

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Learning in the 21st century

The connection between a college education and economic success is clear, and will only become clearer the deeper we get into the 21st century.

The information economy is here, and growing. If you don’t believe it, check out the data centers popping up around Boardman, Umatilla and Hermiston. They’re a multi-million dollar investment in the ever-churning need for information. And they’re not powered by brute muscle, but by trained technicians.

Check out the farms across Eastern Oregon. The wheat and potatoes and watermelons don’t look remarkably different than those of a century ago, but the technology that drives the way they’re planted, raised, harvested and processed has grown in leaps and bounds. It still takes bodies in fields, but it’s the scientist in the lab and the engineer at the controls who are in the highest demand.

Look at the phone in your pocket, the readouts on your dashboard or the tablets in your child’s classroom. We’re surrounded by technology, by data, by information. And being prepared for the best jobs of the future means getting an education past high school.

According to a study by the U.S. Census Bureau, people with a bachelor’s degree earn about \$2 million

in their working lives, those with an associate’s degree earn \$1.5 million and those with only a high school diploma earn about \$1.2 million. We only expect that disparity to grow.

Oregon’s universities have paid a lot of attention in recent years on how to get more K-12 students connected to secondary education.

A University of Oregon pilot program at Pendleton High School, as reported last week in the *East Oregonian*, aims to get students not only to a high school diploma, but prepared to enter college afterward — be it U of O, Eastern Oregon University or somewhere else entirely. They’re treating it like an extension service, sending experts in the field of education to share their knowledge.

“We will succeed only if all our schools are succeeding,” Michael Schill, president of the University of Oregon, told our editorial board in a meeting that included Ed Ray, president of Oregon State University, and Tom Insko, president of Eastern Oregon University.

All three supported that holistic approach which has gained favor in recent years, even as universities and K-12 schools seeks education dollars from the same state budget.

The university presidents are asking for \$1 billion in the next biennium to fund programs across the state. It



EO file photo

Regional advisor Wendy Sorey speaks with lone juniors Laura Ayala, center, and Renee Peterson attending Eastern Oregon University at a job fair March 8 at the SAGE Center in Boardman.

may seem like a big ask at first glance, but when accounting for inflation it essentially resets to pre-recession funding. Their budgets, along with every other public budget in the state, will also be hamstrung by PERS obligations, meaning the piece of the pie that goes to educational endeavors is even smaller.

Education funding should be viewed as economic development funding. Dollars spent on education, from pre-K to post-secondary, are investments made in the future of our workforce. We’re better off training and developing our own entrepreneurs and experts than hoping to attract them from other places.

Often, it all comes back to personal economics. Prospective college students

are looking at a school they can afford, regardless of the potential payouts later in their careers. Keeping tuition as low as possible is a big part of that, and requires the state’s support.

Ray shared that about 42 percent of graduates from Oregon universities who earn a bachelor’s degrees leave with no student loans, and the average debt is about \$27,000. Student debt will certainly play a role in the U.S. economy in the coming decades — with about \$1.48 trillion in student loan debt already owed by Americans, a reckoning may be on the horizon.

But a prospective college student should take note that an investment in their education is an investment in their future. We hope the state takes the same approach.

YOUR VIEWS

Good things are happening

In an unexpected move, the Pendleton City Council has made a courageous decision, voting to leave intact the previous agreements with Saj Jivanjee without modifications. It’s now time for Mr. Jivanjee to live up to past agreements or hit the road, and that in itself is a very good thing.

It looks like Union Pacific Railroad (UP) is putting a lot more thought into the proposal to relocate those Eighth Street Bridge trusses onto their property on Main Street than the Pendleton Enhancement Project (PEP) people. When you consider the liability issues facing the railroad, heavy rail traffic mixing with crowds, UP is probably not real anxious to suffer the consequences of a derailment and fire similar to the disaster that occurred in Mosier a couple of years back. Just imagine the lawsuits. Using the funding to enhance the river walkway or add much needed parking at city parks makes much more sense. Creating more to maintain, while deferring maintenance on what we already have, makes very little sense. Canceling this project would save both the city and UP a lot of time and money and that would be a very good thing.

The conspicuous absence of those red bucking horse banners that normally adorn our antique lampposts on Main Street during the Round-Up leads me to believe that the Pendleton Downtown Association is on life support and does not deserve any additional funding. In this case, stronger support for the chamber of commerce would again be a very good thing for all concerned.

Recent administrators of both the PEP and PDA have apparently recognized the futility of pushing programs that have limited community support exemplified by the lack of sufficient funding, and have thus resigned. Recognizing the reality of their situation will, in the long run, also be a good thing.

The city council has finally decided to tackle a sustainable budget. A necessary first step would be eliminating support for those special interest groups such as PEP, PDA, and most recently the North Hill Citizens Group, and would also be a very good thing if the mayor and council are truly interested in adopting that elusive sustainable budget.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

The burden of proof for Kavanaugh

Last week, I wrote a column taking the view that conservatives supporting Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court because they hope he will overturn Roe v. Wade should be willing to encourage his withdrawal if his accuser testifies credibly against him and the cloud over his nomination can’t be expeditiously cleared up.

Even if Kavanaugh is innocent of the charge of a teenage sexual assault, I argued, to give such prominence and power to a man credibly accused would both leave an unnecessary taint on his future rulings (especially given his appointment by our Playboy president) and alienate social conservatives from the persuadable Americans, women especially, whose support any pro-life program ultimately requires.

This argument was not well-received among many of my conservative friends. So I spent the week having private arguments about whether it was really fair to ask a public servant to withdraw in a kind of tacit shame, for some greater ideological good, on the basis of a single unprovable allegation — and whether that kind of standard would inevitably lead to less-provable allegations against more probably-innocent figures down the road — and how you could expect any decent person to put themselves forward for high office in the climate such a precedent would create.

The strongest point that Kavanaugh’s defenders made to me was that, contrary to the claim that there is no punishment involved in being denied a Supreme Court seat, his withdrawal under the shadow of Christine Blasey Ford’s allegation would be regarded by much of the country as an admission of guilt — an admission he was once a would-be rapist and is a perjurer today. So to pull him back wouldn’t just be like denying someone an important job after an unsuccessful interview; it would emblazon a scarlet “R” on a man who might well not deserve it. And that, my friends argued, would be a grave wrong no matter what it might gain politically and culturally for his conservatives further down the road.

These arguments would be convincing,



Ross DOUTHAT
Comment



I think, if Kavanaugh were up for a lower court appointment, or running for a Senate seat. But the sheer abnormality of the Supreme Court — lifetime tenure, philosopher-king power — makes the prospect of a reputationally-clouded justice more damaging, to the court itself and the country and the causes that the justice might advance, than would be the case with a lesser office. And so the potentially deep injustice to Kavanaugh still doesn’t seem like enough of a reason to let him ascend if he cannot clear his name.

If you take that view, however, you need to acknowledge the burden that this will place on the nominee this week if the brinkmanship over Ford’s testimony is resolved and she appears before the Senate. Ben Wittes put it well for The Atlantic: “He needs to prove a negative about events long ago with sufficient persuasiveness that a reasonable person will regard his service as untainted by the allegations against him, and he needs to do so using only arguments that don’t themselves taint him.”

But what counts as a tainting argument? This question was sharpened Thursday night when Ed Whelan, the president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center and a longtime player in conservative judicial politics, tweeted out the outline of a theory that Kavanaugh’s accuser might be misremembering the identity of her assailant — an outline that rashly and recklessly

included the name of the Georgetown Prep classmate whom Whelan suggested might be the nominee’s doppelgänger, a possibility that Ford immediately denied.

Whelan rightfully apologized for this, and was rightfully attacked for his potential libel. But some of his critics have used this foray to argue or imply that any attempt to raise questions about Ford’s memory, any attempt to put forward an alternative narrative that might point to a different situation or a different perpetrator, should be regarded as the lowest and wickedest and most embarrassing of plots.

But if Kavanaugh is actually innocent, there are really only two alternatives: Either Ford is a brazen liar, or some scenario of clouded or mistaken memory must be true. So to treat any version of the latter defense as simple confirmation of the nominee’s villainy is to close even the narrow door that Wittes (and I) would leave open for Kavanaugh’s potential exculpation.

That is the charity that Kavanaugh deserves, given the burden of proof being laid upon him. If his accuser testifies credibly and all he has to offer are vehement denials, followed by a rushed Republican attempt at confirmation, then he may be innocent, but his nomination will deserve to fail. But an obligation not to elevate a clouded nominee must coexist with an obligation to hear out any serious alternative explanation of the facts. — *New York Times*.

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