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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to our soon-to-be robot overlord “Vahana,” which arrived in Pendleton this week.

The “uber in the sky” — a flying, unmanned taxi — will be tested at Eastern Oregon Regional Airport and housed at a newly-built hangar there.

“It was no easy feat for our bird to leave the nest,” wrote Zach Lovering on the Vahana blog.

It made the journey from corporate headquarters via the back of a big truck, not a straight shot through the rainy Oregon sky. That’s because the cutting-edge technology needs to be tested, and its team needs to put the machinery through its paces to make sure it is safe, secure and reliable.

It’s pretty cool that those experiments will take place in Pendleton, and lucky spotters at the UAV test range will be

among the first to see Jetson’s-era technology operating in real life.

We wish it luck and success, and to be among the first to go flying through the sky to pick up our groceries.

A tip of the hat to Hermiston football faithful, who were honorable hosts to visitors from La Salle High School earlier this month.

Visiting team dad Dennis Kelly of Tigard couldn’t believe how well he was treated both by the opposition, from his hotel clerk to the stadium volunteers. But then came game time, when tension can be high. Here’s an excerpt from Kelly’s letter to mayor Dave Drotzmann and principal Tom Spoo:

“I headed to the top row of the visitors section. I was by myself for some time, then suddenly it seemed like 30-plus middle-schoolers (maybe freshman) were all around me. I figured that was their section and avoidance of older kids. Coming from where I live, my first thought was ‘Great, this might not be fun’ surrounded by so many early teens.

I stayed up there for the first half, and in all that time I never heard one cuss word,

I was spoken to a few times and addressed as ‘sir.’ While the kids were definite teens they were polite and respectful. Big difference from the big city — I can tell you.

I later had dinner with my son and he told me how nice the school’s staff and volunteers were and how wonderful they treated the La Salle coaches and players. The dinner prepared and served was an incredible touch.

So, this is just my thank you and appreciation for being the town and people you are. In this crazy world we live, you demonstrate the right way to do things.”

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

Hydropower is clean energy

Baker City Herald

We understand the disdain some people have for hydroelectric dams.

They turn free-flowing rivers into stagnant reservoirs.

They interfere with, or block altogether, the migration of anadromous fish such as salmon and steelhead.

But these dams also produce copious amounts of electricity, reliably and, unlike coal, without spewing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and contributing to climate change. Hydropower also has advantages over other renewable sources, such as wind and solar, most notably that hydro plants can produce power constantly.

All of which explains why we hope the U.S. Senate gives serious consideration to a bill the House of Representatives passed last week. The legislation is designed to make it easier for hydroelectric plants to be licensed by the federal government.

This doesn’t necessarily mean building dams, though.

The House bill was prompted in part by the reality that the nation’s existing dams represent a source of clean, renewable energy that’s barely been tapped. Just 3 percent of the country’s 80,000 dams generate electricity, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

The bill, if it becomes law, might not have a major effect on the Northwest, which already relies far more heavily on hydropower than other regions. Almost

70 percent of the electricity generated in Washington is derived from water turning turbines, and Oregon’s and Idaho’s shares both exceed 50 percent.

Nationally, though, hydroelectric dams account for just 7 percent of the electricity supply.

House Republicans who voted for the bill, including Rep. Greg Walden of Oregon, contend that the nationwide share of hydropower could be doubled without building any dams, but by installing turbines at larger dams and locks on major rivers such as the Mississippi, Ohio

and Arkansas.

The bill’s critics raise legitimate questions about the details. The bill would make the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission the lead agency for issuing hydropower licenses, and require states to defer to the agency. This raises the specter of private companies pursuing hydropower projects over the objections of local residents.

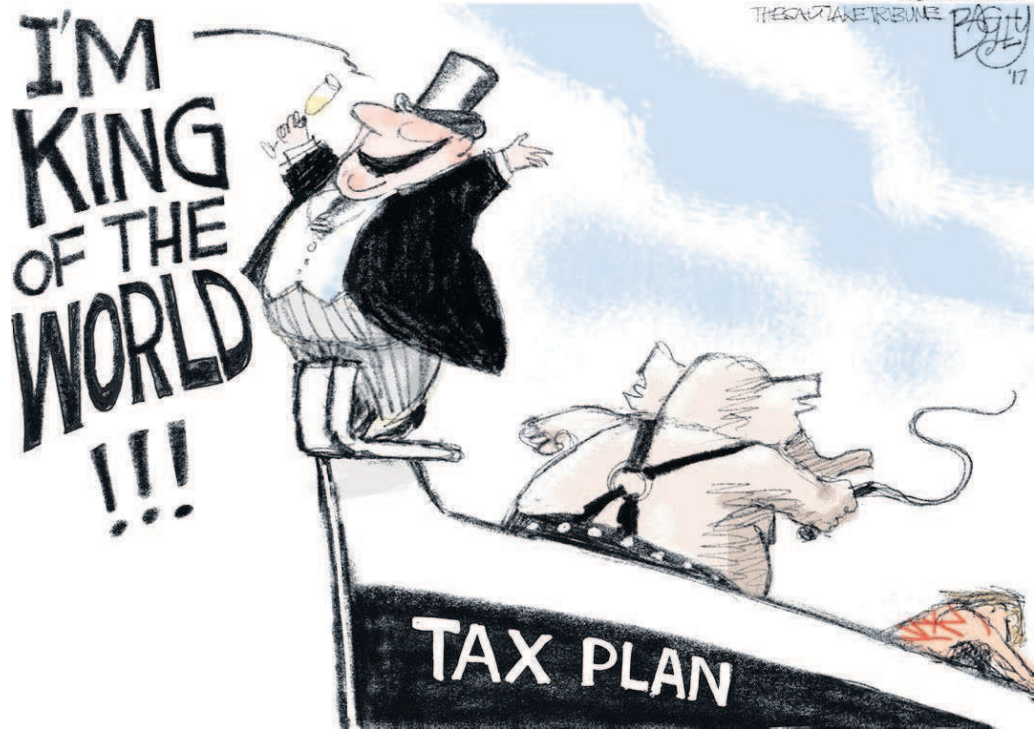
Still, we’re optimistic about the prospects of Congress formally recognizing the vital role that hydropower can, and should, play in America’s transition to cleaner sources of energy.

In addition, we hope the bill will convince Oregon lawmakers to reconsider their peculiar aversion to defining as “renewable” the massive amounts of electricity generated by the federal dams on the Columbia River. That energy is not considered “qualifying electricity” in the state law that mandates large utilities obtain a certain amount of their energy from renewable sources.

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. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

OTHER VIEWS



Billionaires desperately need our help

It is so hard to be a billionaire these days!

A new yacht can cost \$300 million. And you wouldn’t believe what a pastry chef earns — and if you hire just one, to work weekdays, how can you possibly survive on weekends?

The investment income on, say, a \$4 billion fortune is a mere \$1 million a day, which makes it tough to scrounge by with today’s rising prices. Why, some wealthy folks don’t even have a home in the Caribbean and on vacation are stuck brooding in hotel suites: They’re practically homeless!

Fortunately, President Donald Trump and the Republicans are coming along with some desperately needed tax relief for billionaires.

Thank God for this lifeline to struggling tycoons. And it’s carefully crafted to focus the benefits on the truly deserving — the affluent who earn their tax breaks with savvy investments in politicians.

For example, eliminating the estate tax would help the roughly 5,500 Americans who now owe this tax each year, one-fifth of 1 percent of all Americans who die annually. Ending the tax would help upstanding people like the Trumps who owe their financial success to brilliant life choices, such as picking the uterus in which they were conceived.

Now it’s fair to complain that the tax plan overall doesn’t give needy billionaires quite as much as they deserve. For example, the top 1 percent receive only a bit more than 25 percent of the total tax cuts in the Senate bill, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

Really? Only 25 times their share of the population? After all those dreary \$5,000-a-plate dinners supporting politicians? If politicians had any guts, they’d just slash services for low-income families so as to finance tax breaks for billionaires.

Oh, wait, that’s exactly what’s happening!

Trump understands, for example, that health insurance isn’t all that important for the riffraff. So he and the Senate GOP have again targeted Obamacare, this time by trying to repeal the insurance mandate. The Congressional Budget Office says this will result in 13 million fewer people having health insurance.

But what’s the big deal? The United States already has an infant mortality rate twice that of Austria and South Korea. American women are already five times as likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth as women in Britain. So who’ll notice if things get a bit worse?

Perhaps that sounds harsh. But the blunt reality is that we risk soul-sucking dependency if we’re always setting kids’ broken arms. Maybe that’s why congressional Republicans



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

haven’t bothered to renew funding for CHIP, the child health insurance program serving almost 9 million American kids. Ditto for the maternal and home visiting programs that are the gold standard for breaking cycles of poverty and that also haven’t been renewed. We mustn’t coddle American toddlers.

Hey, if American infants really want health care, they’ll pick themselves up by their bootie straps and Uber over to an emergency room.

Congressional Republicans understand that we can’t do everything for everybody. We have to make hard choices. Congress understands that kids are resilient and can look

after themselves, so we must focus on the most urgent needs, such as those of hand-to-mouth billionaires.

In fairness, Congress has historically understood this mission. The tax code subsidizes moguls with private jets while the carried interest tax break gives a huge tax discount to striving private equity zillionaires. Meanwhile, a \$13 billion annual subsidy for corporate meals and entertainment gives ditch diggers the satisfaction of buying Champagne for financiers.

Our political leaders are so understanding because we appear to have the wealthiest Congress we’ve ever had, with a majority of

members now millionaires, so they understand the importance of cutting health for the poor to show support for the crème de la crème.

Granted, the GOP tax plan will add to the deficit, forcing additional borrowing. But if the tax cut passes, automatic “pay as you go” rules may helpfully cut \$25 billion from Medicare spending next year, thus saving money on elderly people who are practically dead anyway. If poor kids have to suffer, we may as well make poor seniors suffer as well. That’s called a balanced policy.

More broadly, you have to look at the reason for deficits. Yes, it’s problematic to borrow to pay for, say, higher education or cancer screenings. But what’s the problem with borrowing \$1.5 trillion to invest in urgent tax relief for billionaires?

Anyway, at some point down the road we’ll find a way to pay back the debt by cutting a wasteful program for runny-nose kids who aren’t smart enough to hire lobbyists. There must be some kids’ program that still isn’t on the chopping block.

The tax bill underscores a political truth: There’s nothing wrong with redistribution when it’s done right.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. Kristof, a columnist for The New York Times since 2001, writes op-ed columns that appear twice a week. He won the Pulitzer Prize two times, in 1990 and 2006.

