

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

The nature of legislation

Few people outside the Oregon Capitol care about much of the Legislature's work.

Most legislation is tedious — making fixes in laws and regulations, adjusting the state budget, correcting spellings such as for the Central Oregon community of Terrebonne, and the like.

Such legislation rarely makes headlines. But it comprises the nuts and bolts of governance, and it was the essence of the 2018 Legislature.

Legislative sessions in even-numbered years are short — limited to 35 days — because they're designed for fix-it and budget balancing bills, not grand visionary legislation. And the 2018 Legislature, which adjourned after only 27 days, largely succeeded in that mission.

The so-called Clean Energy Jobs legislation — a top priority for many urban Democratic legislators but, according to polls, not most Oregonians — was put off until 2019, when the Legislature will meet for up to 160 days.

The Senate continued to act as a brake on the House, letting a number of contentious House-passed bills die

quietly, including one that would have required school districts to negotiate with teacher unions over class sizes.

The Legislature faced up to its dismal record on sexual harassment and pushed Roseburg Republican Sen. Jeff Kruse to resign.

Governor Kate Brown had a modest agenda, and the Legislature mostly went along with it.

Slight progress was made on improving government efficiency and on paring the huge costs of the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System.

Far-reaching gun legislation was set aside in favor of a straightforward bill that expands the definition of stalkers and domestic abusers who may lose access to firearms. Most bills that passed did so on a bipartisan basis, many on unanimous or near-unanimous votes. Among the exceptions were the Democratic majority's bills to partially disconnect Oregon income tax regulations from the federal tax reforms that became law in December. The wisdom of the state legislation, or lack thereof, likely won't be known for some time. The bill still sits on the governor's



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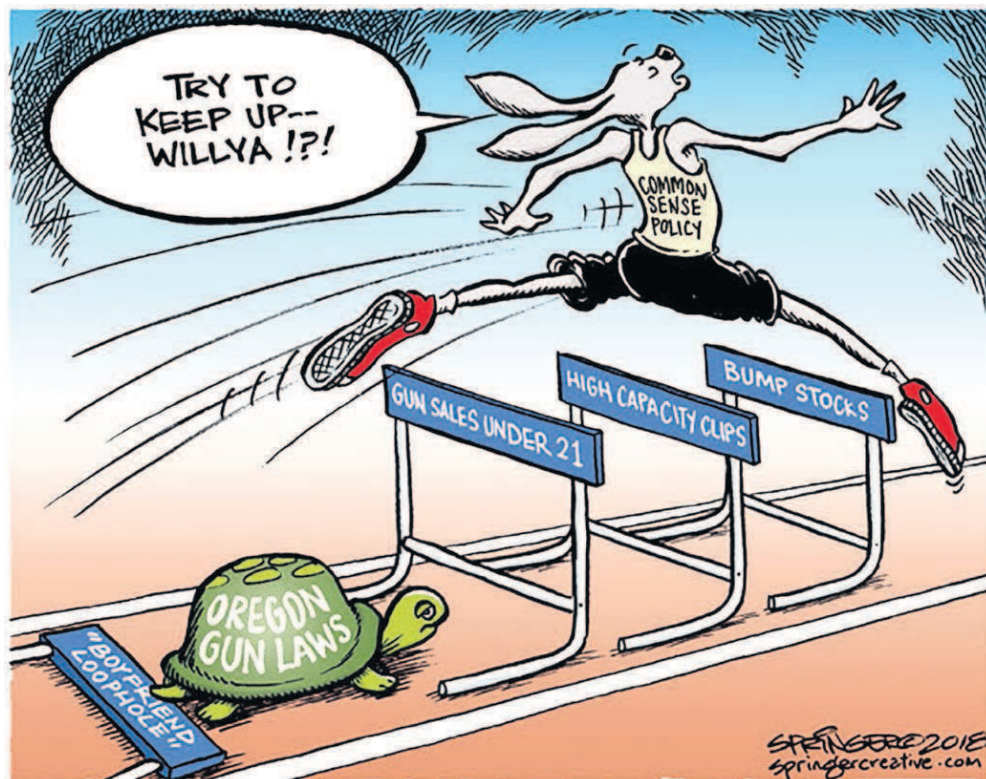
Gov. Kate Brown delivered the State of the State address Feb. 5, at the Oregon State Capitol in Salem to kick off the 2018 legislative session.

desk, and carries with it political implications no matter her decision.

And despite legislators' sometimes-heated public rhetoric on taxes, immigration and a few other issues, this was a legislative session that largely worked well behind the scenes. Republicans and Democrats collaborated to make an early

adjournment possible. We're pleased that major projects were postponed until 2019, when there is more time for debate.

Oregon history books may pay little heed to the 2018 Legislature, and that's OK. Good governance is frequently bland, often tedious ... and supremely important.



YOUR VIEWS

Unfair to disparage the age of county commissioners

Ironically, on the very same day that Tom Bailor, a candidate for Umatilla County commissioner, devalued the contribution that comes with age and experience, Karen Girard of the Oregon Health Authority was quoted in an email from the agency saying, "when older adults encounter barriers to engaging in our communities, we all miss out."

I am reminded of former President Ronald Reagan's response in answer to a question regarding age in a presidential debate in 1984: "I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience."

As the one commissioner who is not running for office this year, I was disappointed that Bailor would build a foundation for his campaign based upon negative comments rather than a platform of issues he might offer Umatilla County.

If he truly is seeking to bring what he describes as new values to the office, he might want to learn more about something called age discrimination.

He also addresses the raise granted commissioners in 2015. The commissioners did not vote that raise. It was proposed and recommended to the budget committee, by a citizen committee called the compensation committee who are called together as a mandated part of the budget process to make recommendations regarding salaries of county elected officials. Their recommendation was passed by the citizen members of the budget committee; the commissioners abstained from voting.

What Bailor also missed is the fact that the increase was the compensation and the committees' recognition that the commissioners had eliminated three administrative positions valued at \$400,000 and assumed those duties themselves. This equation resulted in a huge savings for the county general fund.

Finally, Bailor also suggests that Murdock should surrender his First Amendment rights of free speech while he is a commissioner. That in itself is disconcerting, although the

commissioner has personally chosen to limit his love and ability for writing to nonpartisan issues during the past year-plus. More importantly, Bailor might be well advised to read the joint article Murdock did write with William Aney regarding how people of divergent views can come together in this time of political unrest.

Hopefully, as the campaign unfolds, we can avoid the negativity in politics that is sweeping the nation and is proving to be so divisive. Umatilla County doesn't need that.

Bill Elfering, Hermiston
Umatilla County Commissioner

Early morning speeders up and down Southgate Hill

I live in McKay Creek area and also work there. I have a morning routine where I drive either to McDonalds for a fresh hot mocha, or down to Jack in the Box for an iced coffee.

Both of these fine institutions have an awesome morning staff who greet the blurry eyed folks with a smile and bright attitude.

As I'm out driving my sports car (my midlife crisis car, as my wife refers to it) and because of its make and color I am often seen by the police so I watch my speed carefully. The speed limit going up Southgate Hill is 35 miles per hour. So, with my top down (I did not care that it was 51 degrees — remember, this is my midlife crisis car) I set the cruise control for 35.

I felt like the old person driving in the middle of road with my left turn signal on forever. People were passing me by as if I was going 15 miles per hour.

This was not an isolated incident. I drive this on a daily basis. Tuesdays and Fridays seem to be the worse around 9:30 a.m.

So, I have seen a lot of comments being made about Frazer around Hawthorne Learning Center and going up and down on Southgate Hill. I am confirming their concern, and would support some type of enforcement of the speed laws. I know I am not going to be the most popular person for writing this letter, but I am supporting previous statements that the speeding in and around Pendleton is there.

Scot Jacobson, Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS

Understanding student mobbists

Students across the country continue to attack and shut down speakers at a steady pace, from Christina Hoff Sommers to Jordan Peterson. I confess that I find their behavior awful. My gut reaction is that these student mobbists manage to combine snowflake fragility and lynch mob irrationalism into one perfectly poisonous cocktail.

But empathy is the essential character trait for our moment. So I thought it might be a good discipline to try to see things from the students' perspective — to not just condemn or psychoanalyze them but try to understand where they are coming from. So here goes.

I would begin my stab at understanding by acknowledging that I grew up in one era and they grew up in another. I came of age in the 1980s. In that time, there was an assumption that though the roots of human society were deep in tribalism, over the past 3,000 years we had developed a system of liberal democracy that gloriously transcended it, that put reason, compassion and compromise atop violence and brute force.

There was also an assumption that while we might disagree on the means, we all wanted basically the same things. For example, though America was plagued by economic divides we all wanted a society in which social mobility and equal opportunity were the rule. Though America is plagued by racism, we all wanted more integration and less bigotry, a place where talent and character mattered more than skin color and prejudice.

Given those assumptions, sophisticated people in those days wanted to be seen, to use Scott Alexander's term, as mistake theorists. Mistake theorists believe that the world is complicated and that most of our troubles are caused by error and incompetence, not by malice or evil intent.

Mistake theorists also believe that most social problems are hard and that obvious perfect solutions are scarce. Debate is essential.

You bring different perspectives and expertise to the table. You reduce passion and increase learning. Basically, we're all physicians standing over a patient with a very complex condition and we're trying to collectively figure out what to do.

This remains my basic understanding of how citizenship is supposed to work.

But two things have happened since my worldview was formed. The first is that the conversation about race has changed. The idea for decades was that racial justice would come when we reduced individual bigotry — the goal was colorblind individualism. As Nils Gilman argues in *The American Interest*, that ideal reached its apogee with the election of Barack Obama.

But Obama's election also revealed the limits of that ideal. Now the crucial barriers to racial justice are seen not just



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

as individual, but as structural — economic structures, the incarceration crisis, the breakdown of family structure.

Today's students grew up in this different racial conversation. Progress is less about understanding and liking each other and more about smashing structures that others defend.

The second thing that happened was that reason, apparently, ceased to matter. Today's young people were raised within an educational ideology that taught them that individual reason and emotion were less important than perspectivism — what perspective you bring as a white man, a black woman, a transgender Mexican, or whatever.

These students were raised with the idea that individual reason is downstream from group identity. Then along came the 2016 election to validate that point of view! If reason and deliberation are central to democracy, how on earth did Donald Trump get elected?

If you were born after 1990, it's not totally shocking that you would see public life as an inevitable war of tribe versus tribe. It's not surprising that you would become, in Alexander's terminology, a conflict theorist, not a mistake theorist.

In the conflict theorist worldview, most public problems are caused not by errors or complexity but by malice and oppression. The powerful few keep everyone else down. The solutions to injustice and suffering are simple and obvious: Defeat the powerful. Passion is more important than reason because the oppressed masses have to mobilize to storm the barricades. Debate is counterproductive because it dilutes passion and sows confusion. Discordant ideas are not there to inform; they are there to provide cover for oppression.

Some people I admire see today's student mobbism as an outbreak of an ersatz religion, but I'd say their theory of social change is at least comprehensible given the era they inhabit.

If I could talk to the students I'd try to persuade them that mistake theory is a more accurate and effective way to change the world than conflict theory, but I probably wouldn't persuade them.

So I'd just ask them to take two courses. The first would be in revolutions — the French, Russian, Chinese and all the other ones that unleashed the passion of the mob in an effort to overthrow oppression — and the way they ALL wound up waist deep in blood.

The second would be in constitutionalism. We dump on lawyers, but the law is beautiful, living proof that we can rise above tribalism and force — proof that the edifice of civilizations is a great gift, which our ancestors gave their lives for.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist in 2003.

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