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OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Tip of the Hat, kick in the pants


A tip of the hat to Blue Mountain Community College for recognizing the value of a great instructor and being willing to invest financially in keeping him at the school.

Chandra Kunapareddy, a chemistry professor from India, has been at the school on a short-term visa since 2017. When he came, both he and the school agreed he would teach until his visa expired in 2020.

But after two years, Kunapareddy decided this is where he wants to be long term.

He approached the school asking for help to obtain a green card.

It's an investment of about $25,000 from both the school and the professor, and it's not the kind of money either have laying around.

By all accounts Kunapareddy is an outstanding instructor, with rave reviews from students, faculty and administration.

His story is compelling, and teaches more than just compounds and reactions. He grew up in rural India and is the first of his family to advance past middle school. Through education he has moved to the United States, earned a degree from Texas Tech and is now using his expertise to prepare BMCC students for careers in science. They could also learn a little something about the power of persistence and the value of education.

The BMCC Board of Directors this week agreed to put down the money, even in lean times, to help Kunapareddy continue his American dream. We're pulling for him.

A kick in the pants to House Bill 2408, which would hurt development in Eastern Oregon.

It's certainly not a high profile bill in this session full of bold economic proposals, but it's another example of a well-intended idea having serious consequences outside of Salem.

Cities like Umatilla and Hermiston have made great use of enterprise zones to attract big businesses to expand in the area. The program allows municipalities to offer several years of tax breaks in exchange for set payments.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

BMCC chemistry instructor Chandra Kunapareddy speaks to BMCC board members during a special board meeting concerning the college's support of his H-1B visa.

HB 2408 would add the stipulation that enterprise zone developments would have to pay prevailing construction wages.

One of the advantages of developing in Eastern Oregon is the reduced cost of a workforce. An artificial minimum for that wage would hurt the incentive and give developers good reason to look outside the area — in Washington and Idaho — for a more conducive place to do business.

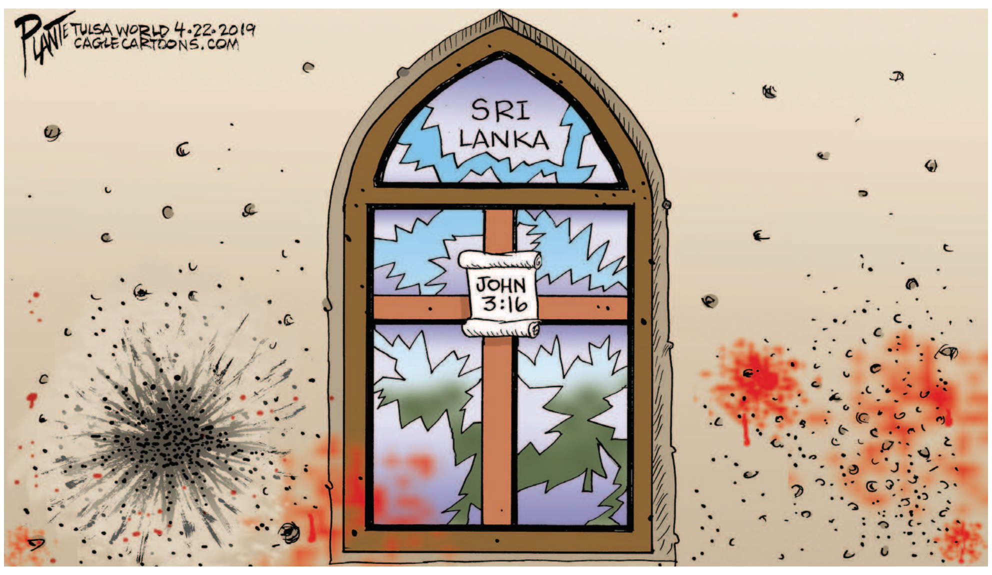
We're all for giving local cities and counties the most effective tools for growing the economy.

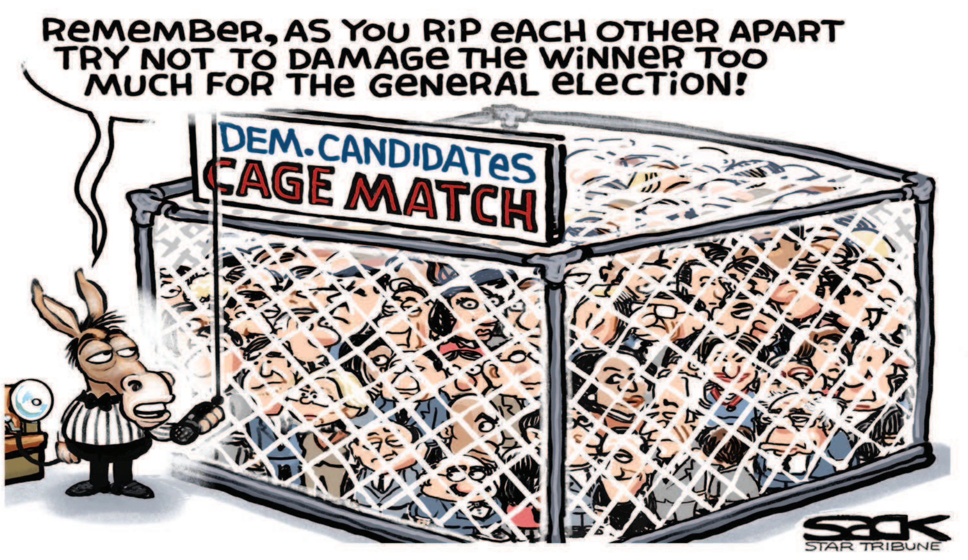
A tip of the hat to the Pendleton Round-Up and Happy Canyon Hall of Fame on its 50th anniversary.

The rodeo and night show have been the heart of Pendleton for more than a century. They set the tone for the ever-growing tourism industry in Pendleton and their histories are intertwined with the city and region.

It's all thanks to a committed volunteer board and staff who bring that history to life.

If you haven't checked it out, now is the perfect time. Admission is free for the year at the museum on the corner of Southwest Court Avenue and 12th Street.





YOUR VIEWS

Higher tobacco taxes a win-win

What if I told you the state can raise revenue, reduce health care costs and save thousands of lives from cancer and preventable death? It's simple: Raise the price of tobacco products, including e-cigarettes.

Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable death and causes nearly 30% of cancer deaths. My second mom Shirley was to be at my college graduation. She died three months before that day came from tobacco-related cancer. I miss Shirley so much. Saving lives from cancer matters to me.

I support our lawmakers in Salem as they consider a $2 per pack cigarette tax increase and a price increase on all other tobacco products including e-cigarettes. Kids are using e-cigarettes at alarming rates and we must protect them from a lifetime of addiction. Making tobacco products more expensive helps people who smoke quit and ensures kids never start.

A $2 per pack cigarette tax increase would cut Oregon's youth smoking rates by 21% and save 13,700 lives from a premature death. Additionally, the state would save about $1 billion in long-term health care costs as smoking rates declined, while raising hundreds of millions of dollars in new revenue.

Sounds like a winning combination.

As an American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network volunteer advocate, I support this tobacco tax increase. I urge Senator Hansell and State Representative Greg Barreto to support it too. Let's reduce the burden of tobacco.

Karen Malcolm
Pendleton

Gov. Brown should keep her promises to state employees

As a corrections officer, I know first-hand how important it is to honor the promises you have made. That is why it is so disappointing to see that Gov. Kate Brown has broken her word to the public workforce.

When she was running for election she promised she would find other solutions for the state's pension obligation and would not ask us to take another cut to benefits. That turned out not to be true. She has now put forth a plan that requires us to pay the state's obligation for people who are already retired.

I have worked at Two Rivers Correctional Institution for 18 years. Under the Gov. Brown retirement cuts, I would lose the retirement security I have worked so hard for and I was promised. I would either have to work more years in a job that already has the highest PTSD rate of any profession, or pick up more hours and work more shifts, increasing my risk of injury or stress-related illness.

I come to work every day I'm supposed to. I do my job. I have kept up my end of the deal. Gov. Brown should stop her attack on public employees and keep up her end of the deal as well.

Greg Clouser
Umatilla

OTHER VIEWS

Kotek shouldn't join the can kicking club

Bend Bulletin

Of all the things parents want to pass on to their children, debt is probably not one. House Speaker Tina Kotek has suggested doing it anyway.

One of the ideas she has been thinking about as a partial solution to the state pension program's $27 billion unfunded liability is kicking the can down the road. Delaying payments. Stretching out the liability farther into the future.

The idea in pensionspeak is to lengthen the amortization period for the Public Employees Retirement System. In plainer language, that means stretching out the number of years used to calculate the time to raise the money to pay PERS pension benefits.

Think of it like a car loan. Paying it off over 6 years rather than 4 years lowers the monthly payment. The Legislature could do a similar thing to PERS.

PERS amortization periods actually vary depending on the class of beneficiaries. Some are 16 years. Some are 20 years. Oregon could stretch those out both out to 25 or further. Kotek pointed out state statute permits 40 years.

She said Oregon has one of the shortest amortization periods in country at 15 years. That is not correct, as *The Oregonian*'s Ted Sickinger pointed out.

The lower payments could, indeed, provide some temporary relief for Oregon's public employers — school districts, state and local governments. The rates that many of them have to pay into PERS have been ratcheting up. That's because, in part, of richer retirement benefit packages the state promised in the past.

For instance, the Hillsboro school district is paying about 28% of its payroll into PERS for the 2019-2021 biennium. That's projected to go up to over 33% for 2021-2023, meaning the district will have less money to work with. So one way to hold down those increases is to fiddle with the calculations to lower those payments.

But we all know what happens. Delaying paying off the debt means paying more in the end. Kotek knows that. She sees it, though, as one way to limit the increases in PERS rates as state employees with the richer packages move through retirement.

As *The Oregonian*'s Ted Sickinger explained, though, there's no guarantee that lengthening the amortization period would help much. What if the stock market dipped and PERS investments faltered? Oregon might be even worse off. Oregon could just make things harder for the next generation. That's not a solution the Legislature should pursue.