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OUR VIEW

Be true to your pool

Outdoor pools are a part of every Eastern Oregon summer. And when temperatures spike as they are right now, pools offer critical opportunities to get through a heat wave.

They also offer fun and recreation, a place to teach life skills as well as a spot to meet and play with your friends and neighbors. Along with splash pads, pools offer affordable, safe, healthy ways for local families and children to spend their summer months.

And as Pendleton learned this month, they can be economic engines, too. The city-owned aquatic center hosted hundreds of families from across the region who filled local hotels and restaurants during the multiple-day Inland Empire Swimming Championships.

But the sun-soaked excitement of the weekend was muted by the fact that swim programs throughout the region are in danger. Blue Mountain Community College's pool — which has long provided a place for the Pendleton Swim Association to practice and compete, as well as other schools in the area and as far away as Hermiston — may never open again. It is being prepped for permanent closure; the pool needs expensive upgrades that the college has no way to pay for.

There is a bit of an improvement on the west side now that an indoor pool has opened at the Boardman Pool and Recreation Center. While it is not large enough to host competitions, it can offer swimmers a place to practice and train 12 months out of the year. Hermiston has been without an indoor lap pool since the closure of the Columbia Court Club, which was damaged by fire more than a year ago.

Pendleton is where the pool situation is about to get much worse. Members of the swim association have spoken with Mayor John Turner and other city officials about finding ways to make the aquatic

center a year-round operation, which would require a temporary cover. Finding ways to pay for that upgrade are key to keeping the Pendleton Swim Association a thriving, volunteer-run group that offers area children a unique opportunity for small town Oregon.

And while times are undoubtedly tough for community colleges, BMCC should also look to find ways to continue to provide a community pool. The former pool provided a clear community benefit for decades, and helped ingratiate itself into the wider Eastern Oregon swim community. Keeping that asset going is good for the college and good for the community, if the money can be found to maintain it. We advise to look under all possible rocks for grant and loans, from local to statewide to federal sources. And ask locals to reach into their pocketbooks, too. If the Pendleton Fourth of July fireworks is any example, lots of people are willing to help lend financial support to things they value.

A pool is a more expensive proposition than a once-a-year explosion, of course. Designing and managing it requires thought and planning and hard work, though opportunities for advanced planning have grown thin. Once the summer gives way to fall, the Pendleton Aquatic Center will close and there will be no competition swim pools in the county.

We should do better. Our hot weather makes municipal pools summer money-breakers (and breaking even is the goal for a government-owned enterprise).

Looking for ways to increase the swim season with temporary or permanent coverings should be the goal of both the public and private sectors.

Umatilla County needs it, both for its economic success and the thousands of young families who have their fun in the water.

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

Transportation package the 2017 Legislature's key accomplishment

The Eugene Register-Guard

The signature achievement of the 2017 Legislature was its bipartisan approval of a \$3.8 billion transportation funding package — a bill notable both for its size and for its innovations in public policy. The bill shows how tensions between opposing parties and between rural and urban areas can be harnessed for productive purposes. No one supports all elements of the package, but it will advance the interests of the state as a whole.

This year's success has its genesis in a failure two years earlier, when a deadlock over the state's clean-fuels standard killed a plan to fund improvements to the state's transportation network. Lawmakers then formed a 14-member committee that toured the state and heard the usual demands for repairs and improvements to roads and bridges.

There were some unexpected messages as well. Congestion on Portland-area freeways was having an effect on transport and commerce throughout the state. And Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield, co-chairman of the committee, reported strong statewide support for improved mass transit.

The transit element of this year's transportation package is its biggest departure from the past. The state Constitution prohibits the use of gas-tax revenue for any purpose other than to build and maintain the road network. That means state support for transit systems must come from another source. Lawmakers settled on a 0.1 percent payroll tax, which will raise \$100 million a year.

Mass transit is often regarded as an urban concern and a new tax of any kind for any reason is a unicorn in the legislative bestiary. But enough rural legislators supported the tax, because as Beyer found, transit services are increasingly vital to mobility in mid-size and smaller communities. Enough tax-averse Republicans supported the

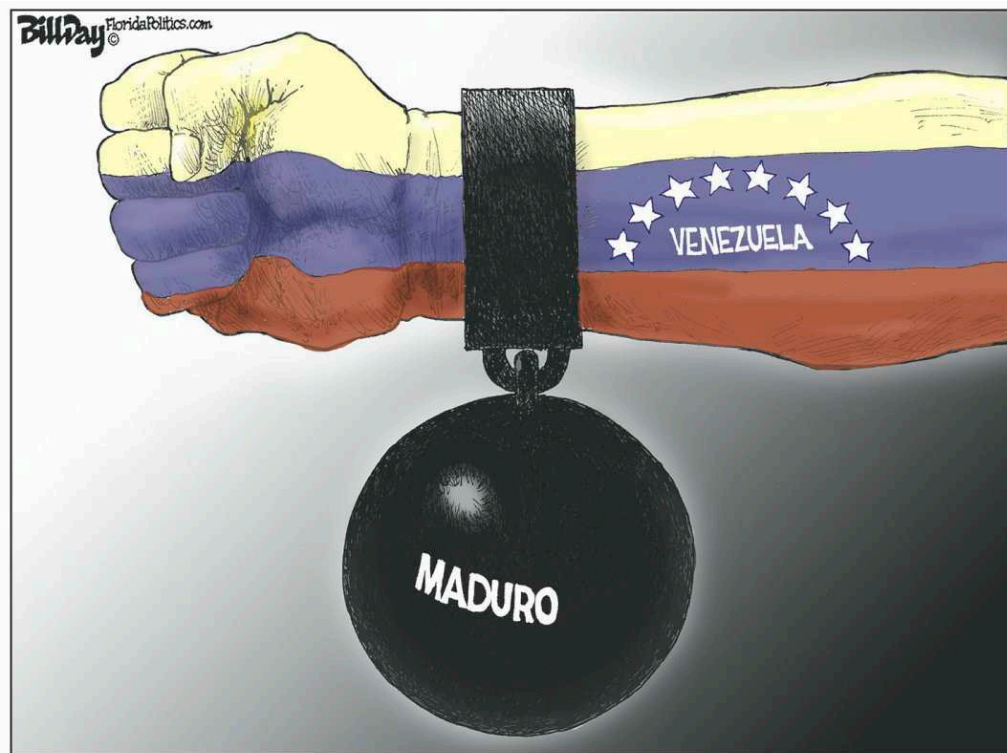
payroll tax because it raises a significant amount of money at a low rate. The Lane Transit District can expect an increase of about 15 percent in its general fund as a result of the new state tax.

A second innovation is a tiered vehicle registration fee, with electric and highly fuel-efficient vehicles paying the most. Vehicles that use little or no gasoline pay little or nothing in gas taxes, making them free riders on the road network. The differential fee works against the state's goal of reducing fossil fuel consumption and emissions linked to climate change. But as fuel efficiency improves, gas consumption will need to be decoupled from transportation taxes. And the unwanted effects will be offset by rebates on the purchase of electric vehicles, financed by a 0.5 tax on the sale of new cars.

Oregon also will impose a \$15 tax on the sale of new adult bicycles costing more than \$200. This tax was the price for the support of legislators who believe bicycles are subsidized by the current transportation funding system. Revenue from the tax will be used to create more and safer bike routes — and might even reduce the long-running tensions between bicyclists and motorists.

The package's big-ticket projects are mostly in the Portland area — improvements to Eugene's Randy Papé Beltline are conspicuously absent. But the Portland projects are likely to be financed in part by tolls. Portland-area lawmakers' willingness to accept the possibility of tolling shows how serious congestion problems in that part of the state have become.

The transportation bill passed by a vote of 39-20 in the House and 22-7 in the Senate — more than the three-fifths majority needed in each chamber. It shows what can be achieved when legislators are willing to listen to people throughout the state and compromise on issues such as the clean-fuels standard. The success contains a lesson for lawmakers in Oregon and elsewhere.



OTHER VIEWS

Voters love lesbians

Like other minorities, LGBT people are seriously underrepresented in our country's political offices.

But I've seen a few signs that one consonant in that cluster is especially well positioned to gain ground. Lesbians are on the march.

OK, that probably overstates things. Let's say they're on a brisk crawl. But consider: The Victory Fund, which supports LGBT candidates nationwide in races ranging from school board to governor, recently crunched the numbers on how its 1,162 beneficiaries over the last decade fared, and the results are particularly positive for women.

The results are encouraging overall — and they're a subtle ray of light following a dark week in terms of the Trump administration's actions. Despite past statements of affinity with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans, President Donald Trump hastily announced a ban on transgender people in the military, and in court filings, his Justice Department went out of its way to enunciate the position that gay people are not protected by a federal civil rights law on employment discrimination.

These are steps backward. But voters seem to be moving forward: The overwhelming majority of the Victory Fund's candidates are prevailing. Not at equal rates, though.

Women in the LGBT community won 70.3 percent of their races. Men won only 60.9 percent. And that's unusual, because there's almost no difference in success rates for female versus male candidates generally. (There are so many fewer women in office largely because so many fewer women run.)

Meanwhile, another set of data shows an increase in the number of openly lesbian lawmakers in state legislatures. There are 44 — still paltry, but an all-time high. The number of openly gay male lawmakers in state legislatures, 61, is significantly down from a peak of 72 in 2014, according to figures compiled by Charles Gossett, a professor at Sacramento State University, and the LGBTQ Representation and Rights Research Initiative at the University of North Carolina. The number of openly trans lawmakers in state legislatures hasn't changed over the four decades that the initiative's figures cover. It's zero.

The figures show that 40 percent of all LGBT lawmakers at the state level are lesbian. In contrast, only 25 percent of all state lawmakers, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, are women. So there's something much closer to female-to-male parity among the LGBT lawmakers.

The *New York Times* is the first publication to be provided with these selective snapshots, and they're just that: snapshots. But they gibe with some politicians' sense that voters may indeed be more receptive, or at least less resistant, to lesbians than to gay men.

"We're less threatening, I think," Annis Parker, mayor of Houston from 2010-2016, told me in a recent telephone interview. She said lesbians don't deal with anything precisely like "the long-dispelled shibboleths about gay men being sexual predators."

More gay men than gay women have been mayors — including, currently, the mayors of cities as disparate as Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Lexington, Kentucky — just as more straight men than straight women have. But Parker remains the only openly LGBT person ever elected to lead one of the nation's 10 most populous cities.

Similarly, the only openly LGBT person ever elected governor is also a woman, Kate



FRANK BRUNI
Comment

Brown, who won in Oregon last year. She is married to a man but identifies as bisexual. (In 2004, Gov. James McGreevey of New Jersey came out as gay more than two years after his election, announcing his resignation simultaneously.)

And there is only one openly LGBT person ever elected to the U.S. Senate: Wisconsin's Tammy Baldwin, a lesbian, who is in her first term.

In the House of Representatives, however, openly LGBT men have enjoyed the advantage. There are five in the House now while there's just one openly LGBT woman, Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who identifies as bisexual.

That makes for a current total of seven openly LGBT members of Congress, counting Baldwin, or 1.3 percent of the 535 lawmakers in all. According to Gallup, roughly 4 percent of Americans identify as LGBT.

Pat Spearman, a state senator in Nevada since 2013, is one of them.

"I'm African-American and a woman and a lesbian: I can't catch a break," she told me. "You know what I'm saying?" She laughed, then talked about the many decades when she kept her sexual

orientation secret, partly because she was in the U.S. military and partly because she was an ordained Methodist minister. She's 62 and came out just seven years ago.

I asked her if she'd talked about that journey during her campaign. Yes, she answered, and many voters, regardless of sexual orientation, seemed to hear echoes of their own struggles. "People could relate," she said, adding that they respected "that I embraced all of these: African-American, woman, lesbian."

Openly LGBT politicians sometimes get points from voters for candor and even character. "There's a little bit of the dynamic that if you're honest about that, you'll be honest about everything," Parker said. "There's a kind of halo effect."

That accrues to gay women and men equally. But what may well distinguish lesbians and explain the success rates that the Victory Fund observed is how well prepared they are, political analysts told me. As women, they're more hesitant than men to run, and that, coupled with being lesbian, may make them pause several extra beats to be absolutely sure that their experience and mettle can eclipse any bigotry they confront.

"It might be that lesbians who have made it over all the hurdles to the stage of candidacy are just damn impressive community leaders and thus better candidates," said Andrew Reynolds, a professor of political science at UNC and the director of its research initiative. "It's pretty rare to find a lesbian in elected office who is out of her depth."

Parker noted that by the time of her election as the mayor of Houston, she'd worked for many years in the energy industry, a vital part of the city's economy, and had been a well-known city councilwoman as well as the city controller.

When I asked her which sort of discrimination — sexism or homophobia — she'd encountered more often along the way, she answered instantly: sexism. "I think at the highest levels," she said, "the woman thing kicks in and kicks us in the teeth."

And the gay woman thing? Maybe that toughens a candidate. Maybe that helps her bounce back from the kick.

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since 2011, joined the newspaper in 1995. Over his years, he has worn a wide variety of hats, including chief restaurant critic and Rome bureau chief.

LETTERS POLICY

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