

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

What Alaska and Sherman County do right

For a region that's blessed with bountiful natural resources, the Pacific Northwest has largely missed the boat.

We're not talking about politicians' willingness to levy taxes on resources and spend the revenue as fast as they collect it. We're talking about viewing natural resources as public property and sharing the windfall with all citizens.

When the boom in wind power began 17 years ago in Sherman County, leaders there came up with an idea. Instead of the county simply pocketing property taxes collected from the big wind generators that were sprouting across the countryside, they would share a portion of the money with citizens.

Every head of household who has lived in the county at least a year now receives \$590 annually. The idea was to reimburse residents whose views were impeded by wind turbines.

The rest of the money has gone to build a courthouse, school,



Capital Press Photo/Sierra Dawn McClain
Hundreds of wind turbines tower over Sherman County, whirring as they generate electricity — and money. Each December, households receive checks for \$590 in exchange for use of their county as a wind site.

library, Oregon State University Extension facility and a new covered arena at the fairgrounds.

For a county that has only about 1,800 people, this was a stroke of genius. County leaders should take a bow — and offer a bit of advice to other political leaders in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and elsewhere.

The idea was patterned after the Alaska Permanent Fund, which was created in 1976 by a constitutional amendment that allowed the state to set aside 25% of its revenue from oil pumped from the state-owned Prudhoe Bay oil field. That money was deposited in a diversified investment account. Politicians cannot spend it for anything without a vote of the people.

Earnings from the fund are divided up and sent to every man, woman and child in the form of a dividend check. Last year, each check was for \$1,600. This year's dividend hasn't yet been decided.

The value of the Permanent Fund nowadays is north of \$60 billion.

We think the folks in Sherman County and Alaska are onto

something. Particularly when publicly owned natural resources are involved, citizens deserve some of the revenue. We fully understand that politicians may be unlikely to cede their power over the money, but they should remember: It's not their money.

The outcome of paying dividends to citizens is extraordinary. It gives them a direct interest in government. Instead of constantly being hounded for more taxes, they actually receive a direct benefit from the government.

Also, those dividends help drive the economy.

Natural resources — wind, oil, timber, natural gas or minerals — should be treated as the property of the citizens.

There's an age-old saying in finance: Make saving a priority. If you don't do that — and many politicians shudder at the thought of not spending every penny — you're leaving yourself vulnerable to the next economic downturn.

OTHER VIEWS

Trump correct to consider changes to our refugee policy

During a recent meeting with the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department and about 20 other representatives from agencies involved in immigration, the Trump administration floated the idea of zero refugees in 2020.

Advocates immediately pushed back against the proposal, but the White House insisted that ever-fewer admissions is consistent with national security, and also in line with the downward resettlement trend. In 2017, 53,716 refugees were admitted, and 22,491 in 2018, according to Refugee Processing Center data, with 21,260 refugees admitted through June 30 of this year.

The president determines and approves the refugee cap and announces it prior to the new fiscal year's start, October 1. That means more than two months for intense partisan wrangling, a period that would be better used now to discuss how refugee resettlement became the most abused federal program in Washington, D.C. (that's saying something), and how immediately it needs to be overhauled.

In 2017, the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office issued a report that found that while the State Department and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees have worked toward a more effective refugee processing system, much remains undone.

But the unaddressed refugee resettlement question, which applies to all other immigration programs, is how are U.S. citizens affected, specifically their employment prospects? As well, how do these programs impact America's population growth, already headed to a total of more than 400 million people by 2060?

With refugee resettlement, first, refugees receive immediate work authorization, a good thing for them since integration into mainstream society is a desirable goal that employment will accelerate. But for an unemployed or displaced American job seeker, more competition represents another hurdle, and many corporations have pledged to hire more refugees.

Second, on population growth, family reunification is a top refugee resettlement priority. Under the UNHCR/

USA resettlement program, families are a broad category that includes the spouses, unmarried children under age 21, and the parents of the refugees requesting reunification. Chain migration will eventually allow more family categories like siblings, cousins and others admission. A Princeton University chain migration study learned that each lawful permanent resident petitions about 3.45 family members to come to the U.S.

Princeton's research concluded that chain migration is the biggest immigration driver that leads to higher population.

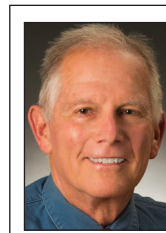
Whether the refugee resettlement totals are the 110,000 annually that President Obama endorsed or President Trump's current 30,000 limit, the number represents only an infinitesimal fraction of the world's estimated 70 million displaced persons. The goal should be to help as many millions as possible, and not merely the lucky handful that the UNHCR selects for resettlement.

Toward that end, proposals have been put forward that could help 12 refugees live safely in camps near their home countries for about the same cost as resettling one refugee in the U.S. This approach is called "proximity help," and Oxford University scholars Alexander Betts and Paul Collier refer to it as a way to help refugees help themselves.

Historically, immigration is always about more. Advocates insist that the nation urgently needs more workers on H-1B high-skilled labor visas as well as more low-skilled laborers on H-2A and H-2B visas. More employment-based visas are always presented in the best possible light. More welcoming asylum and refugee admission laws are positives, we're told.

But often, a pause in the status quo is required to provide time to re-evaluate and improve. U.S. refugee 2020 admissions are unlikely to decline to zero. But taking a more comprehensive look at what the U.S. has done and should do going forward to best assist refugees would be a valuable exercise.

Joe Guzzardi is a Progressives for Immigration Reform analyst who has written about immigration for more than 30 years.



JOE GUZZARDI
COMMENT



Free market in Pendleton is dead

As an apartment owner in Pendleton I'm not worried about the rent control bill 608 that came out of Salem. The law is predictable, out in the open and applied the same to everyone around the state without exception. It's a level playing field, so no one will get a competitive advantage because of this law.

A much bigger uncertainty for investors and developers in Pendleton has been created right here at home, by city hall. City officials are meddling with the free market, giving taxpayer dollars away in the form of free land, reducing permit fees, cash to downtown units, road infrastructure to Pendleton Heights, interest-free loans and property tax breaks. These have not been given out evenly and equitably, but selectively by picking winners and losers.

The city has spurred the next 20 years worth of apartments that will be coming in the next two to three years. This oversupply of new units crushes the value of existing apartments and will ultimately drive down rents for decades as the new units are absorbed. City council is flooding the city with market rate apartments, despite the recommendations of the August 2016 Sabino housing study (25 executive level units, 20-40 downtown units, 100 units at Pendleton Heights). This glut of an additional 205 units was apparently not a recommendation of the housing committee either. City council is also ignoring a new FCS Group housing study that, while not yet complete, currently recommends 17 units per year for the next 20 years with a high portion of those being set aside for low income.

No report, study or committee suggests building two decades worth of apartments in the next two to three years. So why does the taxpayer keep paying for expensive housing studies? Why doesn't city council follow the recommendations of the expensive housing studies? It is also unprecedented to give away public funds without a low income requirement. How many of the 305 newly incentivized units are designated for 30% of median income? How many for 50% of median income? It appears to be zero.

City officials have chosen to incentivize building only on taxpayer-owned land or downtown. This strategy punishes anybody who owns multifamily land already or purchases land to build on by putting them at a competitive disadvantage. If you currently own multifamily zoned vacant land, it will be essentially worthless until 2040.

Common sense would say that if you want to grow your city, then incentivize anybody who is willing to build here and grow your tax base. With no clear-cut set of rules or guidelines for incentives, who knows what city council will incentivize next? Are there any Republicans, Libertarians or even Democrats outraged by this assault on the free market? Isn't the free market the answer to the housing crisis?

Investors and entrepreneurs would literally be better off investing their capital in any other city in Oregon. The free market in Pendleton is dead.

Nate Brusselback is the owner of the Triangle Apartments in Pendleton.



NATE BRUSSELBACK
COMMENT