

Measure 97 bails out PERS

The bill to provide outsized pensions to government workers in Oregon is coming due.

A new report on the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) says that contributions to the fund will need to increase \$885 million in the 2017-19 biennium. Such massive increases are projected for subsequent years as well.

The increases are the result of providing public employees with pension benefits far beyond Oregon's ability to pay.

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain

The campaign to raise taxes to continue this largess has begun. Gov. Kate Brown last week endorsed Measure 97, a \$3 billion-a-year general sales tax increase disguised as a toll on large corporations.

The governor said the tax is necessary to provide stable support for schools and other government services. If our governor were as transparent as she claims to be, she would admit the obvious: Measure 97 raises taxes to underwrite PERS.

Gov. Brown's smokescreen became apparent in April. She avoided mention of the PERS crisis in her State of the State address then later told a reporter: "There isn't a path forward" to reform the retirement system.

The reality is quite different. Oregon's Supreme Court predictably struck down in 2015 bipartisan legislation that reduced benefits already earned by state employees. However, the justices made clear that future benefits could be changed.

Among the available options:

- Reduce the assumed rate of return on PERS investments. Currently, participants are guaranteed a 7.5 percent return. Returns should match market rates.

- Require participants to contribute to PERS. That's the case in most private-sector retirement plans. While public employees are required to contribute to a second benefits plan, that benefit is often paid by taxpayers via the employer.

- Change the retirement age. The federal government adjusted the retirement age to protect Social Security. Oregon should do the same. The average state worker retires after 22 years of service and earns a PERS benefit equivalent to 56 percent of their final average salary. Those who retire after 30 years received 81 percent of their final average salary. Astonishingly, 7 percent of PERS retirees earn more in retirement benefits than they did while working.

- Cap earning levels. Mike Bellotti receives \$513,612 annually in retirement benefits as the former athletic director and football coach of the University of Oregon. There's no logical reason state taxpayers should foot the bill for such gold-plated state workers in the future.

These reforms would reduce the cost of PERS and ensure its long-term sustainability. They would also allow our schools and local governments to spend more to address real needs without raising taxes.

Instead, Gov. Brown is doing the bidding of Oregon's public employee unions, who are heavily financing Measure 97. These same unions are pouring money into Brown's election campaign and to those of legislative leaders.

They, not school children, are the true beneficiaries of Measure 97.



Serving your nation outside the war zone

I was born in 1942, graduated from high school in 1960, received easy, automatic draft deferments through four years of college and one year of graduate school. That was 1964-'65, and I was at Northwestern University in Illinois.

There was a "teach-in" about Vietnam that year, the first time I remember hearing about our growing adventure in that faraway place. I was not enjoying grad school, so looking for a next step I read Graham Greene's "Quiet American" and more on Vietnam. I decided that I did not want to go to that war. Another disgruntled student and I talked each other into applying to the Peace Corps.

I remembered Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." And I remembered the day of his assassination and the two UC Riverside students who had immediately dropped out of school and joined the Peace Corps. It might sound corny, but at 22 I decided that I would catch up, that I would go overseas, but I would not make war.

In 1965 Peace Corps deferments also were almost automatic. My Northwestern friend went to Iran and I went to Turkey. What followed were some of the best years of my life. I spent two as a volunteer in a small village, and after a year on Peace Corps staff in Washington, D.C., two more years on staff based in the capitol, Ankara. I traveled the country helping volunteers in their teaching jobs, working in health and tourism programs. I learned the language, learned geography and history and culture. Believe me or not, I met my first female doctors and engineers in Turkey, and that changed my thinking on the subject.



MAIN STREET

Rich Wandschneider

In 1968 there was Tet. I was 26 and free from it, but our volunteers in the field were not. A few were whisked home in the middle of their service. In 1969, with the draft lottery it all collapsed. Your number came up, and you were in the army now — and more than likely headed to Vietnam.

The draft never has been easy, and there always were ways around it. During the Civil War one could hire a substitute or pay a \$300 fee to help raise money for the war. In later wars religious exemptions were possible, and there was always the option of leaving the country — many fled to Canada during Vietnam. That was not a new thing, as Civil War deserters had helped settle the American West and many German immigrants to this country in the 19th century were running from the Kaiser's army. During the Vietnam War — the one I am most familiar with — medical exemptions or joining the National Guard and Coast Guard were other ways out.

But from World War I through the Korean War, it was incumbent on politicians to make a case for war that would attract volunteers (check the Wallowa County Chieftain in the '40s and find weekly front-page pictures of volunteers for the draft), while carefully crafting a conscription policy that would provide enough troops for the war effort.

Members of Congress and their sons

rushed to serve in those wars. Over 500 Major League Baseball players, including stars Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams, served during World War II. Williams flew a fighter jet in Korea as well, as athletes willingly spent years away from their sports. Finally, men of conscience served as medical conscientious objectors in the war theaters or in hospitals at home, and fought fires and built trails for the Forest Service.

I am a firm believer in such national service. I believe that the war in Vietnam ended when the lottery kicked in and we started drafting Peace Corps Volunteers and the sons of doctors, lawyers and senators. I know that young people were engaged in what was happening in Vietnam whether we served there or not. We knew people. The draft was, and can again be, a check on politicians' urges toward war.

National service need not be military. I believe that in a democracy, we must all share in some way in the country's work — there are trails to be built, bedpans to be changed, students to be taught, as well as wars to be fought. More importantly, people "grow up" and make lifelong friends in the military, the Peace Corps and in Teachers for America. And ours is a country that needs to be knit together again by such common experience and purpose.

I asked a friend who is in elected office why national service is not in the conversation. "Because the wealthy don't want their children to do it," was her cynical reply. Which is exactly the reason we should promote it.

Columnist Rich Wandschneider lives in Joseph.

Get a healthy start to the school year with vaccinations

In August, you'll see back-to-school ads from virtually every store. These ads will try to convince you that you need to buy clothes, shoes, computers, school supplies, sporting equipment, lunch making materials, cleaning wipes and a myriad of other products. Children legitimately need some of these items. Other items are in the nice-to-have category. The average family will spend in excess of \$600 per child for back-to-school items — and significantly more for college-bound students, especially when they need to furnish that freshman dorm room. Back-to-school has become the second largest shopping season in the year.



GUEST COLUMN

Susan Johnson

There is one important item that may not be on your back-to-school list. Immunizations are something every child and young adult should have before they head back to school. That may be why August is National Immunization Awareness Month.

Some of the greatest medical break-

throughs have been the development of effective vaccines for illnesses that have killed or injured hundreds of thousands of people in the past. According to the CDC, "among children born during 1994-2013, vaccination will prevent an estimated 322 million illnesses, 21 million hospitalizations and 732,000 deaths over the course of their lifetimes, at a net savings of \$295 billion in direct costs and \$1.38 trillion in total societal costs."

In recent years, we've looked eagerly for vaccines for HIV, Hepatitis C, Ebola,

See VACCINE, Page A5

Cherish the roadless beauty

On my recent flight home from the Society for Conservation Biology meeting, I eagerly looked out the window and peered into the forested valleys and across the alpine lakes and mountains of one of the largest remaining roadless landscapes in the entire temperate zone, the Bitterroot Wilderness (nearly three times larger than the Eagle Cap).

At the meeting I saw the unveiling of a new dataset showing the entire planet's roadless lands.

The take-home message: very few roadless lands remain in our part of the world. The remaining roadless areas that feel large and rugged on our own two feet are actually quite small and hard to discern from the tangle of roads and development that engulf them at the larger scale.

As we flew west, I could see the forests and canyons that connect the Northern Rockies to the magnificent Hells Canyon country. I looked over the road-

LETTERS to the EDITOR

less canyon lands that wrap around the Zumwalt Prairie, all the way to Joseph Canyon, and the Grande Ronde River with its roadless area that so many now enjoy while floating the river.

Each of these roadless areas is a critical piece of a fragile and beautiful mountain-forest-canyon corridor that links the Pacific Northwest to the Northern Rockies.

Globally, areas that are free from roads are increasingly rare, and none of our remaining roadless areas should be taken for granted.

Explore their beauty, protect their wildness, honor their silence and future generations will have the opportunity to experience places that a road never touched, too.

David Mildrexler Joseph

My error

I apologize for mistakenly stating that tourism was the "area's top industry" (Aug. 3). That was an error on my part that shouldn't have made it to the final draft.

As per my numbers being inaccurate, however, I disagree.

A 2015 Dean Runyan Travel Impact Report for Wallowa County cites \$27.6 million in destination travel spending and another 0.9 million in other travel, bringing the actual total to \$28.4 million.

Please give them a call @ 503.226.2973 or visit <http://tinyurl.com/1429voj>.

I sincerely hope my misworded sentence does not further detract from the original point of Joseph's housing issues, nor in any way minimize the struggle of people from all industries in securing stable housing within our small communities.

Katie Jo Morgan Joseph

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, rdav@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 © 2016. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is prohibited.

Volume 134