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OUR VIEW

Should Oregon legislators get a raise?

Oregon’s Legislature is proposing Senate Bill 959, which addresses legislative financial compensation. As it stands, Oregon lawmakers earn \$31,200 a year and a \$149 per diem payment for meals and lodging, roughly averaging around \$2,000 a month. SB 959 changes the way Oregon legislators are compensated by correlating it to the annual average salary of all Oregonians — increasing policy-maker’s pay by about 63%.

**Pro:** There’s a common mantra that politicians are paid too much and do too little. The point is well taken. But is this notion based on fact or frustration? More importantly, does it represent the best analytical framework?

At first glance, who among us is going to rally behind a roughly \$20,000 pay increase for our lawmakers? Probably more folks than you might think. Oregonians and their unique character should benefit from an equally unique representative legislature. The problem: low-end legislative salaries preclude many qualified voices from representing a large constituency of Oregonians.

Consequently, the current system benefits independently wealthy or retired individuals — often out of touch with the people they represent. Where are the teachers, the social workers or the nurses? Do we not benefit from a demographically well-rounded legislative body?

It’s time to accept that the same demographic that’s been running this state for years could use some diversity. Perhaps they could even learn a thing or two from those in the middle-income bracket who work with common Oregonians daily. Furthermore, tying salaries to average



In this Jan. 9, 2017, file photo, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown delivers her inaugural speech to Oregon legislators in the Capitol House chambers in Salem.

incomes will affect lawmakers the same as the rest of us during economic downturns.

According to nonpartisan think tank FiveThirtyEight, a Missouri lawmaker, noting insufficient funding, described lobbyists as “unpaid staff.” Is that what we want in Oregon?

And while it’s easy to falsely presume the motivation behind a proposed wage increase as greed, research out of Stanford University, according to FiveThirtyEight, suggests that lawmakers asking for raises “are responding to the demands of an increasingly complicated job ... to be compensated adequately for the work they are already doing.”

The fact of the matter is this: Current legislative salaries make it nearly impossible to survive on that income alone, but it’s also difficult to maintain sustainable work while requiring

so much of the year off. Again, this restricts middle-class but competent wage earners from running for office while paving the way for the wealthier among us. Is that representative democracy?

**Con:** In a world of pure intentions and perfect outcomes, giving Oregon’s legislators a \$20,000 annual pay raise could make the state a more equally represented place.

But in reality, there’s little evidence that such a raise would achieve that goal. And it certainly would move the state government even further from its founding principle of being led by a citizen legislature.

Forget the additional \$1.8 million it would cost taxpayers to cover the raises. Think about the job we want our legislators to do, and why it should pay the equivalent of a full year’s salary for the average Oregonian.

What we want are representatives who can bring their expertise in a variety of trades and their knowledge of their home constituencies to the statehouse for one sustained session every two years. They need to be knowledgeable in the workings of state government, but more focused on being a conduit and voice for their district than a full-time professional politician.

Also, the biennial “short session” year shouldn’t warrant a full year’s salary. It should follow its original purpose of adjusting the budget when necessary and addressing true emergencies between sessions. In the decade since it was implemented, it has gone far off course.

While raising the pay may draw more candidates, it’s unlikely to change the complexion of the legislature. Self-funded, white-collar candidates will still have the upper hand when it comes to campaigning, and would be even more incentivized to run for the higher salary.

Instead, state leaders should consider ways other than pay to attract a more diverse body. For instance, an educator might be willing to step out of the school if the job was directed toward developing and implementing policies they care about instead of juggling hundreds of bills and lobbyists and murky politics. Same goes for a contractor, a farmer or any other profession that is sorely under-represented in the statehouse.

Having a comfortable income shouldn’t be a requirement for representation. But instead of letting legislators give themselves a raise, we should find ways to make the job more welcoming, achievable and satisfying to the average Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Biden and Bernie are too old to be president

Whatever their differences, the two front-runners in the Democratic presidential race, Joe Biden, born Nov. 20, 1942, and Bernie Sanders, born Sept. 8, 1941, share one common trait: They are too old to be president.

Biden, leading the RealClearPolitics average of polls, will be 78 years old on Inauguration Day 2021. Sanders, No. 2 in the field, will be 79. Both would be older upon taking office than Ronald Reagan was when he left office after two terms.

Voters are clearly open to older candidates. President Trump, born June 14, 1946, is the oldest president ever to take

office — 70 years old on his Inauguration Day, a few months older than Reagan when he took power.

And Trump defeated Hillary Clinton, born Oct. 26, 1947, who, had she won, would have been the same age as Reagan — 69 — upon taking office.

Americans elect a president with the understanding that he or she might serve eight years. If that were the case with Sanders, he would be 87 years old on leaving office, and Biden would be 86. There’s no doubt both are vigorous men. But having a president pushing 90 would be a new experience in American politics.

According to actuarial tables maintained by the Social Security Administration, the life expectancy of a 70-year-old man is 14.30 years —



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enough time to serve two terms and move on to physical decline. The life expectancy of a 78-year-old man is 9.33 years — enough to last two terms and not a lot more. The life expectancy of a 79-year-old man is 8.77 years — barely enough to make it out of the White House.

Of course, each man might live to 100. None of us knows. But given their age, the issue is more than just whether each candidate might be a voice from the past, or out of touch with today’s concerns. The issue is whether they are simply too old to handle the rigors of the presidency.

The Republican candidate, President Trump, will be 74 years old on the next Inauguration Day. What is unknown is whether Democrats will choose a candidate who is even older, or whether they will give voters a generational choice. First, though, the Democratic Party has to go through a generational reckoning of its own.

The party has a host of candidates who are of prime age for the presidency. In third place in the RealClearPolitics average is Kamala Harris, born Oct. 20, 1964, who will be 56 on Inauguration Day. Next is Beto O’Rourke, born Sept. 26, 1972, who will be 48 (just a bit older than Barack Obama was when he took office).

Next is the candidate who would be the oldest in the Democratic race were it not for Sanders and Biden. Elizabeth Warren, born June 22, 1949, will be 71 on Inauguration Day — older than Trump was when he took the oath of office. But given the experience of Reagan and Trump, and the candidacy of Clinton, Warren appears within the accepted range of presidential age.

Continuing down the Democratic

field, there is Cory Booker, born April 27, 1969, who will be 51 on Inauguration Day. Then Pete Buttigieg, born Jan. 19, 1982, who will turn 39 the day before the inauguration and is the subject of endless profiles noting that he would be the first millennial president. Then Amy Klobuchar, born May 25, 1960, who will be 60 on Inauguration Day. After that, all the lower-ranking candidates are in the same prime age.

All are in the zone. And all stand apart from Sanders and Biden.

The former vice president has taken a lot of heat for things he said and positions he held 30 and 40 years ago. He’s also in the middle of a #MeToo mess over his too-familiar way of touching people. Sanders, too can seem the product of an earlier era.

But there is a much simpler point to be made about Biden and Sanders. They are too old to occupy the nation’s highest office — not because they are out of touch or because their records are out of line with today’s sensibilities, but because they are just too old.

For those who respond, “Well, what about Trump?” remember: If the president serves two terms, he will leave the White House at 78, the oldest ever in office. But that is the age that Biden would begin his presidency. And Sanders is a year older.

Will Democrats realize that and nominate a candidate who draws a clear generational contrast with President Trump? In another age, Biden or Sanders might have been a plausible nominee. But not now.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

YOUR VIEWS

Radie perfect for Port commissioner

Seldom are we given the opportunity to elect someone who is so perfectly suited for the position for which they are running. We have been blessed in this election cycle with such an opportunity in the candidacy of Debbie Radie for Morrow County Port position #5.

Debbie has spent the last 27 years helping create the successful business that is Boardman Foods. This role has given her a unique view of the development, growth, and investment that have created the thriving Port of Morrow. Her leadership ability and compassionate devotion to service have not only made her successful in her chosen career, but has been demonstrated over and over in the many volunteer and regional boards to which she has devoted her time.

She has been instrumental in creating tools to provide quality jobs and training to enhance our Eastern Oregon workforce and to help students find the skills to become effective working adults. She has dealt with different types of budgets and financial implementation in her business, as well as on the boards, committees, and community organizations where she has given of her time.

In each community of the county in which she has lived, she has offered her skills with great generosity and effectiveness, such as her service on both the Lone and Morrow County school boards. She has been honored by the peers in her industry by her election as chair of the regional Food Northwest Association Board, whose stated goal is “to advance the ability of the food industry to produce and deliver wholesome, safe food from the Pacific Northwest to the world.”

Debbie brings knowledge of the needs and goals of the Port, experience in industry, and as an effective and well-loved employer. She brings intellect and business acumen, as well as a positive vision for our area and a long-time commitment to making Morrow County a productive and positive place to live and work.

The Port is thriving and is also on the cusp of many new and exciting opportunities for growth and productivity. Debbie Radie is a candidate who will help this vision continue to expand employment and positive growth in all of Morrow County. Please take this rare opportunity to provide the Port of Morrow with an exceptionally suitable candidate for Port commissioner. Vote with us for Debbie Radie, Port position #5.

John and Kerry Rietmann lone

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