Minimum wage to the max

EDITORIAL
Voice of the Chieftain

Oregon will soon have a higher minimum wage, but it's unclear if Gov. Kate Brown's compromise plan will please both sides of a complicated argument.

Brown's proposal divides Oregon into two separate geographic and economic regions, with wage rules differing in each.

Rural Oregon will have a lower minimum wage than its urban counterparts, especially Multnomah County and the greater Portland area. It also will increase here at a slower pace.

That makes sense. The economic reality is far different in Enterprise than Portland, in Wallowa than Hillsboro. But the Legislature will certainly tinker with Brown's proposal, and how it emerges from that tinkering — and how it will effect rural Oregon — remains to be seen.

Still, some action on minimum wage is a critically important component of the short legislative session that will begin just over a week from now. The legislature must take action or it leaves Oregon vulnerable to the blunt hammer of a citizen initiative to decide state economic policy.

Though that is an ineffective and inflexible way to operate, union and worker rights organizations have not been dissuaded by Brown's bill and say they plan to go forward with petitions that could bump statewide minimum wage to $15 an hour in a faster time frame, and in all corners of the state.

With a plan similar to Brown's enacted by the legislature, it may take the starch out of those initiatives.

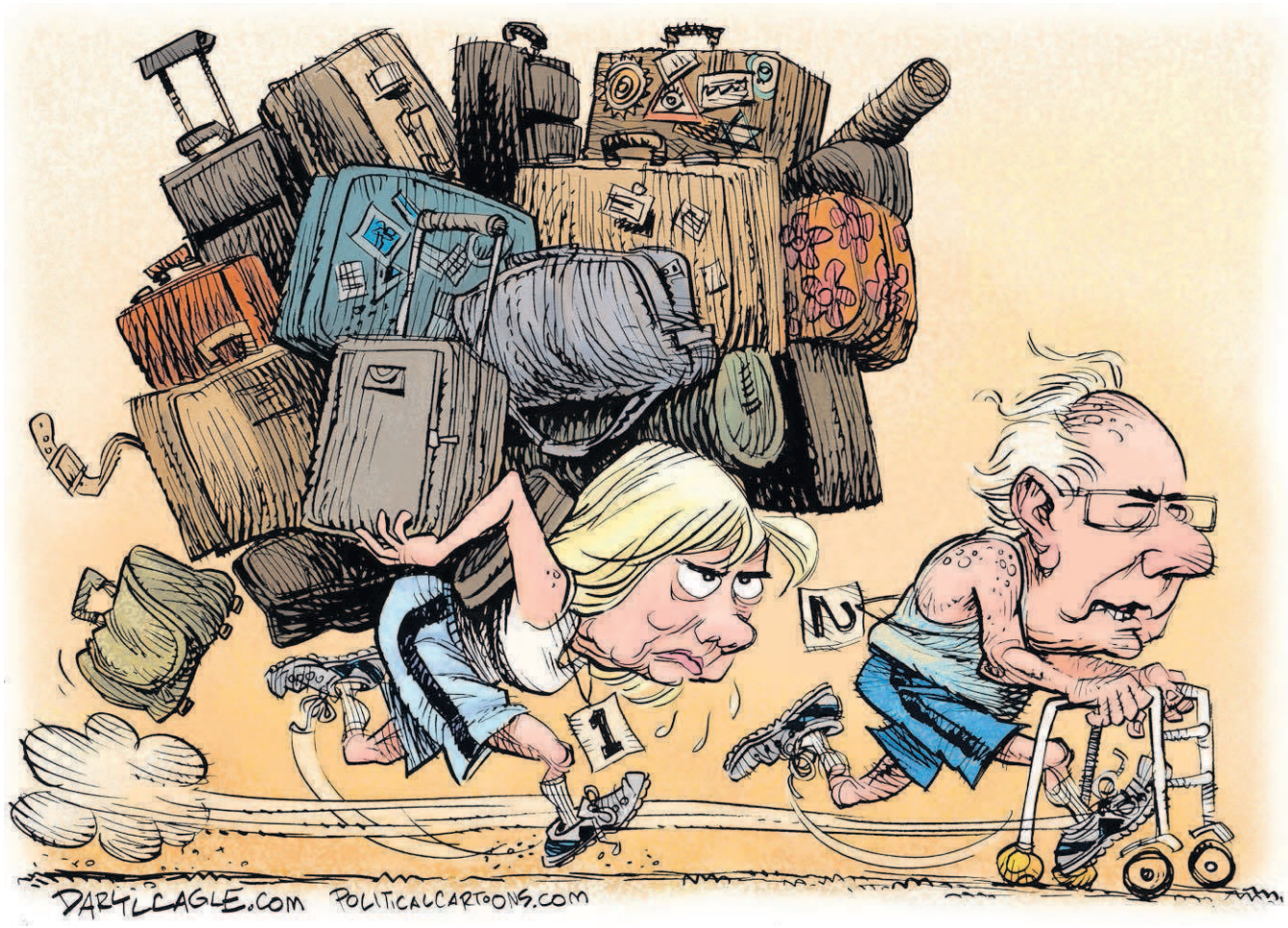
But what about minimum wage, in general, and allowing Eastern Oregon to play with different rules than its urban overlords? A jump to a $15 minimum wage should be no problem for the Nikes and Intels of the world, but would be devastating to small businesses and to much of rural Oregon. Agriculture, most notably, would be thrashed by the new rules. It's also true that the problem of low wages would be much more efficiently handled by the private sector than by government decree.

It is understandable that minimum wage should be tied somehow to a "living" wage — enough money to put a roof over a person's head and food on the table. And it's easy to see that $9.25 per hour doesn't quite cut it in Portland, much less in New York City or Chicago or San Francisco.

Yet there is an economic and social benefit to a country, a state and a business, that some employees can get experience without breaking the budget. Teens, especially, benefit from entry level jobs. Low-paying jobs do benefit part-time and seasonal workers, too, and they can use it to supplement their regular income. True, they can be taken advantage of. But a higher minimum wage is just as likely to harm them as it is to help them, by causing their employers to reduce hours and reduce labor costs.

There is plenty to debate. Minimum wage will without a doubt go up in Oregon, and the effect of that will be wide-ranging and significant. Right now, the pressure is on the legislature to come up with a plan that cuts the legs out from under those who would codify seismic economic shifts, while still allowing working class people to make a decent living and maybe even save a few dollars each pay period.

It will be difficult to thread that needle, but doing nothing will be far more problematic for our side of the state.



And the Democratic presidential nominee is ...

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
John McColgan

In my column last month, I made a set of assessments and predictions regarding the Republican contest for the presidency. This month, as promised, I will look ahead on the other side.

The Democratic primary campaign has fewer variables since there currently are only three candidates still in the race, and only two of them are viable. Probably through no real fault of his own, former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley has yet to attract more than single-digit support in the polls. The only suspense remaining in his case is whether he will drop out before or just after the New Hampshire primary.

Back in 2008, the Democratic contest had remarkably similar dynamics to what we see today. In early January of that year, the frontrunner was Hillary Clinton, and the two other viable contenders were John Edwards and a still little known but fast rising star Barack Obama. Edwards dropped out sooner than expected (probably because of an emerging personal scandal) not long after Obama had won in Iowa and Clinton had rallied in New Hampshire. From there it was a two-horse race.

That's how this one is shaping up as well. Hillary has been the frontrunner and expected nominee all along — by pundits, media and most Democrats. Her anticipated coronation probably was part of what motivated Democratic National Committee Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz to limit the number of debates and to schedule them on the same nights and weekends as big football games, when the television audience was bound to be diminished. Schultz's cozy relationship with Clinton might also account for the DNC's overreaction to a brief security breach of Clinton campaign data back in December by one of Sanders' staff members, after which Schultz deprived Sanders of his own data until Bernie filed suit to have access to his information restored.

For about a year now, Sanders' support has been steadily building while Clinton's has been eroding. Hillary and her advisers essentially conceded this in last week's debate when she stepped up her attacks on Sanders and tried to present herself as the Democrat most closely aligned with and supportive of President Obama. Sanders responded by pointing out the real differences that he has with Clinton on many issues, including Wall Street reform and health care. He also cast Hillary's portrayal of his relationship with the president as disingenuous as he reaffirmed his own support for Obama and his policies.

Our national media have been so obsessed with Donald Trump for the past six months that they have ignored the fact that Bernie Sanders has consistently drawn the biggest rallies and has the broadest base of contributors of any campaign of either party. His slogan, "Feel the Bern," is a clever expression of the enthusiasm of his admirers.

Since caucus states rely on people coming out on a cold winter night to their neighborhood school or courthouse, they measure voter temperature more than volume. For that reason, I expect Bernie to win handily in Iowa.

He also has the advantage in New Hampshire, one of his neighboring states. And although Vermont is a blue state while New Hampshire is purple, Sanders is currently polling ahead of Clinton there. So barring some major gaffe or political dust-up in the next two weeks, I predict that Bernie will win there as well.

I expect the Democratic contest to be a long slog. Hillary demonstrated in 2008 that she is a tough, resilient candidate. She also is an excellent debater, although I think that Sanders holds his own against her there. In caucus states, Sanders will have the advantage.

Once more and more Democrats actually believe that Bernie can win, I think they will rally to his campaign. It will not be easy, but I predict that Sanders will win the Democratic nomination.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.

Locals should manage the land

LETTERS to the EDITOR

While I may not agree with the Bundys on their takeover of the refuge, I do agree that something needs to be done with the Bad Land Management (BLM), United States Foreign Nonservice (USFS) and all of the government entities that proclaim they are taking care of our public lands.

We tend to forget what happened in the early '70s, when the USFS forced all of the ranchers out of the Snake River so that a few people could hike down the river on trails that cost thousands of dollars and now fewer than 100 people a year use. Before all of this land was on the Wallowa County tax rolls and now all they do is cost the citizens of the county more tax money every year. The same goes for the John Day Fossil Beds. Every acre that is put under federal government control comes off of the tax rolls and the citizens have to make up for the lost revenue. Any commercial operation in any of these areas is required to pay a percent to the government with very little coming back into the local economy.

I think all of this land should be turned back the states and ultimate control to the counties. The land should be open to the public even if there are grazing permits or leases given to the farmers. Local people have a better understanding of how the land needs to be taken care of rather someone from the East Coast with a degree in social control. Not only that but it would help the local economy by providing job opportunities for our local young people rather than them having to go to the city to find work.

Jim Ammons
Summerville, Ore.

Public can't win with this shell game

How the Government Collusion game is played:

1. National Forest Service (NFS) wants to come up with an new access plan.

2. NFS would like to limit some access and use of the forest. They work privately with like-minded Special Interest Groups (SIG) who also want to limit access and use to come up with a plan.

3. NFS presents the plan and has a public process allowing all interested parties to make comments and give input. During this process, the SIG use their ample resources that come from rich non-locals to engage in a marketing campaign involving advertising and media that represents the NFS position. In this way, the NFS appears neutral. The people for same or more access/use generally are local folks and have little resources to bring to bear.

4. After much public comment, a revised plan is presented that cuts back on some of the access/use restrictions. Nobody is happy, because no one has actually gotten what they wanted.

5. SIG sues NFS to try and stop the plan from being implemented or immediately after implementation of plan. Consider the NFS position now. They are going to court to defend a plan they do not agree with. They have no real incentive to win or fight this very hard. By losing, they achieve their original goals.

6. The SIGs are out some cash via marketing/lawsuit. So the NFS settles with SIG out of court for some portion of their demands or they lose in court. As part of the settlement or loss, they agree to pay the SIG court costs.

7. Access/use has been restricted. SIG has all or most of their cash. NFS is happy and gets to pretend it is out of their control. Locals have lost access/use and feel powerless.

Serragon Birch
Enterprise

WHERE TO WRITE

Washington, D.C.

The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20500; Phone-comments: 202-456-1111.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D — 516 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-5244. E-mail: wayne_kinney@wyden.senate.gov Web site: http://wyden.senate.gov Fax: 202-228-2717.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D — 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. E-mail: senator@merkley.senate.gov. Fax: 202-228-3997.

Oregon offices include One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St., Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; and 310 S.E. Second St., Suite 105, Pendleton, OR 97801. Phone: 503-326-3386; 541-278-1129. Fax: 503-326-2990.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R — (Second District) 1404 Longworth Building, Washington D.C. 20515. Phone: 202-225-6730. No direct e-mail because of spam. Web site: www.walden.house.gov Fax: 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 North Central, Suite 112, Medford, OR 97501. Phone: 541-776-4646. Fax: 541-779-0204.

WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN

USPS No. 665-100

P.O. Box 338 • Enterprise, OR 97828
Office: 209 NW First St., Enterprise, Ore.
Phone: 541-426-4567 • Fax: 541-426-3921

Wallowa County's Newspaper Since 1884
Enterprise, Oregon

Member Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association

Publisher **Marissa Williams, marissa@bmeagle.com**
Editor **Scot Heisel, editor@wallowa.com**
Reporter **Stephen Tool, stool@wallowa.com**
Reporter **Kathleen Ellyn, kellyn@wallowa.com**
Newsroom assistant **editor@wallowa.com**
Ad Sales consultant **Jennifer Powell, jpowell@wallowa.com**
Graphic Designer **Robby Day, rday@wallowa.com**
Office manager **Cheryl Jenkins, cjenkins@wallowa.com**

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

See the Wallowa County Chieftain on the Internet
www.wallowa.com
facebook.com/Wallowa | twitter.com/wcchieftain

POSTMASTER — Send address changes to
Wallowa County Chieftain
P.O. Box 338
Enterprise, OR 97828

Contents copyright © 2015. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is prohibited.

Volume 134