

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Nickels and dimes

The message to Oregon legislators from Gov. Kate Brown's staff last week was that PERS has an immediate problem.

Yet the solutions proposed by the governor are modest at best.

The problem is the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System has too little money to pay its projected pension benefits. That gap, whose size ranges from \$15 billion to more than \$20 billion depending on what assumptions are made, is PERS' unfunded actuarial liability. And to fill that gap, schools, cities, counties and the state are spending increasingly larger shares of their budgets on PERS.

Each PERS employer, of which there are about 915, has its own unfunded liability. School districts generally are in the worst shape, with their unfunded liability averaging 176 percent of their payroll.

Brown will ask the 2018 Legislature, which convenes Feb. 5, to pull money from other sources and put it into an account to help school districts

pay for PERS. Brown suggested that money could come from Oregonians' unclaimed property, increased collections of debts owed to the state, lawsuit settlements, a potential tax amnesty program, higher-than-usual capital gains and estate taxes, and other sources. Revenue from new Oregon Lottery games also could help schools, along with community colleges and universities, pay for PERS.

The governor's proposed legislation also would create — but not pay for — a matching fund to encourage employers to act faster, instead of letting their current budget needs overwhelm their eventual

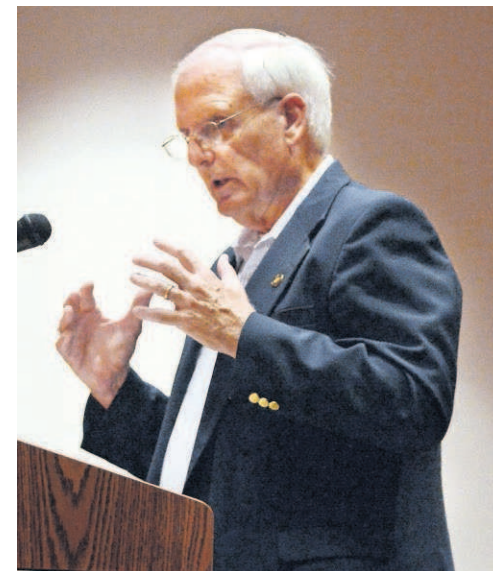
PERS obligations. For example, the state might match 25 cents for every dollar paid by a PERS employer. It would be up to the 2019 Legislature to fund that matching program.

Those are good ideas. As state Sen. Bill Hansell noted, it's good that the governor recognizes immediate action is needed.

"At least we got them to a place

"At least we got them to a place where they're admitting they have a problem."

— Sen. Bill Hansell,
R-Athens



Staff and AP photos

Gov. Kate Brown, left, has said PERS has an immediate problem and suggested a way the state can address it. State Sen. Bill Hansell, right, said it's good the governor is at least talking about the problem.

where they're admitting they have a problem," Hansell told the *East Oregonian* Monday.

Still, it's disappointing that this is all Brown could come up with from last year's blue-ribbon task force on the PERS unfunded liability. And it's even more discouraging that Brown won't take up PERS benefits reforms. Not in this year's legislative session; maybe not in next year's, either.

Brown says she doesn't want to try approaches that will be thrown out by the Oregon Supreme Court. Instead, she and the Legislature must recognize their Catch-22: The only way to know

whether further reforms will pass legal muster is to enact them and have them tested in court.

Of course, that will require going toe-to-toe with the unions in an election year, and we're not convinced Brown will do that, either.

Instead of shying from productive reforms, the governor and legislators should embrace them with the knowledge that they dare not count on the PERS savings until the subsequent litigation settles.

That would be a more courageous approach than Brown's modest PERS proposals for the 2018 Legislature.

OTHER VIEWS

Trump and the 'r-word'

Donald Trump has been obsessed with race the entire time that he has been a public figure.

It started in the 1970s and '80s, when he was a New York real estate mogul. His casinos and apartment buildings had a record of treating black people differently from white people. In 1989, he inserted himself, for no good reason, into one of New York's rawest racial controversies, by taking out ads calling for the execution of (wrongfully accused) suspects in the Central Park jogger rape case.

More recently, Trump's political rise was built on — and there is no other accurate way to say it — racism. He became a star on the right by promulgating the lie that the nation's first black president was born in Kenya. Trump then launched his presidential campaign with a speech describing Mexicans as rapists. His signature proposals were building a wall to keep out Mexicans and banning all Muslims, including U.S. citizens abroad, from entering the country.

The media often falls back on euphemisms when describing Trump's comments about race: racially loaded, racially charged, racially tinged, racially sensitive. I understand why, too. It's better to err on the side of caution with something as explosive as the r-word.

But here's the truth: Donald Trump is a racist.

Yes, some of his individual comments aren't about only race. (You can favor less immigration without being a racist.) Yet the full picture is clear as can be.

He treats people differently based on their race. Specifically, he treats people who aren't white worse than people who are. That — as Trump's ally, Paul Ryan, once said — is the textbook definition of racism.

After Trump's vulgar insult about Haitians last week, I set out to compile a definitive list of his racist comments, with help from colleagues and readers. The full version is online and includes video where available.

I realize that this exercise may feel like a particularly depressing way to mark Martin Luther King's birthday. (For spiritual cleansing, I recommend taking a little time today to watch one of King's great speeches.) But today, of all days, is one to recognize who Trump is.

The president of the United States is a racist, in thought and in deed. He is pursuing policies designed to harm blacks, Latinos, Arabs and Asian-Americans. The country can't effectively fight back — and undo the damage — unless we acknowledge reality.

The most damning evidence is Trump's own words:

"Black guys counting my money! I hate it," Trump once said, according to a former colleague, while complaining about an

accountant. "I think that the guy is lazy. And it's probably not his fault, because laziness is a trait in blacks."

"I think sometimes a black may think they don't have an advantage or this and that," Trump said on television in 1989. "I would love to be a well-educated black, because I really believe they do have an actual advantage."

Trump referred to a Hispanic Miss Universe as "Miss House-keeping."

He repeatedly described Barack Obama as unqualified, lazy or un-American: He claimed Obama wasn't born here, was "a terrible student," played golf instead of working and "issued a statement for Kwanzaa but failed to issue one for Christmas."

Trump explained his Muslim ban was "no different" from the internment camps for Japanese-Americans during World War II.

He said a federal judge hearing a case about Trump University had "an absolute conflict" because the judge was "of Mexican heritage."

Trump frequently casts heavily black cities as dystopian hellscape. "Our inner cities, African-Americans, Hispanics are living in hell," he said.

He is slow to mention terrorism or hate crimes committed by white people, like the 2017 killing of an Indian man in Kansas.

He frequently criticizes prominent African-Americans for being unpatriotic, ungrateful and disrespectful. He referred to one as a "son of a bitch." He called Puerto Ricans who criticized his administration's response to Hurricane Maria "politically motivated ingrates."

He has retweeted white nationalists without apology. He called some participants in a white-supremacist march "very fine people." He was reluctant to distance himself from David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan leader. He has tweeted anti-Semitic caricatures and neo-Nazi conspiracy theories.

In a meeting about Pakistan, he wondered aloud why a Korean-American intelligence analyst briefing him was not working on North Korea policy.

While speaking with Navajo war veterans, Trump mocked Sen. Elizabeth Warren as "Pocahontas."

At a 2016 rally, Trump pointed to one attendee and said: "Oh, look at my African-American over here. Look at him."

Trump said last year that recent immigrants from Haiti "all have AIDS" and that Nigerians, once seeing the United States, would never "go back to their huts." Last week, Trump vulgarly called for less immigration from Haiti and more from Norway. His specific point was that Haitians were inferior to Norwegians.

David Leonhardt is an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.



YOUR VIEWS

Measure 101 represents larger health care failure

It strikes me as odd how intelligent people on both sides of an argument auger themselves so deeply into an issue that, well, they cannot see the forest for the trees.

Measure 101 is a classic case. It does not even matter whether you are for or against it; what should matter is understanding that 101 is just using old baling twine to fix a badly broken cart.

Dr. Hayden, a leading opponent to 101, in his *Oregonian* editorial pointed out that it is not a matter of whether we should pay to hold Oregon's Medicaid system together, but how to pay. He touches on the very root of the problem, maybe without knowing it. We have far and away the most expensive health care in the world with abysmal health outcomes for the money.

Many proponents of 101 are willing to throw whatever it costs to attempt to cobble together the failed health care system in our country. That is noble, but in the end it is futile. Our system cannot hold up much longer under these inefficient patches that fail to address the real problems both within the healthcare system and the outside forces that have driven it to this breaking point.

An editorial in the *East Oregonian* called 101 a Band-Aid. Actually, it is a small Band-Aid being applied to the very large, soaked bandage: the Affordable Care Act. It is a failed attempt to staunch the hemorrhage of money we spend on health care. Both President Obama and (retired) Senator Baucus, the author of Obamacare, said that the two primary goals were to reduce the exorbitant costs of health care in this country and to provide access for all citizens to quality health care. It has failed at both. Insurance is not health care.

This is why we are arguing over Measure 101. If we, the people, do not hold the feet of our elected ones to the fire to honestly address health care in our country, we will face many more 101s in the future. I'm not talking about the "anti-fix" Representative Walden and

the elitist Republicans in D.C. proposed, nor the hollow words of so many Democrats, including Senator Merkley who also puts politics ahead of the people of our country.

Measure 101 is proof that we need to look at, for example, the 34 other countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, all of which have health care systems that: a) cost less than our country, b) provide health care to ALL their citizens, and c) have far better health outcomes than our country. All these countries, like our country, are "committed to democracy and the market economy."

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, the vast majority of universal health care systems around the globe work far better than our very expensive and very broken system. Our system — driven by corporate insurance as well as profit-based Big Med and Pharma — is probably the epitome of a failure of the free market system. It would take a column this size just to outline the massive administrative inefficiencies and redundancies within our healthcare system that drive costs way up before you or I can even see our doctor.

It's time our country implements a "Medicare For All" type system for all our citizens, which will achieve the goals of bringing costs down and improving health outcomes.

Rick Meis
Halfway

One year in 100 words

Saturday, Jan. 20 marks the one year anniversary of President Donald Trump's inauguration. We're asking readers to send a 100-word review of his first year in office. How has it compared to your expectations? Has your perception of him changed after a full year in office? What do you expect in his second year?

Send your thoughts by email to editor@eastoregonian.com or to our office at 211 SE Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR, 97801. Include your name, city of residence and a phone number.

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