

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OTHER VIEWS

Even in good times, PERS problem grows

Bend Bulletin

You’d think, with the state Public Employees Retirement System’s pension funds showing a whopping 15.4 percent rate of return on investments in 2017, that Oregonians could quit worrying about the financially strapped retirement system.

You’d be wrong.

While 15.4 percent is more than double what the PERS governing board expected to get, it isn’t enough to dig the system out of its unfunded liability hole. Nor is it reasonable to assume the system’s investment managers will be able to duplicate last year’s rate over time.

The PERS unfunded liability — money it’s committed to paying retirees that the retirement system does not have — was some \$25.3 billion in 2016; by the end of 2017 it had dropped to \$22.3 billion.

Put another way, the state now has 73 cents in hand for every \$1 it expects to pay out, an improvement of 4 cents on the dollar. But school districts, state government, cities, counties and special districts around the state still will be on the hook for substantially more money for PERS in the next biennium than they were in this one.

Together, they’ll be required to contribute about \$4 billion to PERS in the 2019-21 budget period, a 38 percent increase over what they’re paying during the current one. That’s going to mean that some school districts may lay off teachers, and other agencies also will have to make do with less.

It would be nice to think that last year’s market performance was the new norm, but it wasn’t. While the market has done well during the current decade, that sort of performance is generally followed by a decade of mediocre returns, according



to the Market Watch website. Overall, the market has averaged a 9.6 percent return since the 1920s.

Without genuine reform, which the Democratic-controlled Oregon Legislature so far refuses to consider, the PERS problem will continue to bleed schools, cities and others of precious resources for years. It’s time lawmakers got the message.



YOUR VIEWS

Debates would reveal true rural champion

In just a few months, on November 6, 2018, we the people in the 20 counties of Oregon Congressional District 2 will be choosing our next representative to Congress for a two-year term. Jamie McLeod-Skinner, the Democratic Party contender for our district, was recently in Joseph for their Chief Joseph Days parade as was her opponent, Greg Walden. Jamie McLeod Skinner walked up to the open vehicle Greg Walden and his wife were riding in, shook his hand, and challenged him to three debates in the district. He agreed.

The following week Jamie McLeod-Skinner delivered a formal invitation to his office in Bend and as stated on her Facebook post said, “Thank you for agreeing with my proposal to debate. I believe the voters of our district deserve to hear both of our views about the many important issues affecting their daily lives — including healthcare, education, public land management, and economic development.”

The debates are being offered by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in Umatilla County on August 31, *The Daily Courier* newspaper and Rogue Indivisible in Jackson County on October 7, and Central Oregon Community College in Deschutes County on October 22. When these three

debates were proposed to both parties, the McLeod-Skinner campaign agreed, but there has yet to be a response from Walden’s office, and now no comment on McLeod-Skinner’s recent proposal.

McLeod-Skinner is also proposing offering debates or joint town hall meetings in all 20 counties. Thank you Jamie McLeod-Skinner for asking Greg Walden personally and in a formal invitation to these debates. As a constituent, I have repeatedly asked Greg Walden’s office about when there will be a local town hall meeting. I know many others who have done the same. The normal response when asked about a Town Hall schedule, Congressman Walden’s staff says, “I don’t have access to his schedule.”

When choosing an elected official, we the people who are being represented need to know a candidate’s views on the issues of concern locally, nationally, and internationally. As an Oregon District 2 constituent I am looking forward to hearing both candidates, even though I already know who I am voting for: the candidate who is working to restore openness, responsiveness, and accountability as an elected official — Jamie McLeod-Skinner. Yes, McLeod-Skinner is the rural champion that will work for us and will get my vote.

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OTHER VIEWS

Jewish life at the crossroads

Every #metoo scandal is different, but most are alike in at least one way: Whether among Hollywood moguls or Southern Baptists, congressmen or Catholic bishops, the fall of prominent men usually accelerates some pre-existing debate about where the larger institution or culture should be going, and which side of its internal arguments deserves to gain.

Lately the American Jewish community has presented an interesting case study, with the series of accusations against Steven M. Cohen, a sociologist who has spent much of his career studying the demography of American Jewish life, and linking trends in Jewish intermarriage and fertility to his people’s cultural continuity.

In answering his accusers Cohen has embraced the clichés of male big shot contrition — promising a “consultation with clergy, therapists and professional experts” and “a process of education, recognition, remorse and repair.” But meanwhile, his fall has inspired a critique not only of his behavior but also his life’s work, with three female historians writing in *The Forward* that his sexual sins should prompt a larger reappraisal of “the troubling gender and sexual politics long embedded in communal discussions of Jewish continuity and survival.”

What Cohen’s critics have in mind, specifically, is the way that the long-standing angst within the American Jewish community around assimilation, intermarriage and fertility tends to sustain a kind of soft traditionalist pressure even in liberal Jewish life — one that defines Jewish identity in exclusionist terms, they complain, while marginalizing “single women, queer people, unwed parents, and childless individuals or couples.”

What the authors are describing pejoratively, the way that a general Jewish liberalism can coexist with more conservative impulses and attitudes, has long been particularly obvious in debates about the state of Israel, where the most cosmopolitan of Jewish liberals can suddenly sound like strident nationalists. (Or as the writers of “Crazy Ex-Girlfriend” put it in their “rap battle” between two rivalrous female Jewish lawyers: “Cause we’re liberals/ duh, progressive as hell / though of course, I support Israel.”) But it extends to a general Jewish interest in, and sometimes alarmism about, issues like fertility rates and cultural preservation that in the world of Gentile politics are associated with the social and cultural right.

This combination has often frustrated more thoroughgoing conservatives — Jewish ones especially — who don’t understand why more American Jews don’t extend their conservative impulses beyond the tribe and vote Republican. But a “liberalism without/conservatism within” combination is common to minority populations, and it’s a particularly reasonable reaction to the experience of Jewish history: An oft-persecuted people’s flourishing can both depend on maintaining a certain conservatism about



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its own patterns of marrying and begetting and cultural transmission (and, in the case of Israel, the safety of its lonely nation-state), and on encouraging liberalism and cosmopolitanism in the wider, potentially hostile order in which the diaspora subsists.

(And then, of course, this complicated combination also reflects the fear among many politically liberal Jews that if they don’t sustain a certain familial traditionalism, they’ll just cede the Jewish future to the ultra-fecund ultra-Orthodox.)

The interesting question is whether the combination can survive the pressures of our own era. One form of pressure comes from the left, which is increasingly intent on rooting out all residues of traditionalism within the liberal order — treating any form of nationalism as suspect, any policing of religious orthodoxy as dangerous, any approach to sex and family and child rearing that isn’t purely gender-egalitarian as a dangerous atavism.

That spirit, seeking ideological consistency and opposing (to quote Cohen’s critics) “patriarchal, misogynistic, and anachronist assumptions about what is good for the Jews,” may not be able to tolerate the mix of cosmopolitanism and tribalism, liberalism and traditionalism, that has defined American Judaism for years.

At the same time, there is a different pressure from Israel itself. As the Jewish state’s political and cultural debate has shifted to the right, Benjamin Netanyahu has embraced the view that European Jewry’s old enemy, Christian nationalism, is less dangerous to the Jewish future than the dissolving effects of liberal cosmopolitanism and the threat posed by Islamist anti-Semitism. Thus you have the striking phenomenon of the Netanyahu government cultivating friends like Hungary’s Viktor Orban, on the grounds that joining an alliance of conservative nationalisms actually offers a surer ground for the Jewish state’s survival than sticking with the secularism and anti-nationalism of the present liberal project.

These centrifugal forces, pulling leftward and rightward, have already alienated younger liberal Jews in the United States from the uncomplicated pro-Israel sentiments of their grandparents. And they may portend a future where the “liberal politics with a dose of cultural conservatism” combination gives way to a sharper choice for many Jews: a more consistently conservative Judaism bound to Israeli nationalism, and a liberal Judaism that’s more consistently liberal and less identitarian — and perhaps ultimately more secularized and assimilated.

As for whether this divergence will ultimately be, as they say, good for the Jews — well, that’s a question this Gentile columnist leaves to the chosen people to debate.

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Ross Douthat joined *The New York Times* as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009. Previously, he was a senior editor at *The Atlantic*.