

O EAST OREGONIAN

PINION

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OUR VIEW

Salem comes to Eastern Oregon

Oregon legislators are to be commended for going outside Salem to hear from non-urbanites about the state budget and other issues. But lawmakers should go further, adding more rural perspective to the urban voices that seem to dominate at the Oregon Capitol.

The road-trip public hearings are a start. “Your input is critical to how we make final budget decisions,” Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, told the budget-hearing audience in Coos Bay last Saturday. “We need to hear from you about your needs and your priorities and your ideas on the way that state funds can be best used.”

Johnson co-chairs the Legislature’s Joint Ways & Means Committee, which will write the state’s 2019-21 budget and has had numerous hearings at the Capitol already on various budget bills. The committee will be in Pendleton on Friday and Redmond on Saturday, wrapping up its four-city tour on March 21 in Portland.

Those visits are valuable, although they provide limited exposure to the “real-people” perspective outside the Capitol. Only a few dozen people can be heard during the two-hour budget hearing in each city. Each person testifying is strictly limited to two minutes. But when people speak from the heart, instead of reciting talking points prepared by interest groups, their stories can resonate with legislators.

The Legislature’s Joint Committee



EO file photo
The legislature’s Joint Ways and Means Committee met at Hermiston High School during the 2017 session.

on Carbon Reduction also visited four towns this year, held hearings at the Capitol, and took remote testimony by video for an hour each from Baker City and Newport. House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said the feedback will result in changes throughout House Bill 2020, known as Clean Energy Jobs, while holding true to the concept of a carbon cap and trade system.

Progressive Democratic majorities control both the House and the Senate. It is not realistic to expect that a few rural hearings will cause Democratic leaders to suddenly reverse course on an issue. But rural voices can be a moderating influence, affecting both what goes into the final legislation and what is left out.

Urban legislators say they care about rural Oregon. Their interest and commitment seem genuine. But rural needs and rural perspectives often are far different than those of urban constituents. To really know rural Oregon, it’s not sufficient to simply make a few visits every couple of years.

This is the 21st century. Technology prevails. The Legislature should make video conferencing and other methods of remote testimony for individuals a common practice.

Few farmers, ranchers, commercial fisherman or other rural residents can afford to make hours-long drives to Salem, only to testify briefly. But through technology, they could step away from work, home or school long enough to have their say.

WAYS & MEANS HEARING

Blue Mountain Community College
Pioneer Hall, Bob Clapp Theatre
Friday, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Topic area sign-up sheets to testify in front of the committee will be available prior to the hearing.

For now, we have the committee field trips. Despite their drawbacks, we encourage you to attend if possible.

You’re an Oregonian. It’s your Legislature. Make your views known.

Tips for testifying:

- Arrive early. Sign up to testify before the legislative hearing starts.
- Know what you want to say. Focus on one or two things.

You don’t have to use all your time but know the time limit and don’t break it.

• Speak from the heart. Brief stories, backed by facts, can be compelling.

• Be respectful. Alienating legislators will not help your cause.

• If it is a large crowd and your name is not called to testify, don’t despair. Anyone can submit written testimony by email to the legislative committee by a specified deadline, although it’s unknown how many committee members read that testimony.

The email address for state budget testimony is: waysandmeans.budget@oregonlegislature.gov. Include your town or area of residence in the subject line.

OTHER VIEWS

College bribes are nothing new

One of the funniest stories I ever heard about the college admissions madness came from a consultant who was paid handsomely to guide families through it and increase the odds that Harvard or Yale said yes.

He recounted the involvement of one father and mother in their son’s personal (hah!) essay, which they didn’t trust him to ace himself. They drafted it, focusing of course on the hardship that he had overcome. But when they showed it to him, he spotted a minor problem. What they’d described — his mom’s difficult pregnancy, a sequence of visits to medical specialists, so much fear, so much suspense — predated his arrival in this world. Poignant as it was, he could take zero credit for it.

On Tuesday, the Justice Department announced the indictments of dozens of wealthy parents for employing various forms of bribery and fraud to get their kids into highly selective schools. Some allegedly paid college coaches, including at Yale and Stanford, to lie and say their children were special recruits for sports the kids didn’t even play. Others allegedly paid exam administrators to let someone smarter take tests for their children. Millions of dollars



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changed hands. It’s a galling exposé of widespread cheating by families who are already well-to-do and well-connected, but it’s not really a surprising one. Anyone who knows anything about the cutthroat competition for precious spots at top-tier schools realizes how ugly and unfair it can be: how many corners are cut, how many schemes are hatched, how big a role money plays, how many advantages privilege can buy.

The wrinkle here is that the schemes were actually criminal and will apparently be prosecuted, and for once the colleges’ administrators were in the dark about them. But they’re versions of routine favor trading and favoritism that have long corrupted the admissions process, leeching merit from the equation.

It may be legal to pledge \$2.5 million to Harvard just as your son is applying — which is what Jared Kushner’s father did for him — and illegal to bribe a coach to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars, but how much of a difference is there, really? Both elevate money over accomplishment. Both are ways of cutting in line.

It may be legal to give \$50,000 to a private consultant who massages your child’s transcript and perfumes your child’s essays, and illegal to pay some-

one for a fictive test score, but aren’t both exercises in deception reserved for those who can afford them?

What a message it sends to the children: You’re not good enough to do this on your own. You needn’t be. Your parents and your counselors know the rules, and when and how to break them. Just sit back and let entitlement run its course.

There are many takeaways from this appalling story. One is how crassly hypocritical parents can be. I bet that more than a few of those charged are proud liberals who talked about the importance of equal opportunity and an even playing field, then went out and did whatever it took to push their kids into the winner’s circle. In this case, they doomed them, imparting garbage values.

While colleges pledge fairer admissions and more diverse student bodies, they don’t patrol what’s going on with nearly enough earnestness and energy to honor that promise.

When struggling Americans seethe at “the elite,” they mean parents who exploit their station to try to guarantee it for their kids. When they say the system is rigged, they have this kind of wrongdoing in mind. Our country’s best schools are supposed to be engines of social mobility and the gateways to dreams. Sometimes they’re just another sour deal.

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Frank Bruni is a columnist for the New York Times.



OTHER VIEWS

State shouldn’t subsidize union activities

The (Bend) Bulletin

Ever since the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2018 Janus decision changed how public-sector unions can operate, those unions and their allies have been working to change laws to their advantage.

House Bill 2016 is one example in the Oregon Legislature. It basically hands Oregon’s public-sector unions a direct subsidy from the state and should be rejected.

The bill allows union members to work for the union while they are at work for their government job. In Oregon schools for example, it could divert money that could go to the classroom to pay people to work for unions during the school day. Why is that OK?

Under the bill, the state would collect fees for the unions. Why should the state perform that task? It should be up to the unions to figure out how to get their fees. The bill allows unions to use the government’s electronic mail system for its own purposes. Why should the state allow its system to be used by anyone else?

The bill also gives unions access to employee information that the state may have without the employee’s consent — including an employee’s home and cellphone numbers, personal email address and home address. That is not right.

HB 2016 would do all those things and more.

Public-sector unions are entitled to represent state employees who want

the union’s representation. That’s the law.

But the state should not subsidize the unions. And it should not provide the unions with information that is otherwise exempt from public disclosure.

The Janus decision did arguably hurt the ability of such unions to collect fees, but it was for good reason. The court said public-sector unions must stop forcing nonmembers to pay fees in lieu of dues without their consent.

The First Amendment is violated when money is taken from nonconsenting employees for a public-sector union; employees must choose to support the union before anything is taken from them, the court said.

That decision does not justify HB 2016.