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OUR VIEW

Port weighs container traffic options

There may be hope yet for the Port of Portland's container operation, which has been in mothballs for two years.

The demise of Terminal 6 is attributable to several important factors. The trans-Pacific shipping industry overexpanded in recent years, meaning most companies were financially stressed. The Port of Portland is 100 miles upstream from the Pacific Ocean and the largest container ships could not call there while fully loaded. The International Longshore Workers Union made a career of creating as much havoc as it could, picking fights with the terminal operator and other unions and slowing down container traffic to a trickle.

That toxic combination spelled doom for the port's container operation. If and when a container shipper will return to Terminal 6 is anyone's guess.

For agricultural exporters, that's bad news. Containers of hay, straw, produce and other commodities now must be trucked to Tacoma or Seattle to be loaded onto ships for the trip overseas,

adding to the time and cost of doing business.

But there's hope the port can play another role that would benefit exporters. At a recent meeting of the port's board, managers suggested that the port's rail link could be used to take containers from Portland to the Puget Sound ports. That would take truck traffic off Interstate 5 and, presumably, save exporters money. If the cost savings are real, such a service would be worthwhile.

In the meantime, the port is trying to land another container shipper. With the location of the port, that will take some doing. Keeping the Columbia River dredged to accommodate larger container ships, maintaining a truce with the ILWU and finding an operator for the facility now that ICTSI Oregon Inc. is gone are all tall orders.

We hope it can be done. Fingers crossed.

But in the meantime, a rail shuttle or other possibilities for helping agricultural exporters in the region will be much appreciated.

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

Not either/or but both/and

This op-ed piece had its beginnings in a recent phone call I had with a longtime Pendleton friend, Russ Hensley. What I didn't know at the time was Russ had also submitted a letter to the *East Oregonian*, which ran the day before he called, which summarized what he shared on the phone. Russ was frustrated with those of us in Salem, and with me in particular, for not tackling the major problems facing our state, and for spending time, energy, and effort passing bills that he felt had little or no importance compared to other big item issues. Rearranging chairs on the Titanic, was how Russ described my efforts.

Russ is articulate and sincere, and as I tried to answer his questions, we both thought it might be helpful to do this op-ed piece to explain what is happening, or not, in the legislative process. One thing I want to make clear, I very much appreciate Russ taking the time to call and express his views to me and in his letter to the editor. His two questions to answer: First, why doesn't it appear anything is being done on the very serious issues facing the state? And second, why are you taking up valuable time working on issues that aren't all that important?

The Oregon Ship of State, like the Titanic, is sailing in rough waters. We have some serious budget issues. Among the four biggest are PERS, the Oregon Health Plan, transportation, and the state budget. Even though the legislature has over a \$1.2B, yes that is billion, in new revenue to spend, the state is still \$1.8 billion short of current service level. Unlike the captain of the Titanic, we are well aware of what lies ahead, and we the legislature are working diligently on both sides of the isle, and in both houses, to craft a balanced budget.

We Republicans don't feel we have a revenue problem, but a spending problem. And before we consider any new revenue, we want to work on the spending side of the budget. We cannot continue to sail this ship of state, with the resources available, without running out of fuel.

So, in answer to the first question, every legislative day, and sometimes even into the evenings, different committees are working on these budget issues. Not every legislator works on every issue. But we are all assigned to work on something. For me it is PERS. I am a member of the Senate Workforce Committee, which is the only committee in either chamber assigned to deal with this huge issue. We have been meeting for weeks learning about the issues, learning about the court cases, taking testimony from citizens, meeting with legal experts as to the constitutionality of different reforms, and meeting with the PERS director.

Because most of our work on PERS and other big budget issues are not garnering much publicity, citizens could be unaware of the work that is being done. We are exercising due diligence in determining the best public policy we can forge. We are not going to sink the ship because of neglect to duty. My colleges and I are working hard to find solutions, and in the next several months, bills and budgets will begin to move.



BILL HANSELL
Comment

Please rest assured we are working on a balanced budget; constitutionally we are required to do so. It will happen.

The second question was: Why am I working on unimportant stuff, and taking up legislative time on trying to get these bills passed? This is where Russ and I might have a disagreement. Every bill I sponsor and try to get passed is important to someone, and, as their elected representative, important to me.

The vast majority of the bills I introduce are constituent bills — bills that were written to answer a need or problem. If I don't represent the good people of District #29, who will? It is my privilege, honor, and responsibility to be your voice in Salem. This is one of, if not the most important thing I do. And I offer no apologies for spending legislative time helping constituents.

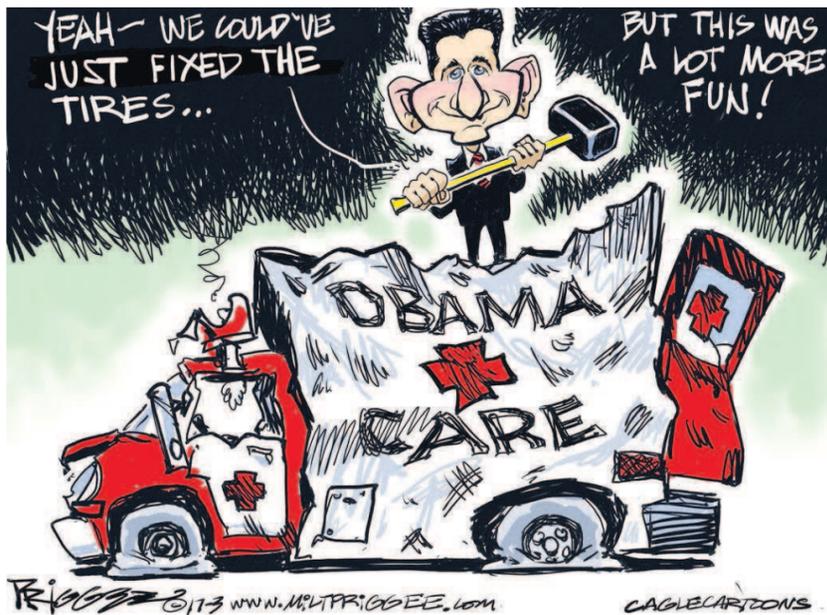
I received a phone call from the mayor of Joseph asking for assistance regarding the city's deer population issue; we have an answer, SB 373. I was speaking with Pendletonian Barbara Clark regarding human trafficking and she asked why we don't have assistance hotline numbers in rest stop bathrooms like they do back east. This conversation created SB 375. I received a letter from a constituent, Mr. J.P. Bailey, regarding state park stays for disabled veterans — this provided the background to SB 380. A conversation about house foreclosures with the former mayor of Adams created SB 381. When prison guards Jeff Coffman and Bryan Branstetter came to me with a need for protections in prison facilities, I quickly drafted SB 368 and SB 366. Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering asked why juveniles were not covered by their insurance when they entered county detention. Adults have that coverage based on a bill the legislature passed in the 2015 session. Turns out juveniles were left out in error, so I have sponsored SB 367. Of the 26 bills I have chief sponsored in the Senate, 16 came from constituent-driven requests. The rest are concerns that other legislators or organizations brought to my attention and I agreed to sponsor.

I would argue these are not like rearranging the Titanic's deck furniture. Nor was working to get more water for our irrigated agriculture, or getting two different wolf bills passed in previous legislative sessions, just moving deck chairs. All these are important to our region.

Again, my thanks to Russ for taking time to share his feelings honestly and forthrightly with me. For me the answer is not an either/or, but a both/and. I am helping to find solutions for the big icebergs floating in front of the good ship Oregon. They will not sink us. And I will continue to work and do my best to help find solutions for the people of Oregon, especially my district — real solutions, not just shifting furniture.

Senator Bill Hansell is in his second term representing Senate District 29, which includes Wallowa, Union, Umatilla, Morrow, Gilliam, Sherman, and half of Wasco counties. He and his wife of 50 years, Margaret, live in Bill's home town of Athena.

OTHER VIEWS



How to build on Obamacare

"Nobody knew that health care could be so complicated." So declared Donald Trump three weeks before wimping out on his promise to repeal Obamacare. Up next: "Nobody knew that tax reform could be so complicated." Then, perhaps: "Nobody knew that international trade policy could be so complicated." And so on.

Actually, though, health care isn't all that complicated. Basically, you need to induce people who don't currently need medical treatment to pay the bills for those who do, with the promise that the favor will be returned if necessary.

Unfortunately, Republicans have spent eight years angrily denying that simple proposition. And that refusal to think seriously about how health care works is the fundamental reason Trump and his allies in Congress now look like such losers.

But put politics aside for a minute, and ask, what could be done to make health care work better going forward?

The Affordable Care Act deals with the fundamental issue of health care provision in two ways. More than half of the gains in coverage have come from expanding Medicaid — that is, collecting taxes and using the revenue to pay people's medical bills. And that part of the program is working fine, except in Republican-controlled states that won't let the federal government aid their residents.

But Medicaid only covers the lowest-income families. Above that level, the ACA relies on private insurance companies, using a combination of regulations and subsidies to keep policies affordable. This has worked well in some places. For example, in California, which has tried hard to make health reform work, the number of people with health insurance has soared, while premiums are still well below expectations.

Overall, however, too few healthy people have purchased insurance, despite the penalty for failing to sign up; this is partly because many of the policies offered have high deductibles, making them less attractive. As a result, some companies have pulled out of the market. And this has left some areas, especially rural counties in small states, with few or no insurers.

No, it's not a "death spiral" — subsidies keep insurance affordable for most people even if premiums rise sharply, and the Congressional Budget Office believes that markets will remain stable. But the system could and should be improved. How?

One important answer would be to spend a bit more money. Obamacare has turned out to be remarkably cheap; the Congressional Budget Office now projects its cost to be



PAUL KRUGMAN
Comment

about a third lower than it originally expected, around 0.7 percent of GDP. In fact, it's probably too cheap. A report from the nonpartisan Urban Institute argues that the ACA is "essentially underfunded," and would work much better — in particular, it could offer policies with much lower deductibles — if it provided somewhat more generous subsidies. The report's recommendations would cost around 0.2 percent of GDP; or to put it another way, would be around half as expensive as the tax cuts for the wealthy Republicans just tried and failed to ram through as part of Trumpcare.

What about the problem of inadequate insurance industry competition? Better subsidies would help enrollments, which in turn would probably bring in more insurers. But just in case, why not revive the idea of a public option — insurance sold directly by the government, for those who choose it? At the very least, there ought to be public plans available in areas no private insurer wants to serve.

There are other more technical things we should do too, like extending reinsurance: compensation for insurers whose risk pool turned out worse than expected. Some analysts also argue that there would be big gains from moving "off-exchange" plans onto the government-administered marketplaces.

So if Trump really wanted to honor his campaign promises about improving health coverage, if he were willing to face up to the reality that Obamacare is here to stay, there's a lot he could do, through incremental changes, to make it work better. And he would get plenty of cooperation from Democrats along the way.

Needless to say, I don't expect to see that happen. Improving Obamacare requires doing more, not less, moving left, not right. That's not what Republicans want to hear.

And the tweeter-in-chief's initial reaction to health care humiliation was, predictably, vindictive. He blamed Democrats, whom he never consulted, for Trumpcare's political failure, predicted that "ObamaCare will explode," and that when it does Democrats will "own it." Since his own administration is responsible for administering the law, that sounds a lot like a promise to sabotage Americans' health care and blame other people for the disaster.

The point, however, is that building on Obamacare wouldn't be hard, and wouldn't even be all that complicated.

Paul Krugman joined *The New York Times* in 1999 as a columnist on the Op-Ed Page and continues as professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.

YOUR VIEWS

Growing city, active business helps decrease tax burden

I came to Hermiston in July of 1991 as superintendent of the Hermiston School District. Our enrollment was just over 3,800 students and the city population was 11,500. Since that time, Hermiston has become one of Oregon's fastest-growing areas. Our school population now is 5,630, up 1,830 students; and the city population is 17,700, up 6,200 residents.

While superintendent for almost 10 years, we built two additional schools, Sandstone Middle School and Desert View Elementary School, creating more space for approximately 700 students. Since that time and due to aged facilities, the district has demolished and rebuilt four schools — Hermiston High School, Armand Larive Middle School, West Park Elementary and Sunset Elementary — creating a small amount of additional space. However, we are still overcrowded by approximately 800 students. Plus, the district will continue to grow at the rate of about 80-100 students per year in the future. The growth we have experienced in our city and region is generally good news, but it is also causing growing pains. It is a little like a family of

nine living in a house with one bathroom and two bedrooms.

I realize that no one enjoys paying more taxes. However, the need for more school space is evident NOW, not to mention the 80-100 student growth we will continue to receive each year. The new bond will address this problem. The good news is, as home owners, we pay only about 48 percent of the schools' bond levy. Businesses and utilities pay 52 percent. Businesses do not create students. Residents do. So this is a pretty attractive deal for homeowners. Also, as our area continues to grow with more residents and businesses, the tax rate will be lowered each year since more people and businesses will be included to pay the bond, thus lowering individual tax bills over time.

In closing, each one of our Hermiston students gets one chance at 13 years of education in our district. A quality experience can make all the difference for their future success. Good schools with good teachers in uncrowded, quality classroom spaces are critical ingredients for achievement and success.

I strongly urge you to support the Hermiston School District bond levy.

Dr. Jer D. Prutton,
Hermiston

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.