

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

CHRISTOPHER RUSH  
PublisherKATHRYN B. BROWN  
OwnerDANIEL WATTENBURGER  
Managing EditorWYATT HAUPT JR.  
News Editor

Founded October 16, 1875

## OUR VIEW

## Where education dollars count the most

Believe it or not, local public schools are already two-thirds of the way through the 2018-19 academic year. Before spring fever hits and thoughts turn to prom and graduation, now is a good time to evaluate where our local districts stand versus the rest of Oregon.

Readers will recall that education — and specifically its funding — was a major campaign theme during the state election cycle in November. Both Gov. Kate Brown and her Republican opponent touted their own plans to get schools the funding they need to operate more effectively. Since the so-called “Great Recession” of 2008, districts in Oregon have struggled to balance PERS (Public Employee Retirement System) liability with the need for classroom teachers and keeping up with state and federal mandates.

One key reporting metric that has been pointed to is the state’s graduation rate. Depending on how it is calculated — and there are almost as many calculation formulas as there are reporting states — it has been noted in some media that Oregon has the second worst graduation rate in the nation.

We are dubious of this. American satirist Mark Twain and former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli are both credited with the salient quote, “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics.” We suspect the state graduation rate that has been reported for



Salem Reporter/Rachel Alexander

Educators and supporters march Feb. 18 in Salem in favor of more K-12 school funding.

maximum political impact does not paint a true picture of where Oregon stands in comparison with the other 49 states.

But even using the current flawed formula, schools here in Eastern Oregon are accomplishing their primary function — graduating a large percentage of their students within four years — at a high rate.

A review of reporting data from the Oregon Department of Education, and assembled by the InterMountain ESD Consortium, which serves 18 school districts in northeast Oregon, shows area graduation rates well in excess of the state average. In fact, 16 out of 18 area districts posted graduation rates above the state average in 2017-18. Ukiah, Union, and

Imbler districts posted 100 percent graduation rates last year. Pendleton was at 81 percent and nearly every other district posted rates between 80 and 95 percent. The state average last year was 79 percent.

It should be noted that Hermiston, which opted out of participating in the InterMountain ESD last year, has seen graduation rates between 64 and 74 percent over the past five years.

Currently, Oregon still counts students who move from one district to another against their original school district’s graduation number, so schools must keep tabs on former pupils’ graduation progress even after they leave the district. Oregon also does not count students who attain their GED within just a year

or two of their originally scheduled graduation date.

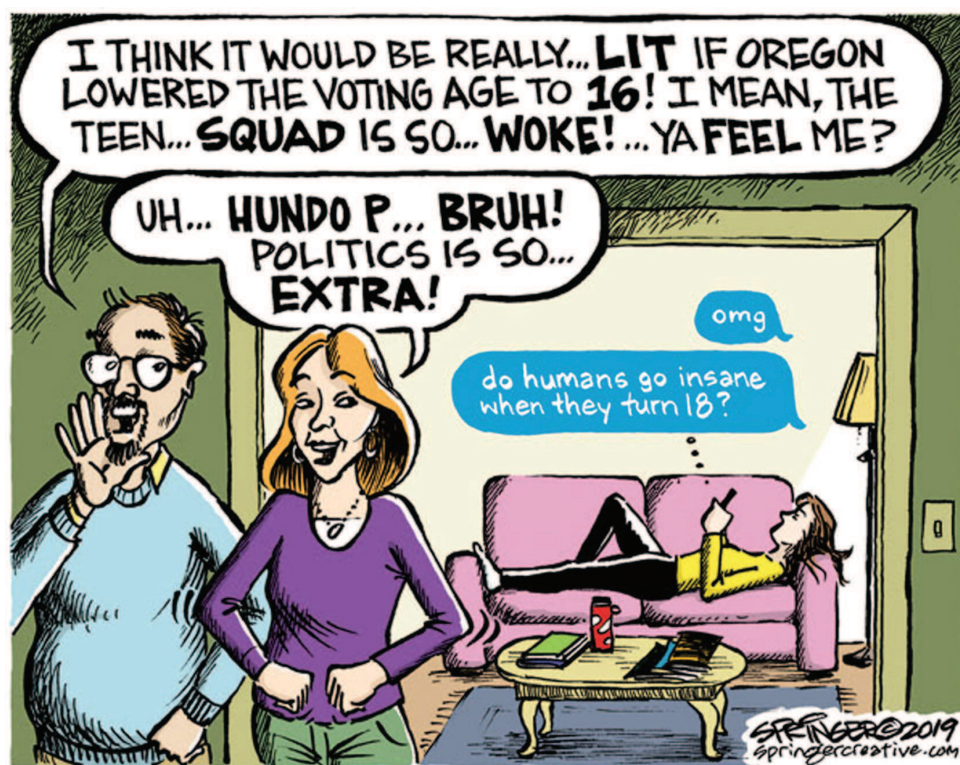
But the most glaring discrepancy when comparing to other states is that Oregon requires 24 credits for graduation when many other states only require as few as 18. There is not a true apples-to-apples comparison to be had. It would only take a few statistical tweaks here and there to move Oregon from the bottom of national graduation rates to at or near the very top.

The bottom line is that we here in Eastern Oregon have very good reason to be proud of the job our local school districts are doing, often under less than ideal circumstances with fewer staff and ultra-tight budgets. Can they improve? Always. So let’s give them the funding they need to make it happen.

And let’s also make sure that funding doesn’t get sliced and diced into well-meaning but ineffectual mandates in Salem. We must trust our educators and administrators to put tax dollars to good use in local classrooms. Take a survey of any community and you’ll find that by and large, the people who are paying the taxes want to see those dollars under local control, directed by the people who best understand the needs.

It’s another reason why having an active local school board is a crucial part of the education system.

When you see a schoolteacher, administrator or school board member from your local district, tell them “thanks!” for the job they are doing.

JOHN COLE  
Cartoonist  
Salem, OR

## YOUR VIEWS

### Cap and trade will cost us all

HB 2020, Oregon’s proposed carbon bill, known as “Cap and Trade,” raises significant concerns regarding the direct and indirect impact of the bill on members of Oregon’s agricultural industries. The bill would impose permits and taxes that would result in cutting greenhouse gas emission levels 45 percent below the 1990 levels by the year 2035 and 90 percent below 1990 levels by the year 2050.

The bill proposes an allowance budget and each year the available allowance would decline. HB 2020 would cap certain carbon emissions and require the purchase of “offsets.” This likely will increase the direct cost of fuel and natural gas for family farms and ranches, transportation costs in the supply chain, and costs for food processing.

This would mean not only could Oregon’s gas prices become some of the highest in the nation, but the increased financial burden on agricultural operations will significantly trickle down to every Oregonian’s grocery store bill.

Increasing input costs will place another hurdle on Oregon’s young ranchers who are trying to start their own business and who are trying keep Oregon lands working. Working the land is crucial for management and maintenance to combat erosion, invasive species, soil and water quality, and fire control. Cattle ranchers sequentially con-

trol carbon emissions by maintaining healthy soil and controlling the fuel levels of wildfires through grazing habits.

“One large Oregon wildfire produces more carbon in the air than Portland can produce in one year,” said Oregon Cattlemen’s Association’s Executive Director Jerome Rosa, “meaningful change for carbon emissions should start with forest management and wildfire control.”

The increased costs as a result of this bill would shift production to other states and countries with less control over environmental regulations, carbon-neutral power supply, and fewer human rights and labor laws.

“Oregon’s rural communities are committed to environmental stewardship and we don’t want to see our state’s commodities outsourced to unregulated areas, we don’t want to see the cost of ranching and farming in this state outweigh the benefit,” said Rosa.

The Oregon Cattlemen’s Association encourages anyone who will face increased operation costs by not exempting commercial or agricultural fuels from this bill to voice your opposition. The Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction is conducting four offsite hearings near rural areas to hear from communities facing this unfair burden. You are encouraged to attend and voice your opposition at one of the following hearings or to write a letter to your local representative.

Robyn H. Smith  
Oregon Cattlemen’s Association

### Better questions than morality of a wall

It was disheartening to read the news release in Tuesday night’s *East Oregonian* from the Round Up Republican Women’s organization. In it, college-bound students from the region were invited to submit applications for a \$500 scholarship the group plans to award this spring. One of the application’s requirements was an essay written in response to the question, “Is a border wall immoral?”

Is this — a not very open-ended, simplistic, and seemingly leading prompt — representative of the thinking among the leadership in that organization? Surely, anyone who is busy grappling with ways to secure funds for college tuition could spend his or her time better contemplating a more provocative and worthwhile question.

With a little more thought, the Round Up Republican Women could have at least come up with a question like “What is the cost and promise of constructing a barrier between the United States and its neighbor, Mexico?” It would be great if these representatives of the Republican Party were contributors to real dialogue instead of to divisiveness.

Shari Dallas  
Pendleton

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

Send letters to managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 9780, or email editor@eastoregonian.com.