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OUR VIEW

For sake of solution, Gov. Brown must set aside campaign

Gov. Kate Brown faces a legacy-defining choice as the 2017 Legislature enters its final weeks: Will she put the good of Oregon ahead of her quest for re-election next year?

The answer matters deeply for Oregonians. For this year's legislative session to succeed, Brown must stand up to public-employee unions and their allies.

The unions and some Democrats on the left seem so insistent on getting their own way that they would rather sink the ship of state than accommodate reasonable,

meaningful compromise. The difficulty for Brown is that she counts on their money and grassroots activism for her 2018 election campaign, to which she already is devoting considerable time.

At stake in 2017 are statewide transportation improvements, taxes, and cost savings in the Public Employees Retirement System and other areas.

As Scappoose Sen. Betsy Johnson, a moderate Democrat, and other veteran legislators have noted, this year's big issues appear far more intertwined than in the past.

That makes it easier for any interest group or partisan bloc to thwart progress everywhere if they don't get their way in one area.

The latest example is the Service Employees International Union's threat to overturn the Legislature's transportation-infrastructure package, which has been a priority for Democrats and Republicans alike, unless legislators pass a suitable tax package to help schools and human services.

This is last fall's ballot fight being replayed. In the aftermath of its decisive but divisive defeat of Ballot Measure 97, the business community has been unable to coalesce and work with unions on an alternative. As a result, SEIU, the

Oregon Education Association and their allies are continuing their push to dramatically increase business taxes.

The SEIU contends that Oregon should increase revenue for schools and human services before raising taxes and fees for transportation projects. That is a rational viewpoint.

But it would be irrational to fight the transportation package at the ballot box — as the SEIU said it might do — if its preferred revenue plan fails in the Legislature.

The Democratic majority in the Legislature needs Republican votes to pass any tax package. Republicans want meaningful cost savings, including PERS reforms beyond the meager proposal unveiled last week.

Republicans, especially in the Senate, are steadfast against the unions' preferred gross receipts tax — a commercial activity tax — to replace Oregon's existing corporate income tax. That plan would create such winners and losers that some companies could see their tax bills triple.

Centrist legislators are floating an alternative that deserves consideration: Temporarily raise corporate and personal income taxes to deal with the state's budget hole.

That is not a long-term solution to Oregon's unstable, unpredictable tax system. But neither is it a wrong-way trip into the unintended tax consequences of a new business tax that, even if it is doable, needs far more work.

Brown endorsed the transportation package this week. That is a welcome step but by itself an inadequate one. Oregonians need her to campaign not for re-election but for a worthwhile transportation package, meaningful PERS reforms and pragmatic tax decisions.

Success will require passion, persuasiveness and willingness to defy her past allies.

At stake are statewide transportation improvements, taxes and cost savings in PERS.

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.

YOUR VIEWS

Bill would make drug prices affordable

I'm a pharmacist in Enterprise, Oregon, at one of two places in town where patients can get prescriptions. I enjoy being a pharmacist because I like to help people. But I don't like seeing how the prices of needed medications gives my patients sticker shock.

I see patients in my community often making choices between the basic necessities of life and their medications, and if nothing is done I know it's likely to get worse. It's unhealthy for them and frustrating for me, and it impacts the whole community.

One of my patients has diabetes, as do one in eight Oregonians. Insulin prices have tripled in just the past decade. In addition, she needs a higher dosage to manage her condition — and a higher dosage also means a higher cost. She is lucky to have health insurance but her out-of-pocket costs are still about \$600 per month and that's after her insurance covers two-thirds of the cost. That means this drug costs almost \$22,000 per year.

Once, as I could see the will to live draining from her face, she said, "Maybe I should just die." She tried to turn it into a joke but it didn't really work.

Experiences like this happen every

day and are why the Oregon Pharmacy Coalition is part of the broad coalition working to pass the Oregon Affordable Drug Prices Act for affordability, fairness, and transparency in drug pricing.

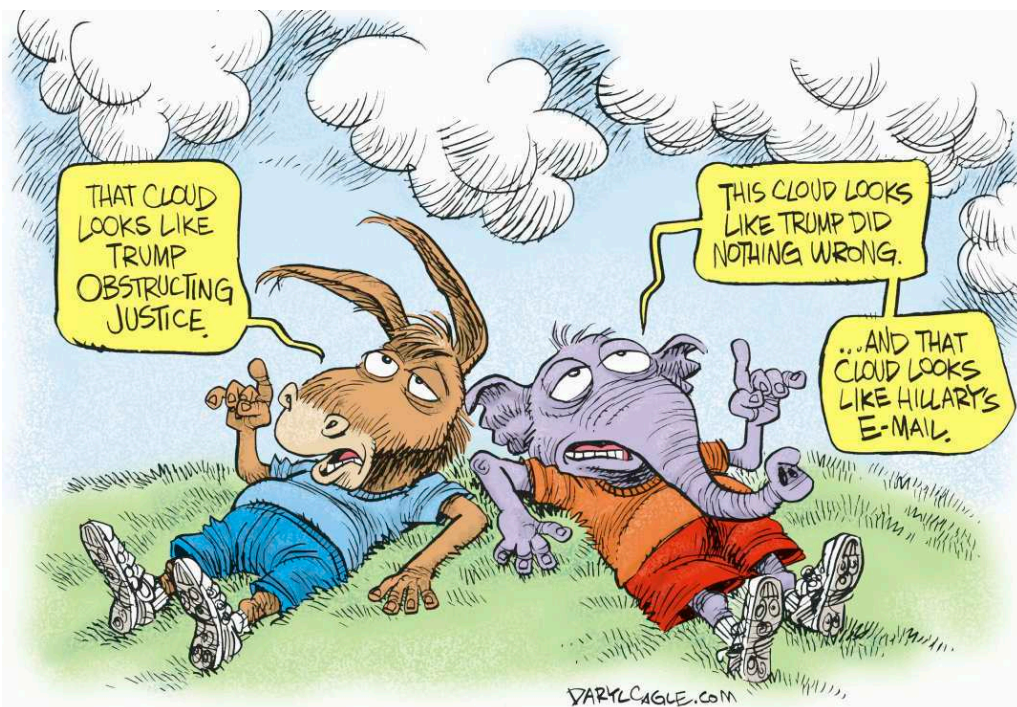
HB 2387, the Oregon Affordable Drug Prices Act, helps patients by capping prescription drug co-pays at between \$100 and \$250, which will provide immediate relief for hundreds of thousands of Oregonians. This Act will also benefit all Oregonians by bringing transparency to drug pricing and making the market more competitive. Pharmaceutical manufacturers will be required to justify large price increases to the Department of Business and Consumer Affairs. If the drug price increase is determined to be unjustified, the pharmaceutical manufacturer must pay a rebate into a Premium Protection Fund, which will ensure that the high prices they charge don't drive up insurance rates.

Learn more about how HB 2387 will help Oregonians and get involved at www.affordablerxnow.org. The powerful pharmaceutical industry has spent a lot of money in Oregon to stop HB 2387 and protect their profits. Please join us today in standing up to Big Pharma to lower prices and bring transparency and accountability to drug pricing.

Sean Murray
Enterprise

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.



OTHER VIEWS

Can Democrats save themselves?

On a recent weekend at the farmers market in Halcottsville, New York, Fred Margulies sat under a "Vote Where It Counts" sign and beckoned second-home owners to re-register in this area upstate instead of wherever their main residences were — New York City, most likely.

To win the House in 2018 and buck President Donald Trump's worst impulses, Democrats don't need more votes in Manhattan and Brooklyn. They need them around Halcottsville, in the 19th Congressional District, where the party should be able to prevail but keeps falling short.

Its optimism grows with Trump's woes. But will Democrats put forward the right candidate for a largely working-class region whose barns need paint, whose town centers want for bustle and whose manufacturing plants are too few and far between?

Margulies told me that a man might fare best, especially someone who doesn't feed residents' fears that they're "under the thumb of the city." But in the Democratic primary last year, Margulies spurned a male contender with unquestioned local ties in favor of Zephyr Teachout, a Manhattan law professor who'd just moved to the district to run. She got the nomination, then lost by about 9 points in the general election.

"I liked her mind," Margulies said. "I guess I'm not practical."

Well, the time for romance is past. The 2018 midterms could hinge on how ruthlessly pragmatic Democrats are.

From the scandalous look of the last week, dominated by James Comey's testimony, Democrats are beautifully positioned to trounce Republicans wherever Republicans are trounce-able. But the party has done an ace job of sabotaging itself before. The 19th District, also known as the Hudson Valley, tells that story well.

Next year, Democrats should pick up many seats in Congress, given the usual midterm correction and the unusual melodrama in the Trump administration. Control of the Senate is probably beyond the party's reach, because Democrats have to defend two states to every one that Republicans do, on turf that's plenty red. Control of the House, though, is entirely possible, even with all the gerrymandering that has occurred. But that presumes that Democrats can get their act together.

They're still not sure how much of Trump's victory had to do with Hillary Clinton's flaws versus the party's poor grasp of America, and the more they focus on the former, tattling for the tell-all book "Shattered" and then tittering over its revelations, the less they own up to the latter.

They're still searching for a concise, coherent message. They're still feuding: the Bernie Sanders/Elizabeth Warren wing versus the moderates. And they're still indulging in



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elitist optics at odds with the lessons of 2016. Although new research commissioned by Priorities USA, a Democratic super PAC, concluded that many Obama-to-Trump voters believed that Democrats are out of touch with less affluent Americans, a recent, high-profile Democratic brainstorming session in Washington was held at the opulent Four Seasons Hotel.

Then there are the candidates, who sometimes step forward, or are elevated, independent of any master plan. Democrats in the 19th haven't been riding optimal ones.

Their horse in 2014 was a pampered foal, Sean Eldridge, then 28, who is married to Facebook multimillionaire Chris Hughes and qualified for the race by purchasing a \$2 million country house just an hour from the \$5 million country house the couple already owned.

His bid was cast as a tale "of nouveau riche liberal ambition, real-estate excess and carpetbaggery run amok," Michael Barbaro wrote in *The New York Times*, and, shockingly, he never captured the hearts of the region's dairy farmers. Although the district is almost evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans, and Barack Obama won it by about 8 points in 2008 and 6 in 2012, Eldridge suffered a 30-point defeat.

He ran against a popular, deft incumbent who then decided to retire from the House after 2016, so Democrats nursed renewed hopes in last year's congressional election. Party chieftains in Washington put the Hudson Valley high on their wish list of House seats to turn blue.

Teachout was the favorite of the local progressives who held sway in the primary. She had been anointed by Sanders. She had attained some celebrity by challenging Gov. Andrew Cuomo's 2014 re-election bid. So they passed over Will Yandik, a relative moderate whose family farm went back several generations and who had graduated from a local high school before getting bachelor's and master's degrees in the Ivy League.

"I don't know that I would have won," Yandik told me. "I would have come closer than Zephyr Teachout." Looking ahead, he said that "in a swing district where every single percentage point matters, the inability to demonstrate a cultural connection to the district is a liability."

He's taking a pass on 2018 but is watching to see whether Democratic primary voters "are going to be strategic and pick a centrist and someone with deep roots — someone who can beat John Faso — or whether they are going to adhere to their progressive principles and put a firebrand like Zephyr Teachout up again."

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since 2011, joined the newspaper in 1995.

Climate crimes won't go untried

I had a dream. At first I thought I was at the Nuremberg trials watching attorneys for the Allied forces prosecute Nazi leaders who carried out the Holocaust.

But the defendants didn't have the look of hardened soldiers. On the contrary, they looked soft and surly, offended at being inconvenienced by the proceedings.

As the dream sharpened, I noticed charts on the walls depicting the fading of the polar ice caps, the steady temperature rise of the oceans, the relentless increase in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The prosecution was surrounded by tables brimming with studies and reports, peer-reviewed journals, clippings, satellite photos and NASA research.

This clearly wasn't Germany or a post-war tribunal. I wasn't dreaming about the past but rather the not-so-distant future.

"Are you aware that NASA first briefed the Senate in 1988 that it was 99-percent certain that rising global temperatures were caused by the burning of fossil fuels?" the prosecutor barked at the defendant slouched on the witness stand. I couldn't tell for certain but his familiar "Mr. Burns" smirk reminded me of Scott Pruitt, the guy who fought the EPA's efforts to protect air and water while an Oklahoma politician only to be appointed to lead the agency.

He didn't answer the question, just sneered. "Did you ever think about your children and grandchildren when you refused to act on the unprecedented consensus of climate

scientists who warned action was needed to protect future generations?"

He scoffed but again said nothing.

I glanced at the other defendants awaiting their turn. The former Speaker of the House looked as cold and clueless as ever. I recognized a handful of the congressmen who had urged for withdrawal from the Paris climate accord — and not coincidentally had taken millions of dollars in oil company donations.

The prosecutor was now playing an excerpt from another former president about his travels around the world. "... you talk to leaders of governments and the opposition, and they are arguing about a whole bunch of things," he said. "One thing they're not arguing about is whether the science of climate change is real and whether or not we're going to have to do something about it."

He then asked the judge to direct the defendant to answer the question — why his political party was the only one in the advanced world that still denies climate change?

The defendant added a half smile to his sneer, and lazily lifted a hand and rubbed his thumb back and forth over his finger tips. I saw a woman juror mouth the unspoken answer: Greed.

As the dream faded I realized why I initially thought of Nuremberg. I was witnessing another trial of crimes against humanity.

Hal McCune is a longtime Pendleton resident and former editor at the East Oregonian.



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