

EAST OREGONIAN
Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

Beating back the recession in rural Oregon

The Great Recession was a decade ago, yet many rural areas of Oregon are still feeling the sting. And even worse, demographics and a changing global economy may mean that things will get worse before they get better.

These are at least two takeaways from the “Employment Landscape of Rural Oregon” study released this month by the Oregon Employment Department.

The report points out that 17 of Oregon’s 23 rural counties have fewer jobs now than before the recession hit in 2008. And most of the jobs that have returned pay lower wages than those that left.

All the while, rural Oregon populations continue to age, with the number of rural youths in the midst of decades of decline. And this at the same time that the Portland metro area and much of the Willamette Valley have grown by leaps and bounds, its economy humming and expanding with abandon.

The difference between urban and rural economies is just another example of the country being pulled in different directions, with succeeding factions barreling ahead while others fall farther behind.

Still, we don’t want to thump you with only bad news, because the report certainly wasn’t full of just that.

Our swath of Eastern Oregon is doing much better than in more rural locales around the state like Grant, Gilliam, Lake, Malheur and Wallowa counties.

And Morrow County is outright exploding, with job growth there outpacing nearly every county in the state — even the urban ones.

The Port of Morrow is leading that growth, with good paying jobs that are helping prop up the Boardman and Hermiston economies, from retail to housing developments. It’s the kind of economic engine that gives all rural areas something to aspire to, though few are blessed to be on a rail line and surrounded by an interstate and gigantic navigable river.

Still, the port’s successes have helped Morrow County become the strongest rural economy in the state.

We cannot say as much for elsewhere in the rural environs, from the forests of southwest Oregon to the rangelands of the southeast.

The declining timber industry is one clear culprit, but so too is a lack of infrastructure, according to the report. As is the fact that many rural economies are heavily dependent on one industry — they are not diverse, leaving them vulnerable to economic shocks and recessions.

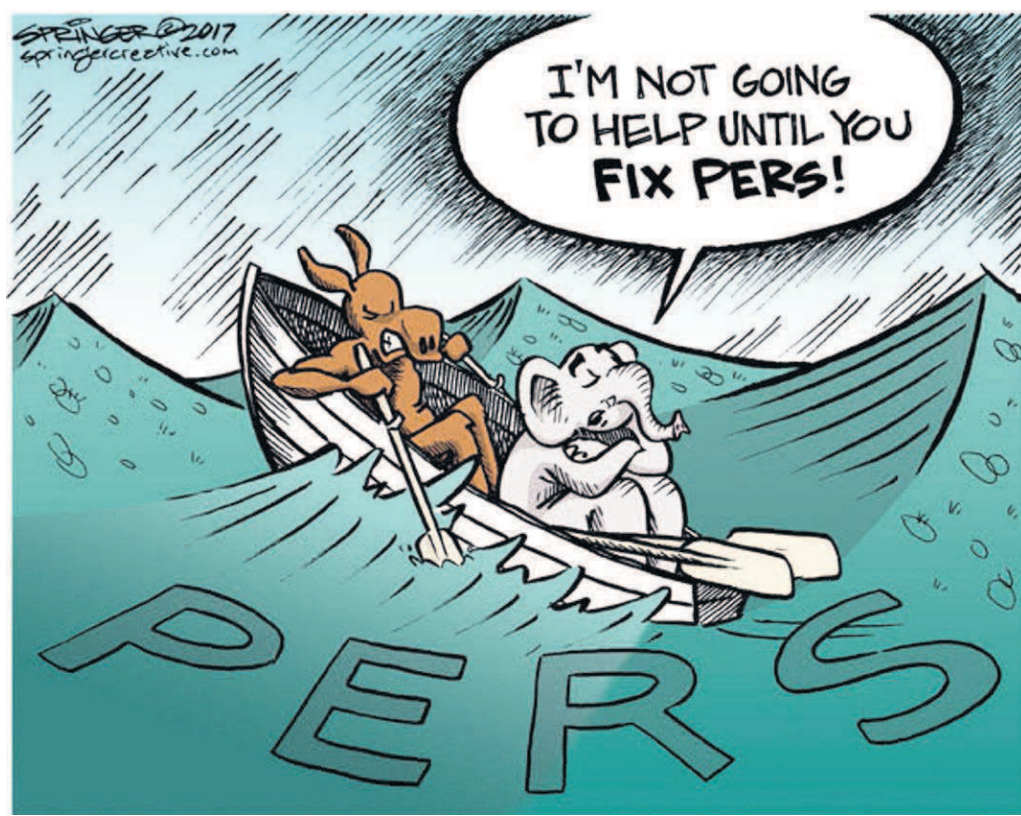
The clearest takeaway from the report is the need in rural Oregon for economic diversity — to continue to support our traditional industries while taking entrepreneurial risks and branching out into others. That diversity brings diverse people, who can help reverse the trend of an aging and declining rural population, restoring solid funding levels to rural schools in the process.

Still, we wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.

Perhaps Portland is booming now, but we know every boom is followed eventually by a bust. Luckily rural Oregon isn’t riding that roller coaster. Still, we need to get our economies on track with new investment and new ideas.

17 of Oregon’s 23 rural counties have fewer jobs now than before the recession hit in 2008 — Morrow County is the lone standout with a fast-expanding economy.

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

Who will save the republic?

You have seen them on high, scurrying with great urgency between columns of marble, the clicks of Armani-heeled favor seekers never far behind. You have heard them in the past few days, saying they are “troubled” or “disappointed” about the latest assault on democracy from the White House.

They know enough history to get this: Donald Trump is the first president in history whose campaign has come under federal investigation for collusion with a hostile foreign power. And now the person heading that investigation, the FBI director, has been fired.

We’re looking for a few good men and women in Congress to understand the gravity of this debasement. We don’t need more parsing about the bad “optics” or “timing” of Trump firing the man who could have ended his presidency. We need a Republican in power to call it what it is: a bungled attempt to obstruct justice. And the tragic part is that Trump is likely to succeed, at least in the short term. The person he chooses for FBI director will never assemble a prosecutable case of treason that leads to the doorstep of this White House.

The courts can do only so much. They can block orders that violate the Constitution. But they can’t be real-time truth seekers in a moment of real urgency. As for Ivanka Trump, the supposed sane person in an insane White House, she has only so many whispers into Daddy’s ear that will be listened to.

Thus, it falls to a half-dozen or so Republicans to heed the words of a man whose statue they pass every day in the Capitol. “Even if you’re on the right track,” said Will Rogers, Oklahoma’s gift to American gab, “you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”

As it is, they’re getting run over. Things that never happened before now happen with such regularity that the numbing and the dumbing down can make a rational human inert. Trump is a tutorial in Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s observation about “defining deviancy downward.” Here is a man who doesn’t share basic democratic values, who uttered nearly 500 lies or misleading statements in his first three months in office, and it has all become mere background — the screen saver of this presidency.

The civilized world was recently appalled at Trump’s outreach to tyrants from North Korea, the Philippines and Turkey. This week, we find out that the family of the president’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, offered Chinese business owners a path to U. S. citizenship if they invested in a Kushner property. And a White House visit of Russian political operatives



TIMOTHY EGAN
Comment

was closed to the American press. We needed Tass, which is to Vladimir Putin what Fox News is to Trump, to provide official documentation for that meeting.

The Trump White House makes gangsters look more civilized, and organized. With Trump, as with most outsize characters in fiction or real life, character drives action. He’s a lifelong charlatan, a con man, a habitué of bankruptcy courts. He thinks this will blow over — everything always does.

He’s off to Europe soon, the rogue man out. And that photo with Pope Francis will surely make people forget the chaos back home.

The Trump White House makes gangsters look more civilized, and organized.

But the truth will come out. The journalism of the past few days — those labeled Enemies of the People by Trump now doing the people’s work, as envisioned by the founders — has been extraordinary.

It’s obvious that Trump fired James Comey because he was getting closer to the truth of what happened with Russian manipulation of the American election. His

advisers say an enraged Trump screamed at the television when this story would not go away. “Russia, Russia, Russia,” Kellyanne Conway said, sounding like a “Brady Bunch” brat complaining about “Marcia, Marcia, Marcia.”

Trump’s assertion that Comey told him three times he wasn’t under investigation has yet to be backed up and looks like another bogus Trump claim, if not a violation of Justice Department protocol.

So, we turn to a handful of people in Trump’s own party to do something courageous — to do the job they were sworn to do. Trump was at 38 percent approval in Gallup’s tracking poll Thursday and 36 percent in a Quinnipiac survey — both historic lows at this stage in a modern presidency. These numbers may stiffen the spines of some Republicans in Congress.

The Irish Undertaker, Paul Ryan, is a lost cause — and increasingly looks like a bystander to the multiple-car wreck happening before him. The Senate leader, Mitch McConnell — whose wife, don’t forget, is in Trump’s Cabinet — is also sitting this one out.

Call out the names: Sens. John McCain and Jeff Flake, Richard Burr and Bob Corker, Ben Sasse and Lisa Murkowski. They have committees and investigators at their disposal. Their party impeached Bill Clinton for lying about sex. The least they can do is demand some accountability of a man whose entire presidency is a lie.

Timothy Egan, a New York Times contributing op-ed writer, covers the environment, the American West and politics.

YOUR VIEWS

Walden lost voter because of stance on health care bill

Good day to you, Rep. Greg Walden. Many congratulations on your work to “repeal and replace” Obamacare — I know it has been a significant goal for you. But I’m a bit thick about some of these complex issues and I don’t understand a few of the provisions, so I’m wondering if you could clarify a couple of things?

One is that I understand that as you repeal Obamacare there really isn’t a plan to replace it — just a very quick outline of a different approach. Isn’t there more to health care for all Americans than a quickie outline, and before you eliminate one plan shouldn’t you have another one ready to go?

This seems to me to be like eliminating your car before you get another and then you can’t go to work, and I’d call that poor management.

And what about the tens of millions of Americans who will end up with no health care at all or health care that is much more expensive and/or has less coverage? From what I’ve read, seniors and poorer people are really going to end up on the short end of this stick, especially in rural areas. A lot of your district, especially here in Eastern Oregon, is very rural and there are lots of old folks. So how does this repeal serve them?

And why are so many doctor and hospital groups so opposed? Is it because poor people and old people are taking such a

hit? Or because it will create so much chaos in the health care system? Did you know that Medicaid is a really, really important program for a lot of people not only in your district but all across America? And when you eliminate so much from the Medicaid program that a whole lot of people, including your constituents in your district, get really, really hurt?

I’ve always thought in terms of separating “needs” and “wants.” I understand part of this bill that you all have passed has given huge tax breaks to the billionaires and multi-millionaires. I’m sure you’ve made big points with the Billionaire in Chief, Rep. Walden, but not with me. I voted for you the election before last but not again — ain’t no way.

So for a second time, congratulations on reaching your goal — and good luck to us all who might be forced to live with it unless the Senate wakes up and smells the coffee.

Andrew A. Clark Pendleton

Legislature can bring dentists to rural patients

Our Legislature is facing many challenges during this year’s session. One issue that is a top priority for many is access to health care, including professional dental care.

A recent study found that the number of dentists in Oregon is not lacking now, nor will it be in the future. But many Oregonians

living in more isolated areas still have less access to the providers they need to take care of their teeth. As important as oral health care is to one’s overall health, this should be a top priority for our elected officials this year.

One reason some dental school graduates choose to work in a more populated area over opening a practice in a rural, underserved community is debt. When considering where to practice after dental school, many graduates, who have debt loads of \$300,000 or more, choose the option that ensures they can more quickly pay off their student loans, in a metropolitan area.

However, those who choose those areas never get to experience the benefits of working with and living in a smaller community. Having grown up in La Grande, I knew I wanted to practice in a rural area. There is a rich quality of life in smaller communities, and the need for more dentists in some of these areas is significant.

Even though it can be more challenging to cover the costs of operating a practice in a rural town, the benefits of living in a community such as La Grande make it well worth it.

As dentists navigate the many challenges of practicing in rural Oregon, including lack of oral health education, geography and patients’ abilities to pay, they are much like the pioneers who settled in these areas hundreds of years ago.

Our elected officials can help to ensure

that this pioneer spirit will continue in the rural, under-served areas of Oregon. One way to foster this is to support loan forgiveness opportunities provided through Scholars for a Healthy Oregon, and the Oregon Medicaid Primary Care Loan Repayment and Forgiveness programs. Rural practitioner tax credits also help get more dentists to the patients who need them.

As lawmakers continue the debate on health care access in the Legislature this year, it is vital that we find ways to ensure that every Oregonian has access to a professional dentist regardless of race, income or geographic location.

James McMahan, DMD La Grande

LETTERS POLICY

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