

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Loss of jobs carries more weight in rural Oregon

Union Pacific calls it a “work-force reduction” to quicken its “continuous improvement plan.”

Whatever the massive railroad company wants to call it, though, the fact remains that the massive layoffs announced Tuesday were about one thing: saving money to boost profits.

On one hand we get it. We are a Republic fueled — for good or ill — by capitalism. Businesses, whether small or giant like Union Pacific, exist to generate profits.

The move by the railroad to slash 195 jobs from its Hinkle Rail Yard in Hermiston is another example of the Damocles’ Sword of capitalism. We need firms to invest in our area, and the more jobs the better. But those same companies survive and prosper at the whim of economic factors beyond our control. Which means a company — especially one as large as Union Pacific — can pick up and move, and slash jobs, whenever it wants.

None of those sentiments, though, are going to mean a whole lot to the man or woman who learns they’re



EO file photo

Rail cars roll down the hump and into the yard at the Union Pacific Railroad Hinkle Locomotive Service and Repair Facility and Freight Classification Yard near Hermiston. Union Pacific Railroad filed notice with the state on Tuesday that it will lay off up to 195 employees at the Hinkle Rail Yard and close the yard’s supply warehouse and mechanical shop. It stated the 195 layoffs would be completed by July 19 and are expected to be permanent. The bulk lay-off is an escalation of the scores of layoffs that have happened incrementally at the rail yard since October 2018.

going to be out of work soon. Yes, they will surely be able to use state unemployment assistance. That will be a great help, but it isn’t a long-term solution.

The jobs that are going away are not exactly easy to come by in the first place. They are high-paying, good benefit occupations.

While the loss of many jobs by a

local employer is difficult anywhere, it is especially acute in a place like Eastern Oregon. In a rural area often fighting poverty, firms in the region face more than their share of obstacles. From punitive state regulations to a shrinking employee base, big companies must contend with issues here in Oregon that are not typical of other states.

Here, every job carries just a little more weight, a bit more importance than an occupation in, say, Portland. The loss of 50 or 200 jobs in Washington County is serious but not a game-changer. The loss of the same number of jobs in Umatilla County is an economic disaster.

While it would be easy to blame Union Pacific, the fact is they are a for-profit company. They’re not a charity.

They’ve decided, and all of us — from the person who is laid off to the local merchant to area politicians — are going to have to live with it. But, more importantly, all of us are going to have to work together to find a way to overcome this economic challenge.

OTHER VIEWS

Memorial Day reminds us of our highest ideals — and the price we must sometimes pay for them

Every year, I’m struck by the powerful — and often, opposing — emotions that Memorial Day stirs.

We celebrate our freedoms, and yet, we mourn the cost that they required. We look ahead to a bright future, while we remember the trials and challenges of the past. We honor those who served, but we grieve their loss.

Celebration, and sadness. Gratitude, and remorse. Hope, and helplessness. Memorial Day is unique in evoking such a broad spectrum of feeling, because it is this holiday that speaks most keenly to our highest ideals, as well as the steep price we are willing to pay for them.

Sadly, it is also a day that, for many, has lost its significance. President George W. Bush would often tell the story of asking schoolchildren what the meaning of Memorial Day is, only to have them respond, “That’s the day the pool opens!”

For many Oregonians, Memorial Day is primarily the unofficial start of the summer recreation season, a chance to enjoy our amazing forests and beaches, rivers and lakes and mountain trails.

We should enjoy all that our state has to offer, but we should also keep in mind the words of another president, John F. Kennedy: “A nation reveals itself not only by the citizens it produces but also by the citizens it honors, the citizens it remembers.”

We must remember the fallen because the courage, the strength, the selflessness and the sacrifice of each one of these brave warriors is the ideal to which we all should aspire.

On this Memorial Day, I think of Bob Maxwell, a great American and Oregonian whom we lost earlier this month. Bob was a World War II combat soldier, and until his death, the only Medal of Honor recipient still living in our state. While he did not die fighting for our country he fearlessly faced death in a way few Americans ever have.

He earned that medal — the U.S. military’s highest decoration for valor — for the courage he showed during a battle in September 1944, when a live German hand grenade was tossed in the midst of his squad. Without a second thought, he hurled himself upon it, shielding his comrades from the blast with nothing but a blanket and his unprotected body.

Maxwell cheated death that day, though he carried shrapnel in his body

for the rest of his life. It was a life he dedicated in humble service to the veteran community, and to the memories of his brothers in arms, who never got the chance to come home.

We must never forget the true cost of war. It is a price paid not in dollars and cents, but with the blood of our heroes.

They were nothing less than the best America had to offer, those who answered the call when their nation needed them, who paid the ultimate price to protect us and our way of life.

The stories of their sacrifice are forever woven into the fabric of our nation and its history. They gave their lives on the foreign soils of Europe, the black sands of the South Pacific, the frozen reaches of Korea, the sweltering jungles of Vietnam, the scorching deserts of Afghanistan and Iraq, and in many other places across the globe.

The United States lost more than 400,000 of its sons and daughters in World War II — 2,826 from Oregon. We know that 54,246 American service members gave their lives in Korea (287 Oregonians); and 58,209 in Vietnam (791 from our state).

In Iraq and Afghanistan, we lost 6,713 American service members — 142 Oregonians.

Each one of their names is etched on slabs of granite that form the heart of the Afghan/Iraqi Freedom Memorial, located just a few steps from the Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs office building.

Each one of their names is read aloud each year at our Memorial Day ceremony, as we seek to honor and remember their sacrifice.

Each one represents the loss of a bright and shining light in the lives of their families, a pain that they feel each and every day — not just on Memorial Day. We remember and honor their sacrifice as well.

They, too, paid a great price for the freedoms we now enjoy.

On behalf of the Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs, I urge all Oregonians to take a moment this Memorial Day to remember our fallen heroes who gave their lives in service to our nation, and say, “Thank you.”

Kelly Fitzpatrick is a U.S. Army veteran and the director of the Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs.



YOUR VIEWS

Men shouldn’t legislate women’s bodies

Well, I have some great solutions for pro-lifers who want abortion laws passed. One solution would be working with those that want to change laws on gun rights.

You can ban my right to an abortion and I can ban your right to own a gun. Or, maybe, you leave my uterus alone and I’ll leave

your MR15 alone. Fair exchange, since I believe your weapon kills more babies than my weapon does. Mine only kills one at a time.

Another solution would be, for a law that deals solely with a females body, it’s only practical that only females be allowed to vote on this kind of bill.

The men of these different states that have passed these laws have shown their total lack of knowledge relating to the func-

tions of the female body. They probably still think storks deliver babies.

If men think they have a right to govern our bodies then they need to include all forms of “baby making” killings, or what part of the human body is used to form new life. It is sad that so many men kill thousands of babies without giving them a chance at life just to satisfy their own self-gratification.

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