

A wage plan for rural Oregon

Oregon's poorly conceived minimum wage law — like so many Oregon laws the product of a half-baked ballot initiative — has abused farmers, ranchers, food processors and other businesses large and small since it went into effect 11 years ago.

It has also abused their employees.

The law calls for Oregon's minimum wage to automatically increase each year based on the U.S. City Average Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers. That means when the cost of living goes up in U.S. cities, the minimum wage across Oregon must increase by the same percentage. Whether a business is in booming Portland or tiny Mitchell, Ore., population 130, the minimum wage must be the same.

EDITORIAL
Voice of the Chieftain

The problem: Oregon's minimum wage often goes up even when the rural cost of living goes down or stays the same.

The impact can be significant. In John Day, the McDonald's recently closed its doors because of the "low economics of the situation," its owner said. In an area with 9.1 percent unemployment the loss of 18 jobs was a big deal.

While minimum wage increases over the years are not the sole reason for the loss of those jobs, they were a contributing factor.

Across Oregon, farmers who depend on temporary workers for harvest and other hand work have had to tighten their budgets to cover higher minimum wages.

We remind those of our readers unfamiliar with agriculture that farmers and ranchers are generally price-takers, meaning they cannot unilaterally raise prices as expenses such as payroll increase.

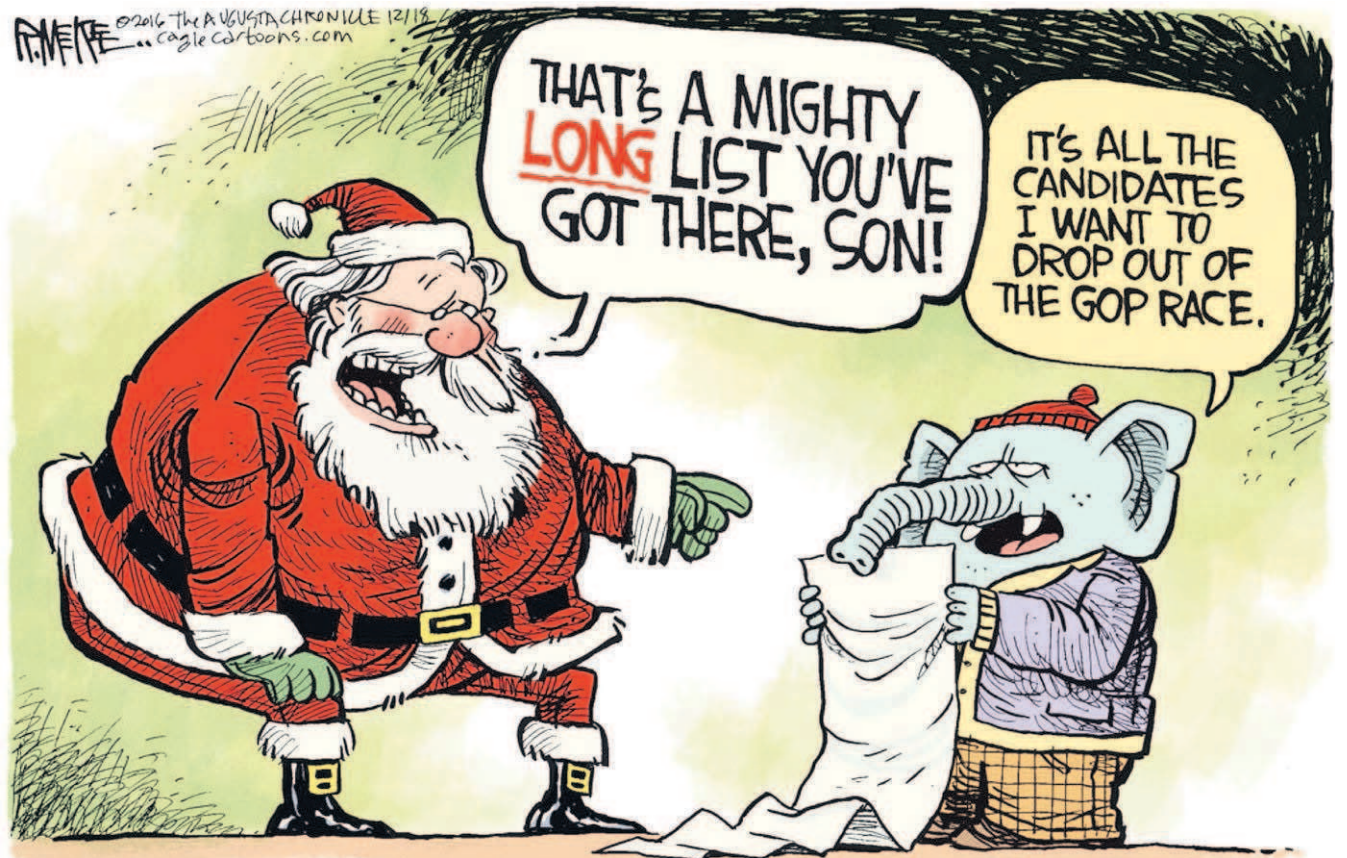
Comes now an idea that at least acknowledges the fact that the economy in Portland is vastly different from elsewhere in the state. Sen. Michael Dembrow, chairman of the Oregon Senate Workforce Committee, has proposed three regional minimum wages in Oregon. The minimum wage would be highest in Portland and lowest in rural Oregon.

"We needed to take into account cost of living and economic vitality in different parts of the state," he told reporter Paris Achen of our Capital Bureau, a collaboration between EO Media Group, which owns the Capital Press, and Pamplin Media Group.

The proposal, the details of which have not yet been determined, is aimed at averting a ballot initiative that would jump Oregon's statewide minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Another initiative would increase it to \$13.50 and give cities the authority to increase it more.

Either initiative would hammer farmers, ranchers and food processors. Dembrow's proposal represents a compromise that would soften the blow to the rural economy.

Though we're still against constant efforts to increase the minimum wage, we do appreciate the senator's recognition that Oregon's rural economy is in a far more precarious condition than the state's urban economies.



And the GOP winner will be ...

By John McColgan
For The Chieftain



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

As a political junkie and a sports fan, I enjoy trying to handicap the quadrennial presidential horse race that officially takes off in Iowa and New Hampshire every leap year. In preparation for making my prognostications, this lifelong Democrat even stoically watched last week's Republican debates, hosted by CNN. The debates focused on national security and terrorism, which turned out to be more interesting, though only slightly less annoying, than I had expected.

If we Americans could somehow convince the followers of ISIS to abandon their religious restrictions for an evening and engage in a drinking game in which they each took a shot of whiskey every time a Republican candidate insulted our president, we could simply cart them off stone drunk in paddy wagons after the debates, and that would be the end of our troubles, right? Not a realistic proposal, you say? Since when has workability been a requirement in these discussions, I reply. But I digress.

Although I didn't see all of the "undercard" debate, which featured the four candidates — Pataki, Graham, Santorum and Huckabee — who languish furthest

back in the polls, I saw enough of that event to reassure me that these gentlemen will soon be able to resume their respective roles in retirement, in the Senate or as professional political commentators. Personally, I will miss hearing from Sen. Lindsey Graham most because he actually added some badly needed words of rebuke against the current frontrunner, who shall remain nameless in this column for as long as I can manage.

Turning to the nine Republicans who qualified for the "main event" (and wrestling or boxing terminology seems appropriate, especially considering that CNN deliberately arranged the format as a set of face-offs between perceived rivals), we could loosely organize them into three groups of three candidates: the governors, the senators and the outsiders. It is a curious feature of this year's political pre-season that, in general, the governors have been underperforming in the polls, the senators have been stuck in the middle of the pack and the outsiders have

been leading.

Keeping to these three categories, I think it is safe to say that the candidate who lags furthest back in each will be the first to fall by the wayside. So shortly after the New Hampshire primary, I anticipate that Ohio Gov. John Kasich (who also has represented a more moderate but apparently underappreciated voice within his party), Sen. Rand Paul (who represents a strain of fiscal conservatism and libertarianism that Republican voters ought to embrace more than they do) and Carly Fiorina (who earned a promotion from previous undercard status by her surprisingly strong debate performances) will all be spending more time with their families again.

Of the remaining governors, Chris Christie chose during the debate to highlight his experience as a federal prosecutor and to contrast his role as governor with the more esoteric matters that occupy U.S. Senators, while Jeb Bush was set up by CNN to engage in direct confrontations with the current frontrunner. The only aspect of this political pre-season that I have found as stunning as the enduring status of that frontrunner is the lackluster response of Republican voters thus far to Jeb Bush.

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Wrong call on bronze sculpture

I feel the need to weigh in on the subject of the bronze sculptures that adorn the streets and towns in Wallowa County. They help draw people to the towns and help bring locals and visitors to local businesses — not to mention the pride that the community should have in the fact that most of the sculptures on the streets of Joseph and Enterprise are the creations of artists who have lived and raised families in Wallowa County and helped build a thriving foundry industry here.

I believe an injustice occurred in the (Joseph Arts Council) decision to not allow Dick Cross' life-size "Bronze Bike" sculpture, modeled after his father's treasured Harley Davidson motorcycle, to be displayed on Main Street in Joseph.

Dick was the second employee at a fledgling Valley Bronze in the early 1980s. He brought his knowledge of the steel foundry industry and his passion for art to Wallowa County. He trained employees to produce some of the finest castings and helped build a foundry reputation for the county that is recognized around the world.

There is a small percentage of bronze artists who have the knowledge and skill to take a project from concept to completion and do all the steps from sculpting to welding, grinding and finishing, to installation — and Dick is one of them.

A graduate of Enterprise High School, Dick was able to make a living in the art business and raise his family where he grew up. Just as Austin Barton remembers good times racing horses down Main Street in Joseph as a young man, Dick has similar memories of riding his first motorcycle on the roads of Wallowa County.

Dick Cross' life-size bronze sculpture would be a great addition to the assortment of subjects and styles currently lining the streets of Joseph.

Tim Norman
Enterprise

LETTERS to the EDITOR

with no mincing of words. I really like Ben Carson and yet he seems too soft spoken and therefore not as convincing. Donald Trump seems more like General Patton of World War II fame. That last sentence will send the left wing loonies into screaming fits but we must not lose sight of the fact that ISIS wants to KILL Christians and Jews, especially in America. Of course, they want to destroy Israel, which will be unsuccessful since they are the Chosen Nation of the scriptures.

Many Americans, I fear, have the false impression that our leaders, especially the Administration, will protect us from ISIS. Every single person from whatever country must be totally vetted before entering this country and the borders must be completely secured. Remember, ISIS wants to KILL US. They are deadly serious and will do anything possible to take advantage of American hospitality to accomplish their goal.

Stormy Burns (USN, Retired)
Joseph

Kudos on LWCF extension

Founded in Oregon and now with membership in all 50 states and Canada, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) applauds the Congressional three-year extension of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) with first-year funding at a higher level than in past years. We applaud Sens. Wyden and Merkley for their efforts to make this fund permanent.

Over the 50-year history of this tax-free fund, over \$300 million LWCF dollars have helped ensure access to our public lands in Oregon. It also helps fuel a robust \$10 billion outdoor economy that employs approximately 100,000 people, according to Travel Oregon estimates.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is especially important to rural areas where the economy lags. Headwaters Economics studies show the closer a rural community is to public lands the better the economy. While the recent extension included in the year-end Omnibus bill is encouraging, BHA will continue to support full and permanent funding of this law that has overwhelming bi-partisan support.

Full and permanent funding was held

up primarily because of one elected official — Congressman Bob Bishop of Utah, who wants to restructure and re-direct LWCF funds. LWCF expired in September because of Bishop. Had it not been for the insistence of Sens. Wyden and Merkley and others, this three-year extension would not have happened.

It's time for all those who love and support public lands tell Congressman Bishop to take a hike. He may find something worthy of support if he takes that hike in public lands.

Brian Jennings
Bend

Fair Board reader board update

The Wallowa County Fair Board would like to update the public about the reader board being down. We really appreciate all of the donations that we received to purchase the reader board. Therefore, we feel it is important for you to know what we have found out so far.

The company that the reader board was purchased from in 2013 is no longer servicing the product they sold. We have had a couple of volunteers look at the wireless connection, computer setup and board. They were unable to come up with a solution. We then had a tech from Education Service District look at things as well.

Through the process of elimination we discovered that the board is not compatible with Windows 10, which is why the board was completely down for a couple of weeks. We then downgraded the office computer to Windows 7 and were able to get a wireless connection to the board and the south side started working again.

As for the north side, that we have been trying to get fixed for quite some time. We have discovered there is nothing wrong with the wireless connection to the board and nothing wrong with the computer set-up. It has been determined that there is something broken within the board itself. Therefore, we plan to take the north side of the board down and are going to have it looked at.

Once again we would like to apologize for this inconvenience and let you know we are working to get it fixed. If you have questions concerning the reader board, please feel free to contact the Wallowa County Fair Office at 541-426-4097.

Wallowa County Fair Board
Enterprise

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Wallowa County's Newspaper Since 1884
Enterprise, Oregon

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PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY BY:
EO Media Group

Periodical Postage Paid at Enterprise and additional mailing offices

Subscription rates (includes online access)	1 Year
Wallowa County	\$40.00
Out-of-County	\$57.00

Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

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Wallowa County Chieftain
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Volume 133