

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Oregon's leaders need long-term strategies

In the words of State Economist Mark McMullen, Oregon's economy "is still pretty hunky-dory."

The current period of economic growth is on its way to becoming the longest on record, with little chance of a recession within the next year. As a result, the state is collecting far more in taxes than previously projected.

But if any legislators and other state officials are making plans for spending that extra dough, forget about it. Here are three reasons:

First, the most obvious is Oregon's unique kicker law. It could result in more than \$550 million being returned to taxpayers as rebates on their 2019 personal income taxes.

The kicker remains popular with taxpayers, although a strong argument can be made that voters eventually should funnel that money into

government rainy-day reserves instead. Historically, some Oregon recessions came on the heels of big kicker payouts.

Second, we know good economic times cannot last forever, which is why economist McMullen referred to Oregon being in a "pre-crisis" mode.

It appears the state will enter the 2019-21 budget period with \$1.2 billion to \$1.8 billion in reserves, which might be unprecedented. "However," says the Oregon Economic and Revenue Forecast issued last week, "such reserves would barely be sufficient to withstand a typical recession's impact on state revenues, let alone account for the increase in public services and programs during downturns."

Third, our state government still has no overall strategy of economic, educational, environmental, social and related goals; or, how financial decisions — taxing and spending —



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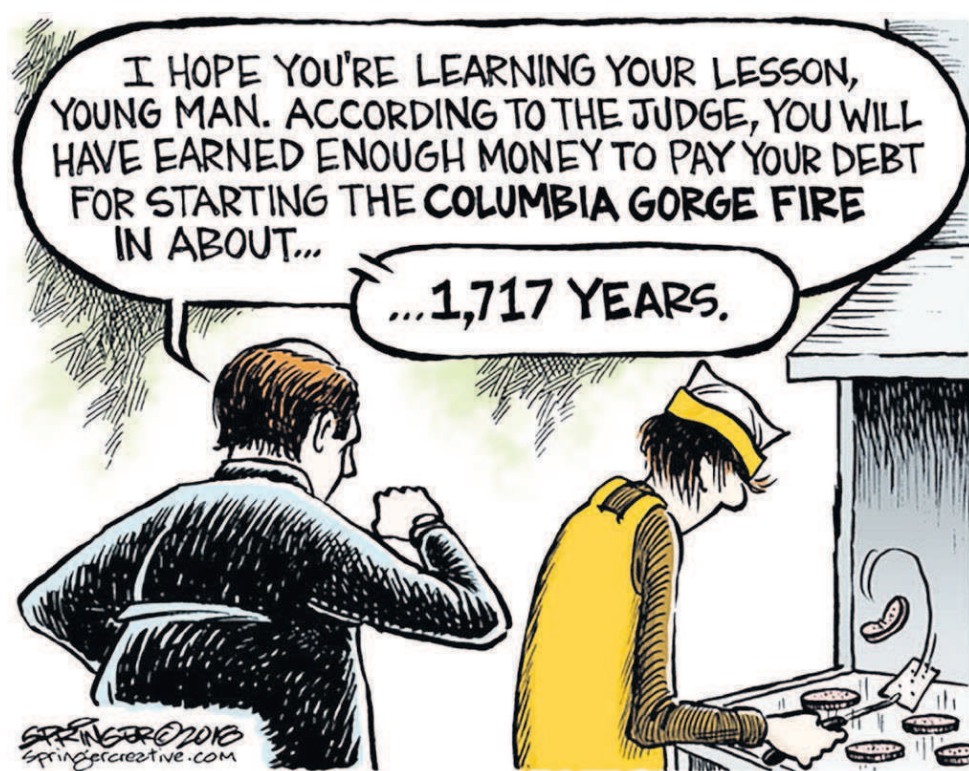
Dark clouds hover over the Capitol in Salem in January.

can most effectively achieve those priorities. Instead, the state budgets incrementally — department by department, program by program, crisis by crisis. What is urgent overwhelms what is most important.

Meanwhile, the global pace of change intensifies each day. Oregon lags in affordable housing; an adequate,

timely transportation network; worker retraining in the face of inevitable automation; and other areas. Each of those will have an economic impact, pro or con.

It's long past time for the Legislature, state leadership and the public to set long-term strategies to ensure prosperity for the state and its residents.



YOUR VIEWS

Better options for country's wild horses

The final statement in your editorial on the wild horse problem hit the nail on the head. "Clearly, something needs to be done, because what's already been done hasn't worked."

I have long advocated that these surplus animals be slaughtered and the meat be given to the poor. The Oregon Food Bank and Farmers Ending Hunger have told me the meat would be beneficial, but it was too emotional an issue for them to pursue. Apparently providing the poor a lean, high protein food source lacks appeal.

Maybe I should have proposed these animals be slaughtered and the meat offered to those who value organic foods. I know there was a study that found 65 percent of the U.S. population would not eat horse meat. That implies 35 percent might. This number is probably greater than the percentage of the population who regularly buy organic. Inasmuch as these animals have received no medications, additives, etc., they should qualify as organic. It is a well established fact that horse meat is nutritionally superior to beef. In Iceland it is the cheapest meal on restaurant menus. Also quite tasty. In the 1940s and 1950s horse meat, according to Time Magazine, was the number one meat consumed in Portland, Oregon.

At a Fish and Wildlife meeting in Pendleton in the early 1970s someone in the audience asked an official what kind of management plan did they have for the inevitable overpopulation of horses that would occur with the passage of the free roaming horse law. The official said "they were concerned." I naively suggested they issue tags and have a drawing like they did for other big game. The F&W official immediately asked the news reporter not

to print that. They didn't. Maybe the time has come.

At the end of the day, we need to set aside our emotions if we want to provide a thriving environment for sage grouse, antelope, deer, elk, big horn sheep, native fish and a healthy horse population. Yes, I do enjoy seeing these horses, but I don't want there to be more than 26,715 horses, a number range scientists have determined to provide an appropriate balance.

Carlisle Harrison
Hermiston

McLeod-Skinner ready to take on Walden

The midterm primary election is over and we now know who we can support that will help bring sense to Congress. And her name is Jamie McLeod-Skinner.

Jamie is a native of the eastern and southern Oregon region and will bring a real knowledge of our issues and values to Congress. She has the experience, knowledge and common sense to solve the grave issues currently facing our district, state and country. She also exhibits the absolute integrity that Washington is so lacking in at the present time.

In conversations with Jamie and hearing her speak, it is apparent that in addition to her extensive knowledge of Eastern Oregon issues, she will be a strong voice for insuring that affordable health care is available to all Oregonians and she will work hard to see that the rural and semi-rural residents of our district will have livable wage jobs.

These are the issues and Jamie McLeod-Skinner is the person who will bring the intelligence, experience and integrity to congress to do just that job.

Jack Lorts
Fossil

OTHER VIEWS

The Donald Trump of Silicon Valley

He is prone to unhinged Twitter eruptions. He can't handle criticism. He scolds the news media for its purported dishonesty and threatens to create a Sovietlike apparatus to keep tabs on it. He suckers people to fork over cash in exchange for promises he hasn't kept. He's a billionaire whose business flirts with bankruptcy. He's sold himself as an establishment-crushing iconoclast when he's really little more than an unusually accomplished BS artist. His legions of devotees are fanatics and, let's face it, a bit stupid.

I speak of Tesla chief executive Elon Musk, the Donald Trump of Silicon Valley.

Not long ago, a wise friend with an enviable Wall Street reputation wrote me to describe his astonishment with Tesla, calling it "a situation unlike anything I have ever seen."

"The stock market valuation of a well-known company is stratospheric," he said, "while at the same its bonds are viewed as junk."

"Meanwhile," he added, Musk "plays to his audience with constant tweets of claims that go largely, repeatedly and visibly unfulfilled. And the SEC, which is supposed to prevent companies like this that raise money from the public on false pretenses, sits idly by."

Strong words — too strong, if you ask the satisfied customers of Tesla's Model S (base price, \$74,500) and X (\$79,500). But Tesla is supposed to be the auto manufacturer of the future, not a bauble-maker for the rich.

The company has rarely turned a profit in its nearly 15-year existence. Senior executives are fleeing like it's an exploding Pinto, and the company is in an ugly fight with the National Transportation Safety Board. It burns through cash at a rate of \$7,430 a minute, according to Bloomberg. It has failed to meet production targets for its \$35,000 Model 3, for which more than 400,000 people have put down \$1,000 deposits, and on which the company's fortunes largely rest.

Also, the car is a lemon. Like the old Borscht Belt joke, the food is lousy and the portions are so small.

So much, then, for Elon Musk solving climate change or everything else he has promised to do, like building cities on Mars or (much more preposterously) solving LA traffic. At this point, it would be enough for Musk to save his company and the jobs of its 37,000 or so employees. For them and their families, saving the world first requires that Musk turn a profit on his existing business, not spin tales about his future ones.

I'll leave it to market analysts to figure

BRET STEPHENS
Comment

out whether that can happen (some actually think it can), though the solution will not come from finding the next John Sculley to discipline Musk's Steve Jobs. The Apple of the 1980s was a brilliant idea with a terrible leader.

Tesla, by contrast, today is a terrible idea with a brilliant leader. The terrible idea is that electric cars are the wave of the future, at least for the mass market. Gasoline

has advantages in energy density, cost, infrastructure and transportability that electricity doesn't and won't for decades. The brilliance is Musk's Trumplike ability to get people to believe in him and his preposterous promises. Tesla without Musk would be Oz without the Wizard.

Much of the blame for the Tesla fiasco goes to government, which, in the name of green virtue, decided to subsidize the hobbies of millionaires to the tune of a \$7,500 federal tax credit per car sold, along with additional state-based rebates. Would Tesla be a viable company without the subsidies? Doubtful. When Hong Kong got rid of subsidies last year, Tesla sales fell from 2,939 — to zero. It may be unfair to describe Tesla as Solyndra on wheels, but only slightly.

But the Tesla story isn't just about the perils of misdirected government-led development and clever rent-seeking entrepreneurs. And it isn't about the virtue signaling of those who like their environmentalist bona fides to come with vegan-friendly upholstery. It's about hubris and credulity — the hubris of the few to pretend they know the future and the credulity of the many to follow them there.

Electric vehicles were supposed to be the car of the future because we were running out of oil — until we weren't. And Musk was supposed to be a visionary because he spoke in visions, for which there will always be a large receptive audience. Casting about for a cause and a savior to believe in is what too many Americans do these days, perhaps as a result of casting off the causes and saviors we used to believe in.

Trump long ago figured out that truth is whatever he thinks he can get away with, a cynical kind of wisdom he rode all the way to the White House and whose consequences we live with every day. With Musk the consequences are hardly as serious, but the essential pattern is the same. Maybe he'll next try to sell us on a time machine and promise rides to anyone willing to make a \$10,000 deposit. Tesla could surely use the cash.

Bret Stephens won a Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2013. He began working as a columnist at The New York Times in April.