

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Legislature, marred by turmoil, actually did some good work

The partisan excesses and political turmoil of the 2019 Oregon Legislature have been well-documented. But the now-finished legislative session also should be remembered for some good work on behalf of the entire state.

Much of that work was bipartisan. Much of it drew little public attention. Much of it would help rural Oregon.

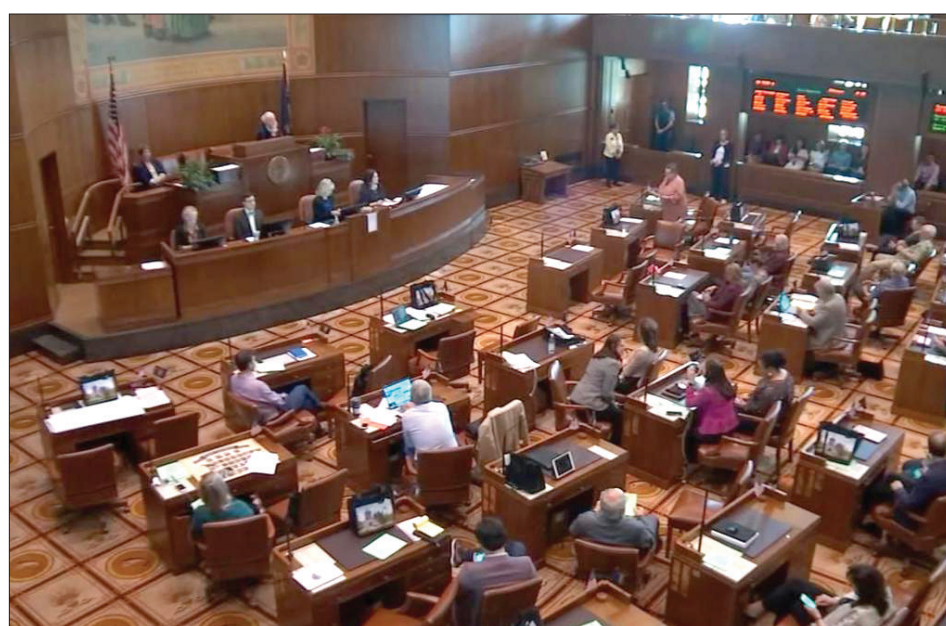
There are many examples. Here are a few:

The Legislature fulfilled its constitutional mandate to write a balanced state budget for 2019-21, while also building up a healthy rainy-day fund. By the way, Oregonians will get to keep their “kicker” tax refund next year, although the amount won’t be known until next month.

Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, was a constant voice for fiscal sanity — and understanding the needs of rural Oregon — in her role as a Senate co-chair of the budget-writing Ways & Means Committee. Her reputation for holding state officials accountable was undaunted.

She and other lawmakers challenged public universities to learn from community colleges by collaborating on their building needs and addressing their deferred maintenance instead of constantly seeking state money for new buildings.

A proposed university center to train rural health care workers received \$10 million. The proposed Southern Oregon Medical Workforce Center in Roseburg would be a collab-



KPTV Photo

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oration with Newberg-based George Fox University. It would offer bachelor’s and graduate degrees in allied health professions, such as physical therapy and mental health. The concept is that people trained in rural Oregon are more likely to take health care jobs in rural Oregon.

An increased 911 tax will help emergency dispatch centers hire more staff and modernize their technology. Although call volumes have increase dramatically, the emergency communication tax had not increased in nearly 25 years, according to the legislation’s tenacious sponsor, Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale. The monthly tax will rise over a two-year period from the current 75 cents to \$1.25 per phone

line. That measure, House Bill 2449, passed the Senate in the Legislature’s final hours. It was an illustration that even the best ideas needed constant attention and unending advocacy to survive the legislative process.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, and Johnson sponsored SB 290 that protects farmers, ranchers and volunteers from civil liability for helping fight wildfires. The legislation, which passed unanimously in both chambers, stemmed from the Substation Fire that burned more than 78,000 acres of crop and range land in Wasco and Sherman counties.

Another bipartisan bill successfully sponsored by Hansell and Johnson aims to increase student achieve-

ment and improve graduation rates through state coordination with FFA programs.

Among major issues on lawmakers’ agenda, they did a little bit to pay down the Public Employees Retirement System’s unfunded liability, although public-employee unions howled that it was too much and Republicans said that it was too little. In one little-noticed but important move, the Legislature also allowed the Harney District Hospital in Burns to offer a retirement program other than PERS and to fill job vacancies by rehiring PERS retirees without affecting those retirees’ pensions.

Oregon’s beleaguered child welfare system gained the money and program changes to add 347 front-line workers. Oregon State Police can hire 40 troopers. Oregon State University Extension Service — one of the most popular programs among legislators — gained new investments for fire resilience, water basin research, organic farming and berry research. The Legislature appropriated \$14 million to rehabilitate the Wallowa Lake Dam after Gov. Kate Brown visited the area and learned the potential for a dam disaster.

High-profile items, such as family leave, education funding, climate change, gun control and rent control, dominated the news at various times during the past five months. Amid dealing with those controversial issues — for good or bad — legislators collaborated on a lot of good work.

YOUR VIEWS

Walden should check his facts on border crisis

While attending Representative Greg Walden’s recent town hall, I was somewhat perplexed by Mr. Walden’s response to my question. Like many Americans, I am concerned about the treatment of immigrants, particularly women and children, in the detention facilities near the southern border. When I asked Mr. Walden about his knowledge of these facilities and how the detainees were being treated, he gave me an answer that was completely contradictory to current published information on the matter.

Mr. Walden claimed that he visited one of these border facilities in July of 2018. He claimed that he was able to see firsthand a facility where children were receiving excellent care. He said that the children were well fed, attended school and even had a student council. The fact that Mr. Walden claimed that he visited and viewed the inside of one of these facilities almost one year ago, when just recently members of Congress were allowed to enter these facilities, seems odd.

His description of these facilities also contradicts reports from a congressional delegation, as well as the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security, indicating that these facilities were substandard and that the detainees were not treated well.

I would hope that our government would see fit to treat the detainees at the border with respect and provide for their fundamental needs. I challenge Representative Walden to study the facts of this matter and to work in a bipartisan fashion to explore humane and realistic solutions to the immigration problems on our southern border.

Sue Petersen
Pendleton

Cap-and-trade debate fueled by fear

The recent debate over cap and trade in Oregon was intensely emotional, causing some senators to actually go into hiding to avoid voting on it. I suspect the emotion driving both sides was fear.

Those promoting cap and trade fear the long-term consequences of a warming planet. Those opposing cap and trade fear the more immediate losses of their constituents’ jobs, income, and way of life. Their fear is not surprising, given that people tend to worry more about losing something they already have than what they might not have in the future.

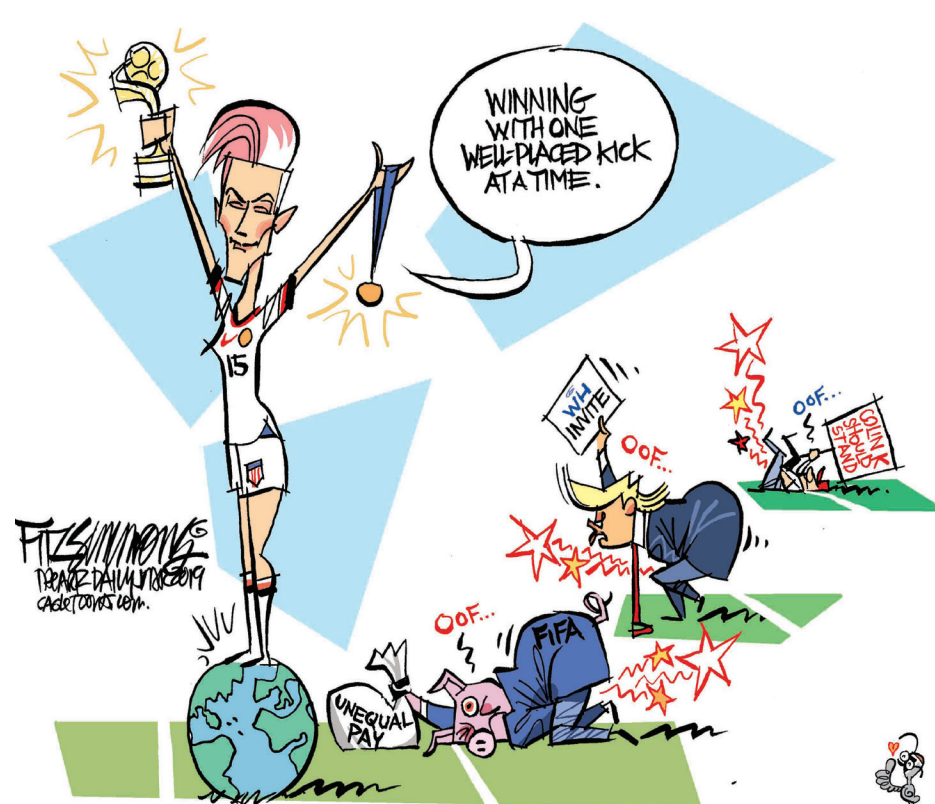
The irony is that none of us will live to see the long-term consequences of our actions, so we don’t really know for sure how they will impact the future. We are the ancestors of the people who will have to live in the world we leave them.

Terry Templeman
Pendleton

Young people must carry the torch for a better world

Last month the *East Oregonian* did a story about some young folks from Hepner who were trying to raise awareness and have a conversation about climate change. I applaud them for their efforts.

My generation came of age during the 1960s and 1970s. We were going to change the world, and in some ways we collectively did. Major legislation was passed aimed at cleaning up our air and water, protecting endangered species, and bringing more transparency to government. Along with this, the powerful fossil fuel industries and large corporations bought their way into politics. We went on to raise families and have careers as our economy developed around consumption and having the latest and greatest things. Some of what we developed was fantastic and



useful; some set us on the path to climate change, bolstered by an exploding world population.

Now, most agree that climate change is happening, and there is overwhelming scientific agreement that humans are responsible for part of this.

Although there is general agreement in recognizing that we have a problem, we seem to lack the will to make the personal and organizational sacrifices needed to mitigate and adapt to a changing future. As long as we use the excuse that what we do will not make that much difference, or that someone else needs to take a hit — not me, nothing will change. Climate change will not discriminate — conservative or liberal, rich or poor — we will all be affected. We

will continue to see hotter and drier summers, larger wildfires, more invasive species, earlier spring runoff and lower summer streamflows. June was the hottest month ever recorded worldwide.

My generation is aging out. It is time and it is so appropriate for the younger generations to take the reins for their future. We can learn from them and they will live in a different world than the one we grew up in. I applaud the young folks who are insightful and courageous enough to get involved with their future. Hats off to them for raising our consciousness, and along with others, pressing us into action wherever that may lead.

Jeff Blackwood
Pendleton