. I personally read every single comment made by every person that wrote a comment. Some comments, like making up days at Round-Up, don't work because the resolution has to happen during this school year. Some comments will be considered as we plan next year's calendar.

Every person involved in Pendleton School District, from school board members to classroom teachers to the janitors who clean our schools, is here to provide an excellent educational experience

- SAY IT WITH FLOWERS
- SAY IT WITH DIAMONDS
- SAY IT WITH CHOCOLATES
- JUST SAY IT!



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OTHER VIEWS

Hands off our old rigs

The (Albany) Democrat-Herald, Feb. 12

The apparently short life and relatively unhappy life of House Bill 2877 should serve notice to Oregon taxpayers that legislators will be looking under every possible rock this session in search of revenue.

You might have heard about House Bill 2877, which emerged from the House Revenue Committee. This is the bill that would have assessed a \$1,000 "impact tax" every five years on vehicles that were at least 20 years old. Money from the tax would have been directed to the state highway fund, which helps to pay for work on Oregon's roads and bridges. To be fair, the bill would have exempted vehicles registered as antiques. It's not clear how much revenue such a tax would raise.

The theory behind the bill apparently was that these older vehicles inflict a disproportionate amount of wear and tear on the state's transportation infrastructure. We say "apparently," because that's not entirely clear — and members of the House Revenue Committee weren't talking much about the bill, although a representative of the committee, presumably reacting to a public outcry against the bill, did say Friday that it would not be considered by the Legislature.

Well, that's a little bit of comfort, but it's worth remembering the ease by which legislative proposals thought dead can be resurrected as the session wears on.

In any event, we come not to praise House Bill 2877, but to bury it: This is exactly the kind of legislation that Oregonians point to when they argue that state officials pay little heed to the needs of the rural portions of the state. The bill, for example, didn't include any provision for farm vehicles, many of which are older than 20 years but which nevertheless are in

good working condition.

And the bill also would have done a disservice to those Oregonians who still are economically struggling and must drive older vehicles.

Rep. Sherrie Sprenger of Scio said it well: The bill was a "legislative indictment of poor Oregonians."

"When I first heard about this, I thought it was ridiculous, just one more way to punish folks who can't compete with Portland liberal standards and don't want to," Sprenger said, noting that she and her husband, Kyle, own two vehicles that would have been subject to the impact tax.

Rep. Andy Olson, who represents Albany, had much the same reaction: "This bill does not take into consideration the rural environment of our state, or the folks who try to maintain their vehicles for a long

time," he said in a statement. "Many are not in a financial position to purchase anything newer and others just like to keep their vehicles a long time because it is fiscally prudent."

As a tax increase, the bill would have required support from Republicans as well as Democrats, who do not quite have the three-fifths majorities in either house of the Legislature required. And it seems likely that this bill would have attracted some opposition from Democrats as well.

An interesting side note: Since revenue from the impact tax would have gone to the state highway fund, that suggests that legislators are looking not just for money to plug the state's estimated \$1.8 billion gap in the general fund but also for alternatives to an increase in the gas tax to help fund one of the session's top priorities: a transportation package to pay for needed work on Oregon's roads and bridges. That search may yet come up with some intriguing alternatives, but this so-called tax on clunkers isn't one of them: This one is just a lemon, through and through.

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 managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

YOUR VIEWS

for every student in every way we can.

Our dedicated staff will work hard to educate our children whether it's on March 14 or June 14, because every day in school matters.

Debbie McBee
PSD board chairman
Pendleton

Liberal tantrum overlooks real problems facing nation

It is unbelievable the extent this tantrum has come to be. And I, one who supports the right to express a difference of ideas, am beginning to think this is mindless.

Every effort of President Trump is met with disagreement and conflict. Is this disagreement and conflict for the betterment of our country or the result of liberal/left people who cannot accept being wrong about the will of the nation? This man, President Trump, did more work before his inauguration than most have done in their first year of office! He is not a slick politician and his style may take a little getting used to but he is not afraid to do the work. Trump has real world experience, something lacking in Washington.

I believe we should pull together as a nation and give this president (unlike any we have ever had) a chance to make good his dream of a better America. I don't believe we are on the right track now. Nationally 49 percent of our people receive

welfare benefits. We have 11 million people here illegally and a larger percentage of them are using public assistance than the whole. Our universities are staffed by, and teach, the liberal thought style. My granddaughters, whom I dearly love, who are the products of Northwest universities, "parrot" to me liberal attitudes that I know are not products of their own thinking but the products of the classroom or each other.

"Any falsehood, repeated often enough, gains credence."

Correctly named, the "silent majority" is that. If you agree and/or disagree I invite you to speak up. The media, including our local paper, would have us believe our future is bleak, that we don't have a responsible driver in the bus. I disagree.

Ron Linn
Stanfield

Soon newspaper reporting will come with penalties

I am appalled at the *East Oregonian* newspaper and others that seemingly are at war with Donald Trump. There was a time when journalism was a respected profession, but no longer, as it appears you are shooting yourselves in the foot.

I predict the demise of reporting as we know it and penalties provided on reporting in such a biased and untrue method.

James Tiede
Hermiston