

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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Founded October 16, 1875

OUR VIEW

Tip of the Hat, kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to the hat tippers — local chambers of commerce — that put on annual award banquets to highlight the best of their communities.

These annual events are a perfect showcase for the uniqueness of each town, and offer not just a who's who of the current citizenry, but a history lesson of the people who have guided the community over the years.

At Wednesday's dinner in Hermiston, for instance, the audience was introduced to an outstanding alumnus who returned to the area to put criminals behind bars, an energetic accountant who has been a mentor to teenagers, and a restaurateur who has been front-and-center at many community auctions, but does much of his selfless work behind the scenes. And that was just three of a dozen or so people recognized.

We're glad to extend our hat tip to all the winners, and are pleased that the tradition carries on.

A tip of the hat to George Gillette and other referees like him who don the stripes and whistle (or equivalent gear, depending on the season) and make youth sports possible.

Gillette, from Milton-Freewater, was honored before the Blue Mountain Conference basketball game on Saturday in Pendleton for 50 years as a referee.

Officiating isn't for everyone. It takes an encyclopedic knowledge of the rules of a given sport, athleticism, attention to detail and an extra layer or two of skin.

But without people like Gillette, young athletes wouldn't be able to compete.

We may joke about the ump needing a pair of glasses, or gripe about all the calls going the wrong way, but we realize it's a difficult job and are glad some are willing to take it on.

We'd also urge the local sports fan community to remember that, as much as you may love getting into the game, the officials, coaches and players are all



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

George Gillette stands with his wife, Dominie Heiser, as he is honored Saturday at the Pendleton Convention Center for his almost 50 years as a sports official.

people. Good sportsmanship makes an athletic event enjoyable for everyone involved.

A tip of the hat to the proposal to add a cellphone surcharge to pay for expanded internet projects in rural Oregon.

The fee — between \$4 to \$8 a year for the average phone user — is expected to raise \$10 million a year to expand internet access to places where it's nonexistent.

As we were reminded earlier this

week when a fiber line was severed, access to the internet has become a crucial part of our daily lives.

And it's more than just checking Facebook and streaming "Friends" reruns. Access to fixed broadband enhances education, health care and business. It allows remote places to compete for new development.

We're pleased that this Legislature is addressing the shortcomings in our statewide network, and hope they're able to bridge the digital divide.

YOUR VIEWS

16-year-olds not wise enough to vote

A few comments and questions on lowering the voting age to 16: Why, what an excellent idea. The very thing we need is to enfranchise tens of thousands more people who get much of their information from social media and can be counted on to vote based on emotion and the fad of the moment. Isn't there a big enough surplus of such voters now?

Did allowing 18-year-olds to vote do anything good for the state? "Why can I drive like an adult"; that might not be the best talking point that could be used — check out the accident statistics by age group. "[P]ay taxes like an adult"; if you work, you're going to pay taxes; age has nothing to do with it. "[B]e charged and sentenced like an adult"; be honest — excepting very serious crimes, this happens seldom, if ever.

People, ask yourselves: "Did you make wise choices about anything when you were 16?"

John Kaufman
Pendleton

Why PAE matters in Pendleton

At Tuesday's Pendleton City Council meeting, councilors voted unanimously to approve a loan agreement between the city and the state of Oregon for \$2.6M to build another 18,000-square-foot hangar, as reported in the *East Oregonian* ("Pendleton Takes Out \$2.6M Loan for a New Hanger," Feb. 20, 2019). This article explains that the city has a letter of commitment from a company called PAEISR to lease the new hangar once it is completed.

Who is PAE? Pacific Architects and Engineers Inc. is an American company, based in Falls Church, Virginia, started in 1955 to provide critical services rebuilding parts of Asia after WWII. They employ more than 20,000 people all over the world.

They have many divisions, one of which is PAEISR, which manufactures the Resolute Eagle UAS, a long endurance Group 3 drone. PAEISR is supporting a U.S. Navy contract. They have also partnered with the Pendleton UAS Test Range and NASA to conduct a UAS Traffic Management demonstration in the summer of 2020. PAEISR arrived at the Pendleton UAS Range in 2016 and have recently named Pendleton as their West Coast Base of Operations, based on range capabilities and the level of support they have received from range staff and the community. PAEISR is conducting UAS final assembly, production acceptance flight testing, and crew training at the range. They employ more than 30 people with numerous positions waiting to be filled and are leasing a large city-owned hangar that has sat vacant for a number of years.

Why should we be willing to build this new hangar? The Pendleton UAS Test Range was selected from several ranges around the country because of the unique characteristics of the airfield and the community. The ability to work with the company to help them expand strengthens our ability to keep secure the companies permanent presence in the community, add family wage jobs in Pendleton, and increase revenue for the airport.

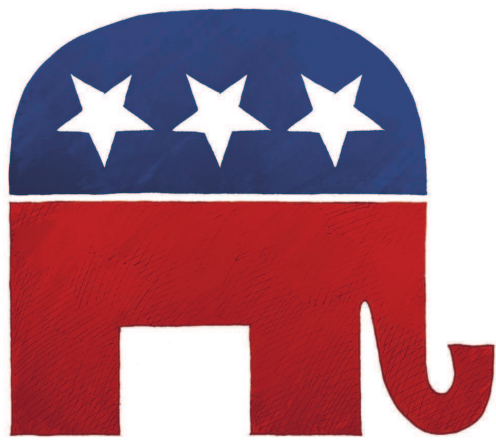
When will private investment begin and public investment end? We feel that we will eventually build up enough activity and clientele that private investment will happen. We have had discussions with private parties who were willing to build hangars, but wanted the city to provide guarantee that if the hangars sat empty the city would pay the debt.

Up until the years ago, we were a completely unknown commodity in the aerospace industry. But that is changing rapidly.

Robb Corbett
City Manager, Pendleton

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OTHER VIEWS

'Oregon Way' is to ignore problems, raise taxes

Bend Bulletin

New arrivals to Oregon sometimes have a hard time figuring out how state government works.

For instance, the state has a \$26 billion unfunded liability for its future pension costs. That means schools and other government entities can't do as much teaching, road paving and law enforcing as they would otherwise. Why not? Because year after year, they almost inevitably have to pay more and more into the state's Public Employees Retirement System to deal with runaway costs.

Schools in Oregon already have a future PERS shortfall of some \$9 billion. Their PERS costs are likely to go up by \$375 million over the next two years, and costs will continue to rise after that.

Gov. Kate Brown would like to increase school funding. She is hoping to get some \$2 billion more into the schools with new taxes on businesses. But to make that \$2 billion a real increase she would also need to find a way to add in another \$3 billion just to keep up with projected PERS increases through 2021, according to *The Oregonian*.

Ideally, policymakers would look at the PERS problem from two angles. First, what can be done to pay the liability down? Second, what can be done to reduce the cost drivers that created a \$26 billion unfunded actuarial liability?

But that's not how things actually work here. The people in control of state government seem to recognize only the revenue problem, which leads them to

look for new sources of revenue. The state's businesses are consistently in legislators' taxation crosshairs.

There's another example of that this week. *The Oregonian* discovered through public records requests that Gov. Kate Brown is looking at selling the state's workers compensation insurance corporation or seizing some of its capital surplus and using the proceeds to pay down the state's PERS liability.

It wouldn't be a direct tax in business. But make no mistake — it would be a functional tax on business.

Businesses in Oregon enjoy some of the lowest workers compensation costs in the country because of the success of the agency called SAIF. It basically has been taking in more in premiums than it has had in losses and expenses. Businesses in Oregon have benefited from low rates and have been getting some of their premiums returned. Despite that, SAIF's surplus is growing. It now has a surplus of some \$1.9 billion.

That success could make it an appetizing target for purchase from the state by a private entity.

One proposal apparently under consideration is for the state to sell SAIF. Another is to grab a big chunk of that surplus and use it to pay down the PERS liability. Businesses would lose one of the major advantages of working in Oregon and perhaps also face the additional \$2 billion in new taxes Brown wants.

That's the Oregon Way. Ignore the problems that send costs skyward and increase taxes on businesses to pay for it. Only in Salem, it seems, is it so easy to act as if squeezing businesses will have no effect on the people those businesses employ.

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