

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

**A tip of the hat to Thursday's ballgame. And no, not the Mariners getting beat again.**

We're talking about the baseball game in Washington, D.C., between Democrats and Republicans — some of the same Republicans who were shot at on Wednesday as they practiced on an Arlington, Virginia, field.



The Congressional Baseball Game raised money for a children's charity, but it also helped promote bipartisanship and fair competition and playing under well-defined rules — ethics that have been missing recently in our political system.

In the face of violence and extremism and anarchy, it's nice to have baseball and sportsmanship to help calm nerves and point us down the path to move forward.

The United States is in a dangerous place with an divisive, unpopular president at the helm. But there is only way to create systemic, sustainable change in a political system. It's not by violence, it's by voting.

**A tip of the hat to the repair project on the Interstate 82 bridge across the Columbia River at Umatilla.**

Anyone who has ventured across the bridge knows the work is long overdue. Not only is it about the roughest patch of highway you'll find anywhere, seeing chunks of the bridge missing underneath your tires is especially unnerving.



The bridge is even on the Washington Department of Transportation's "structurally deficient" list. That doesn't mean it's likely to collapse anytime soon, but its condition has deteriorated enough to make engineers wary.

So for the next year we'll endure detours and slowed traffic as we make our way to the Tri-Cities and back, and in return we'll have a little more peace of mind each time we make the trip.

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

# Trying to solve PERS crisis

The Oregonian/OregonLive

SB 1068, a bill aimed at easing public employers' crippling pension costs, accomplishes the rare feat of being measly and consequential at the same time. Measly, in that the proposed changes would barely move the needle in addressing the escalating contributions that government agencies and school districts will be making to the underfunded pension system for years to come. But consequential for what the bill reveals: Legislators who have long insisted that there was nothing they could do to legally and meaningfully address Oregon's mounting pension problem finally appear willing to try.

In the abstract, SB 1068 seems a promising way to help the government absorb rising Public Employees Retirement System costs. The bill, sponsored by Sen. President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, and Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, would require public employees to contribute to their own pensions, just as almost all other public employees across the country do. The idea is for workers — who already contribute 6 percent of their salary to "supplemental" retirement accounts — to divert a portion of that to the main pension fund, which owes \$22 billion more in benefits than it has on hand. Those payments would help offset the skyrocketing contributions that public employers are required to make to chip away at the pension funding gap and allow them to reserve more money to provide the schooling, health care and other public services that Oregonians are paying for.

Unfortunately, while the concept is good, the details leave much to be desired. The bill, which was written with the guidance of the state's largest public employees union, seems more like window dressing than serious reform at this point. Among the provisions: Employees would redirect only 1 percent of salary to the pension fund in the first year of contributions, 2 percent the following year and no increases until 2021 at the earliest. Given the mechanisms in the bill designed to limit further increases, it's unclear if employee contributions would ever rise above 2 percent, much less to the bill's 4 percent cap, which itself is far below the 6 percent that public employees in other states contribute to their pensions, as The Oregonian/OregonLive's Ted Sickinger reported.

The bill also would not require any higher contributions from current employees at "Tier 1 and Tier 2," whose retirement benefits are not only richer than newer workers', but account for

more of the unfunded liability. And the proposed contributions wouldn't even begin until July 1, 2018, which, with the paltry 1 percent rate, would produce only \$100 million in savings for the 2017-2019 biennium, with less than \$50 million going to the state's general fund.

While those savings projections improve modestly in later years, they're still woefully inadequate in light of the pension funding tsunami that Oregon is facing. Employer contributions are poised to eat up about \$900 million more in the next biennium, increase another \$1 billion-plus in the biennium after that and take still more in the two-year-cycle after that. That's money that would otherwise go to employing teachers, counselors and librarians in schools, providing quality child-welfare services and keeping basic health services for Oregon's poorest residents.

Still, there's hope. The involvement by both Courtney and the Service Employees International Union Local 503 is a sign that they recognize the need to at least start the discussion, even if SEIU doesn't support the proposal. But Courtney and other leaders must show that this bill is a first step, not a done deal.

That means dialing back on the rhetoric. As Sickinger reported, Courtney declared that he would not move the bill forward without a significant revenue package with corporate tax increases to go with it. The fatal flaw in that ultimatum? Courtney thinks he's holding a royal flush when all he's got is a pair of twos. It's hard to imagine businesses, Republicans and anyone racing to the table for fear of losing a bill that, as it stands, would do next to nothing.

Instead, Courtney and other leaders should be looking at how to incorporate some of the extensive and valuable work done this session on two other PERS reform bills, SB 559 and SB 560, sponsored by Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend. Those bills look at modestly limiting future pension benefits and redirecting a greater percentage of employee contributions to the pension fund. With only a few weeks left in the session, they should seek to put together a comprehensive slate of reforms that still provide a fair package to employees but helps reroute the devastating course we're currently on.

It's taken far longer than it should, but elected leaders are recognizing they can no longer claim that there's nothing that they can do about PERS. Now it's up to them to show they can deliver something more consequential than simply acknowledging the truth.

## OTHER VIEWS



UNITY

# Rhetoric and bullets

In 2011, after Rep. Gabby Giffords of Arizona was gravely injured and six others were killed by a shooter in Tucson, I was moved to commit an entire column to condemning the left for linking the shooting so closely to political rhetoric.

Yes, Republican personalities and officials in the wake of Barack Obama's election had spoken openly about "Second Amendment remedies" and being "armed and dangerous" and "revolution," but it was not possible to connect the dots between that irresponsible talk and the Tucson shooter.

Now, here I am again, only this time extending the same condemnation to the right for doing the same after four people, including House Majority Whip Steve Scalise, were shot at an Alexandria, Virginia, baseball field where Republican members of Congress were practicing in advance of a charity game.

The shooter, identified as James T. Hodgkinson, appears to have had strong liberal, anti-Trump, anti-Republican views — among other things, he was a volunteer with the Bernie Sanders campaign — but at the time of this writing, authorities had not announced a motive for the shooting.

The very real possibility that the shooting was politically motivated was clearly on the minds of many, including Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Ill., who was at the baseball field during the shooting: "This could be the first political rhetorical terrorist attack, and that has to stop."

Let me be clear: I don't have a problem with viewing these incidents through a political lens. Not to do so is naive and ridiculously self-blinding in a way that avoids reality.

As Katy Waldman wrote for Slate last June: "Things that happen for political reasons, and have political consequences, demand that we scrutinize them through a political lens. Crying 'politicization' is itself politicization — a way to advance whatever slate of politics favors the status quo. Often people invoke policy goals in order to get things done; what's at stake is whether these tragedies should be regarded as irreducible lightning strikes or problems with potential solutions."

What I abhor is ideological exploitation that reduces these acts to a political sport and uses them as weapons to silence political opponents and their "rhetoric," rather than viewing them as American tragedies that we can work together to prevent through honest appraisal and courageous action. Every shooting in this country is a tragedy, and they happen with disturbing frequency here.

As The Washington Post reported, Wednesday's shooting was the 154th mass shooting so far this year in America. That's 154 mass shootings in just 165 days. Violence, particularly gun violence, is the American fact, the American shame.

This country has a violent culture, is full of guns, and our federal lawmakers — mostly Republicans, it must be said, because there isn't any real equivalency — are loath to even moderately regulate gun access.

Pretending that America's gun violence is a function of collective political rhetoric rather



**CHARLES BLOW**  
Comment

than the nexus of personal mental defect and easy access to weapons is a way of dodging, well, the bullet.

So, here I must take a stand in defense of rhetoric. While rhetoric should never promote violence, it needn't be timid.

I was impressed by the official responses from Washington. Even President Donald Trump's response was sober and direct, not marred by his typical lack of tact, not like the way he tried to exploit the Pulse Nightclub shooting last year. House Speaker Paul Ryan delivered a stately speech from the House floor, and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi echoed his sentiments in a noble act of bipartisanship.

At the top, the responses were pitch perfect, but the political debate isn't confined to the top. It trickles down into the cesspool of social media, which has grown exponentially since Giffords was shot. At that time, Facebook had only about a third of its current number of users, Twitter had about a fifth of its current users, Instagram was just three months old, and Snapchat didn't exist.

On social media, where anonymity provides cover for vitriol, violent threats are a regular feature.

When Gabby Giffords wrote on Twitter, "My heart is with my former colleagues, their families & staff, and the US Capitol Police — public servants and heroes today and every day," she was met with a sickening number of hateful responses, including one that said, "To bad it was not her." (Yes, it should have been "too," but grammar isn't a major concern in a statement that grotesque.)

It is true that political rhetoric can set a tone that greases the skids for a small number of people who are prone to violence to act on those impulses. We have just gone through a political cycle where that was on full display.

But some rhetoric is necessary and real. I believe Donald Trump and the Republican-led Congress are attempting to do very serious harm to the country and its most vulnerable citizens, and I will never stop saying so in the strongest terms I can summon. For many people, this isn't an abstract policy debate between partisans. For them, these debates — about repealing the Affordable Care Act, for example — are about life and death. But that has nothing to do with the promotion of physical violence; it has everything to do with protecting this country from administrative and legislative violence.

We have to object stridently to proposals that will hurt people, and not be chilled by a deranged man with a gun. Violence is abhorrent and self-defeating, but vociferous resistance to national damage has nothing to do with that violence and must continue unabated.

You can, as I do, have sympathy for the victims of Wednesday's shooting and condemn the shooter, while at the same time raging, nonviolently of course, against an agenda that places other Americans in very real danger.

Charles M. Blow, a New York Times Op-Ed columnist, writes about politics, public opinion and social justice.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Don't help fund the Rainbow travelers in Eastern Oregon

I am not sure if the general community has noticed or not, but there has been a recent influx of, for a lack of better term, "rainbow hippies" passing through our town and indeed all of Eastern Oregon. I write to inform the general public that these hippies are a part of an international group who call themselves the Rainbow Family.

Every year there are many Rainbow Family gatherings held in different areas, including an annual international gathering, many regional gatherings throughout the year and the big one: every July there is a national Rainbow Family Gathering. Guess where they picked for 2017? You got it, Oregon. Where specifically I do not know. But if anyone is curious they could follow the caravans of panhandling hippies along with the trail of broken down RVs.

What do they do at a Rainbow Gathering? Many things, including praying for world peace on July 4. There is also an atmosphere that comes with the Rainbow Family and their gatherings which is ultimately unsavory as

it includes pure hedonism, including illegal drugs, nudity, sex and the promotion of homelessness as a chosen lifestyle.

This can be very lucrative to young runaways, although the unfortunate truth is that a transient lifestyle is likely to involve addiction, extreme poverty and violence. There have been incidents of crime, both violent and otherwise, related to the Rainbow Family and their gatherings.

I urge the general public to keep this in mind when they see hippies panhandling throughout this month, to keep in mind that they are on their way to a giant party and have chosen to purposely live off the kindness of strangers. Don't feel too sorry for them, as there are plenty of people living in poverty who are willing to not only work to better their own lives, but also contribute to society through civic engagement, voting, etc. In my opinion there are plenty of more deserving causes to fund before you fund their way to what is often little more than a glorified drug orgy.

Carlin Sacco  
Pendleton