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**OUR VIEW**

# The value of showing up

It has been another week of distressing news for an Oregon education system that continues to rank among the worst in the country. Administration after administration, from state government all the way down to local school districts, have promised reforms and improvement.

Yet new initiatives, new tests to measure progress, new management, new programs and new funding sources are always stymied — they lack follow-through and soon enough Oregon education is back where it started, though pointed down a different shady path.

On Wednesday, Oregon's chief state schools officer Salam Noor resigned under pressure from Governor Kate Brown. That's the same governor who handpicked Noor to oversee the state's K-12 schools little more than two years ago. According to the governor's press secretary, Brown said she was no longer satisfied with Noor's ability to execute her vision.

So back to square one for Oregon education. Back to the back of the pack.

From a local perspective, school districts received their "report cards" on Thursday and they were mixed bags. Far from straight As, but far from failing grades as well.

We spotlighted the results from the Hermiston and Pendleton districts, and what is most compelling is the fact that teachers and administrators are hard pressed to put their finger on why a certain statistic improved or why another dipped.

And that's understandable. Anyone who has spent any time in a classroom knows that each is different, as is each and every student who comprises them.

It makes sense that the numbers fluctuate, and it will take many years and many thoughtful studies to drill down to what (if any) progress is being made in our schools and how

we can do better. Because what good are these tiny data points until we have a larger set? And will we ever have a large enough set if we continue to change how and why we test our young people? It's like measuring a baseball player on their first few at bats, when it's only after seasons (or a whole career) that we can accurately measure their true value and ability.

It can be discouraging to watch the continual revolving door of upper management. It can be equally discouraging to get lost in the minutiae of statistics.

But the one thing we're continually reminded of

the importance of showing up. Of attending class. Of missing as little time as possible, of not falling behind.

The state defines "regular attenders" as students who attend at least 90 percent of the school year. Statistics show that students who fall below that mark test well below those who show up reliably.

Yet in Pendleton only 76.2 percent of students classify as regular attenders. It's worse in Hermiston — only 71.1 percent attend at least 90 percent of class time. And statewide Oregon students attend an abysmal 67.3 percent of the time.

That's not good enough. So much of the education system can seem bureaucratic, generic and random — the success of our children and loved ones are out of our hands once we've taught them to read and write, think and count.

But the best thing we can do to get them *through* school is to get them *to* school. Accept only legitimate excuses — contagious illness the obvious one. Get your kid to class and the state's statistics, and our community as a whole, will no doubt improve. Perhaps the statistics will even bear it out.

**In Oregon, only 67.3 percent of K-12 students are classified as "regular attenders" — an abysmally low percentage.**

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**

**Walden siding with utility companies and against fish**

Columbia River salmon and steelhead are facing urgent challenges to avoid extinction.

Last summer the U.S. District Court determined that the plan that dam operators currently follow on the Columbia and Snake rivers is illegal and does not protect salmon and steelhead from extinction. The court ordered the operators and scientists to come up with a more effective plan by 2021.

A second court finding said the current plan will do "irreparable harm" to fish that are already facing extinction so they ordered the agency scientists to come up with an immediate short-term plan to spill more water over the dams starting in 2018 to protect these fish from extinction.

However, HR 3144 was introduced into the legislature this summer and seeks to overturn both of these court orders and lock in the current "status quo" operations. Furthermore, it seeks to eliminate the required analysis of

management options.

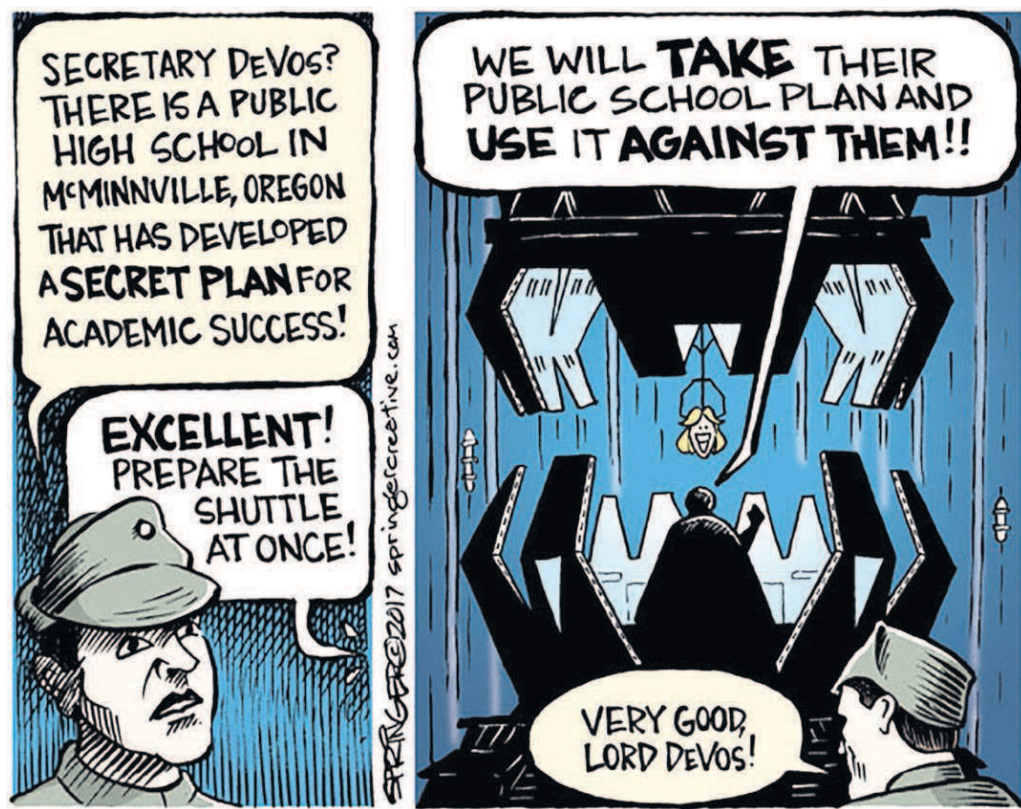
Guess who is one of the co-sponsors of this bill? Yep, our U.S. Representative Greg Walden. The same Walden that received \$146,000 from the electric utilities industry in the last election cycle.

So, if you enjoy fishing for salmon and steelhead or you just value their existence as part of our Pacific Northwest heritage, recognize that Walden's proposed bill will allow these fish to continue their path towards extinction.

The challenges of preserving salmon in the Columbia River involve many aspects, both in the rivers and in the oceans. How we meet these challenges should be determined by those that understand the science involved, not by a politician who is lobbied by the utility companies to keep things as they are.

Things "as they are" are not going to preserve our salmon. Consider that when Walden asks for your vote in 2018.

**John Schwartz**  
The Dalles



**OTHER VIEWS**

## We used to build things

They say that fighting a wildfire is the closest thing to being in combat. The trees explode, the wind whips down while the oxygen disappears and the fire "sheets" along the ground, streaking sideways like rushing waters.

Today's California fires remind me of the largest fire in U.S. history, the Big Burn of 1910, which destroyed 3 million acres in Idaho, Montana and Washington. One of the towns the fire destroyed was Wallace, Idaho. A lone train arrived to take people away, and panic ensued. As my *New York Times* colleague Timothy Egan describes in "The Big Burn," his history of the fire, men yanked women out of their seats, taking their place.

The U.S. Forest Service had been created five years before by President Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot. The 10,000 men who were rounded up to fight the fire were led by a small group of young foresters, many of them from the Yale School of Forestry, which graduated its first class in 1904.

One of the foresters, though decidedly no Yalie, was Ed Pulaski. By the time the fire hit Wallace, Pulaski had been up in the mountains fighting fires for a month. He came down to get food for his men. "Wallace will surely burn," he told his wife and 10-year-old daughter, before returning up the mountain to care for his fighters. "I may never see you again."

Pulaski and his men were soon surrounded by flame. Hand on his gun, he forced them to lay face down in the mud of an abandoned mine tunnel. He covered the small entrance with a wet cloth to try to prevent the air from being sucked out by the inferno.

Soon, his face caught fire and he collapsed. After five hours in what they assumed would be their coffin, the men stirred. Forty-one were still alive, with only five dead.

Pulaski never received a cent from the government for his heroism. But Pinchot used the fire to tell the story of the Forest Service, the small band of underfunded heroes who risked their lives to save others. The fire turned out to be the making of that new and embattled agency.

When you look back at that era, you are struck by how many civic institutions were founded to address the nation's problems. Not only the Forest Service, but also the Food and Drug Administration, the municipal reform movement, the suffrage movement, the Federal Reserve System, the Boy Scouts, the 4-H clubs, the settlement house movement, the compulsory schooling movement, and on and on. Four amendments to the Constitution were passed in those years.

In fact, when you look back on most periods of U.S. history, you see a rash of new organizations being created. In the 18th century, Benjamin Franklin helped build



**DAVID BROOKS**  
Comment

the University of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Fire Department, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, The American Philosophical Society, the Pennsylvania Hospital and much else.

In the 1930s, the alphabet soup of New Deal agencies were created. The late 1940s saw the creation of the big multinational institutions: the United Nations, NATO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the beginnings of the European market.

When you look around today, you see a lot of history-making new companies being created, but you don't see too many big civic organizations. There are some great social entrepreneurs, like Bill Drayton, who started Ashoka, but the only vast national civic movements I can think of are the charter school movement and the tea party.

We've got just as many problems as previous generations faced — as many as in the progressive era, I'd say. Why has there been this decline in civic institution building?

**Hand on his gun, he forced them to lay face down in the mud of an abandoned mine tunnel.**

Political polarization has got to be a big culprit. The federal government can't build anything new, even something as obvious as a national service program. The churches have let us down, too. The Christian churches have been behind most of the big social movements in U.S. history, such as abolition, poverty programs and civil rights. But for the past generation, the church has been fighting a defensive war against the sexual revolution, not an offensive assault for opportunity and human dignity.

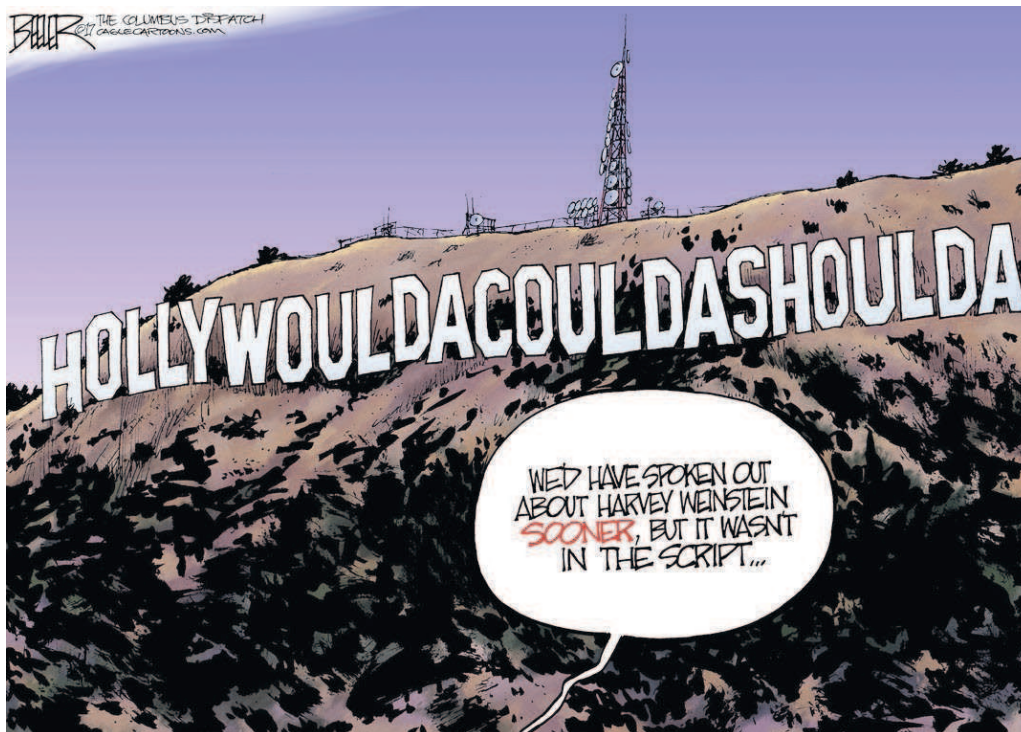
The affluent have also been less entrepreneurial. Many civic institutions in past decades were created by people like Roosevelt and Pinchot, who inherited family empires but devoted their lives to civic institution building.

But I wonder if there is also a malaise, a loss of faith in the future and a loss of expertise in institution building, a sense of general fragmentation and isolation. U.S. foreign policy, which used to be about building positive coalitions to make life better, now seems to be based on the idea that we should defensively withdraw from things. There has been a loss of civic imagination.

The good news is that one could have said the same thing in 1890, when politics was steeped in corruption and the economy wracked by crisis. But by 1910 the landscape was transformed. There were new organizations, new movements, a new mentality and a new burst of optimism.

Even the worst fires clear the way for new growth.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*, a contributing editor at *Newsweek* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, and is currently a commentator on PBS.



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