

Unfunded mandates show lack of leadership

In politics, it’s easy to pass the buck — or the blame — through the age-old practice of unfunded mandates. It’s the practice where one government orders an agency or a lesser governmental entity to take a specific action to fix a problem, but doesn’t supply the money to make it happen. The mandate makes the agency or the community fix the problem out of their own budgets, which is often nearly impossible to accomplish without raising taxes, cutting services or both. Even more, this practice usually rears its head at election time to give voters the idea that leadership is truly addressing problems rather than letting them slide. But the fact that those leaders have to issue a mandate in the first place shows the problem did slide. And sometimes, those same state leaders avoid transparency by using mandates as a scare tactic to get legislative or voter approval for unpopular or controversial legislation that they support.

GUEST EDITORIAL

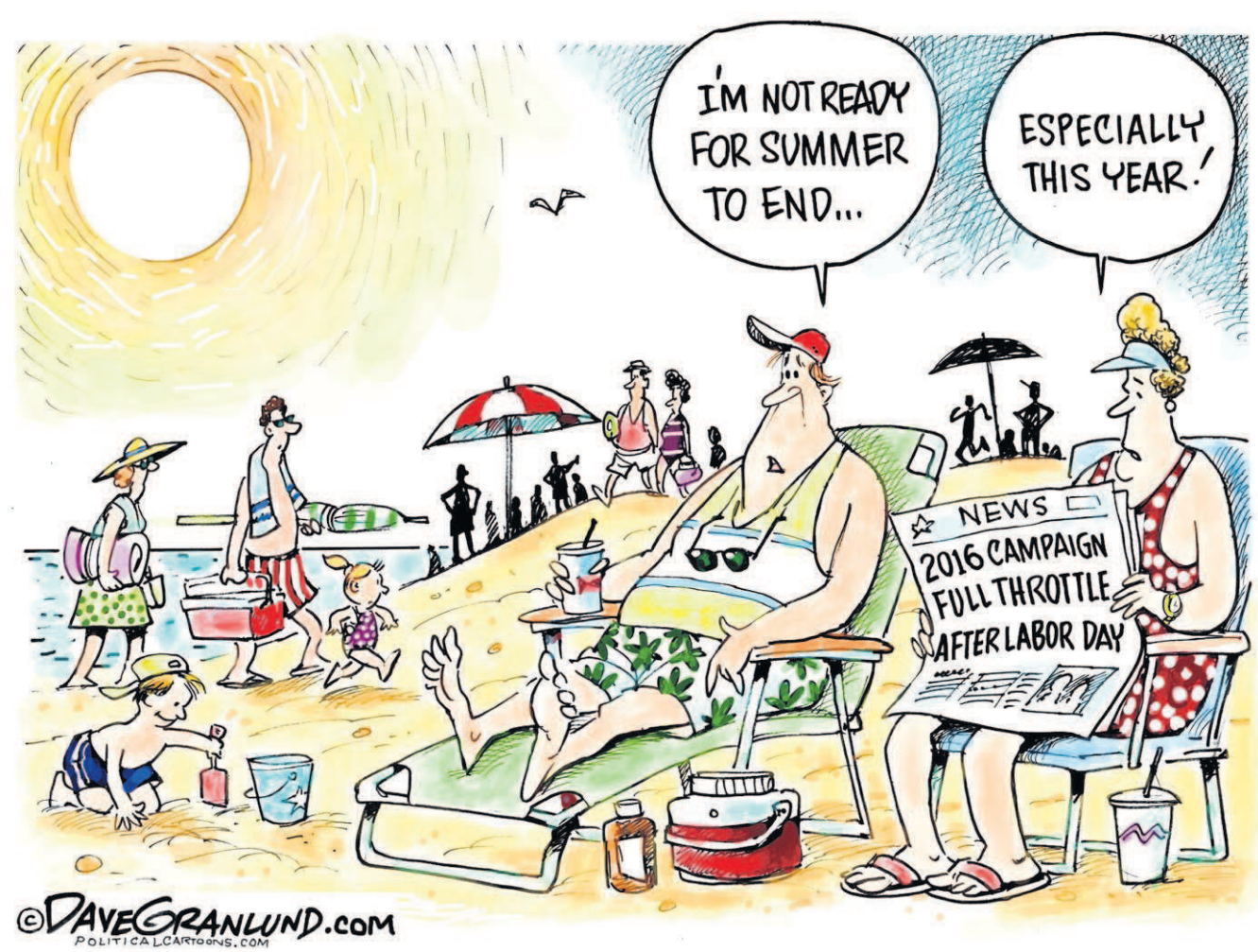
From The Daily Astorian

That’s the case currently with two state mandates in the past three weeks. And to no surprise, the mandates surfaced as Gov. Kate Brown endorsed Measure 97, the highly controversial ballot measure that would create a 2.5 percent tax for some corporations on gross sales of more than \$25 million, rather than taxing those corporations on their on the profits as now is the case. Supporters of the measure say it would raise an additional \$3 billion and help Oregon fix long-standing problems and avoid a looming \$1.4 billion deficit. Supporters also say the tax revenue would be spent only on schools, seniors and health care. Opponents point out the regressive nature of the tax and say corporations would simply pass the tax on to customers who can afford it least. The measure, they say, would curb private sector growth while boosting public sector hiring. They also point out that lawyers for the Legislature say tax dollars raised by Measure 97 could be spent however lawmakers please. In her endorsement, though, Brown said she would make sure the money goes to those areas.

The mandates

The first mandate came in early August when the state Treasury announced that the bill for schools, cities, state agencies and other public employers in Oregon will rise by \$885 million next biennium to fund the state’s public employee pension system. The \$885 million is much higher than was forecast and represents a 44 percent increase from what public employees are currently paying into the pension plan to support it. Next came an order from the Oregon Board of Education after it adopted a new, fast-tracked rule at the behest of the governor that requires testing for lead and radon in schools, public disclosure of problems that are found and the elimination of each problem when discovered. School districts are required by the mandate to have a preliminary plan in place by October and a finished plan by January. While parents and educators all agree that fixing those problems needs to happen and happen quickly, the order came without a funding mechanism in place. The state School Boards Association predicts the mandate could cost districts hundreds of millions of dollars statewide. Fortunately, districts on the North Coast have been proactive and only a handful of problems have surfaced so far. Public schools are also facing another challenge that was mandated by the Legislature in 2007. It requires they provide a minimum of 150 minutes of physical education instruction per week for kindergarten through fifth grade and 225 minutes for sixth through eighth grade.

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Lunch form a critical part of school year

As a parent, you will receive many forms, pieces of paper, permission slips, art work and so forth from your child’s teacher and the school. Some of those papers you will find months later, rumpled and out of date because they have been hanging out at the bottom of your child’s backpack. Those forms will probably be tossed in the trash. Some artwork will make its way to the refrigerator. The permission slips and the papers requiring your signature will be attended to then and there.

However, there is one document you will receive that needs a second or even third look. It concerns whether your child qualifies for a discount on the price of the National School Lunch and Breakfast meal at school. Some of you may assume your child does not qualify, so why bother to take the time to fill out the form? Other parents, who may or may not qualify, will toss the form because they feel their financial situation is none of the government’s business. These are valid points. Here are a few facts that you may not know about the meal program that may influence your decision to complete the form.

There are many benefits to filling out the form, and even if you don’t qualify for the program it is still important to complete the document.

The form is entirely confidential; you can even complete it online. No one outside of the school nutrition staff ever knows if you qualify to participate in the school meal program. If you do qualify, there is no requirement to participate simply because you qualify.

All children may participate in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs at school. If your family qualifies for the meal price discount your child



GUEST COLUMN

Ann Bloom

will receive the same nutritious lunch as a student paying full price. The school receives a monetary reimbursement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for every meal it serves, so there is never any out of pocket expense for your family if you qualify for the full-price discount, and only a small charge for a reduced-price meal. The federal income guideline has set the poverty level at a little over \$24,000 per year. So, for example, to qualify for a free school meal, annual income for a family of four cannot exceed \$31,590 (130 percent of federal poverty level). To receive a reduced lunch, the qualifying income is approximately \$44,440 (185 percent of poverty level). This is based on gross income (before taxes). Some schools in Oregon also participate in the universal breakfast program, where every child is offered breakfast before school starts, regardless of income level.

In addition, there are services that your child will not benefit from if there are not enough qualified families at your school. For example, the OSU Extension Service provides nutrition education to students in Wallowa County if a school has 50 percent or more of its students qualify for the meal program. If your child is not receiving nutrition education from an OSU Extension Service staff person, it is because your school doesn’t meet the 50 percent standard. The 50 per-

cent figure is a requirement of the USDA, which funds the Extension Service nutrition education program. Call your school to find out whether it qualifies. Also, if you are receiving unemployment benefits, you may qualify for participation in the meal program.

Another benefit to receiving nutrition education at school is that your child will have a strong knowledge base of the components of a healthy diet, the importance of physical activity and they will be exposed to foods they may not otherwise try. Nutrition education will help ensure your child develops a lifetime of healthy habits, which can go a long way toward preventing chronic diseases in adulthood and certain forms of cancer.

If pride is keeping you from completing this form, consider this: should pride stand in the way of making sure your child has a nutritious meal at school? The government asks you to complete a form for a driver’s license, a social security card, a passport and an application for college. Why should your child’s nutrition be any different? Or that of their friends, who may be able to receive a lunch at a discount if they qualify? According to recent research on the subject, children who are well-nourished, who arrive to class rested and ready to learn, do much better on tests, do better in school in general and are much better behaved than children who are not nourished and rested. Finally, remember the form and its information is entirely confidential.

I encourage you to complete this very important form and return it to your child’s school — don’t let it hang out at the bottom of that backpack.

Ann Bloom is Education Program Assistant for the OSU Extension Service in Enterprise.

So much for ‘temporary’ trail closure

Temporary: “Lasting, used or enjoyed for a limited time; impermanent ...” (American Heritage Dictionary)

It has been two years since Creating Memories closed off the trail to the falls at the lake. The first reason given was that Satanists were meeting there. Then it was vandalism. After that, the story was to protect equipment.

All along we’ve been told that closure of the trail was temporary. However, after two years I wonder what is going on. Surely the excuses are about worn out.

It is time to open it up. If nothing else, open it from, say, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. I’ve been going to the falls for over 60 years. I want to continue to do so.

Please give us back our falls.

Forrest Wilson
Joseph

Make climate an election priority

Your vote in November is crucial to ability of the U.S. to implement timely significant action on climate change issues. Delaying strategies of many elected officials are costing taxpayers untold amounts in dollars and human suffering but more importantly delay lessens our ability to affect required changes.

Many Republican candidates adhere to party lines regarding climate issues, but many Democrats also refuse to prioritize climate change issues either out of ignorance or fear. I believe if a candidate does not have climate issues as a priority they are irrelevant and unable to function in current and future political arenas. I ask that while you consider a candidate to be mindful that immediate and ef-

LETTERS to the EDITOR

fective action on climate issues should be a declared priority by the candidate as this will determine the quality of life on the planet for current and future generations.

Require that your candidate detail their understanding of climate issues and commitment to action. This applies to all elected officials at every level of government.

On the state level we have opportunities to design/implement effective paths (put a price on carbon) to transition away from fossil fuels and to implement effective mitigation and adaptation strategies that may serve as models for national programs. Nationally, implementing realistic pricing schedules on carbon emissions (studies show this to be the most effective method for immediate reductions) is a top priority for moving us toward an emission-reductions trajectory that may provide a chance to stabilize the rate of climate change.

If you have trouble elevating this in your priorities try to have a discussion with your children/grandchildren or a youth group and explain to them the consequences of inaction by your candidate of choice.

Chuck LeBold
Union

We should have local control of local land

In 2012, Utah’s legislature passed House Bill 148, a bill that is getting close scrutiny by many other states and smaller jurisdictions.

The Transfer of Public Lands Act sternly requests that the federal government return select tracts of land — about 20 million acres — to the jurisdiction of the state of Utah.

The deadline for the federal government to meet Utah’s demands was Dec. 31, 2014, and the ongoing battle has spilled over to nine of 11 nearby western states.

Leading the charge today is the American Lands Council; Wallowa County is one of only two counties in Oregon that has established membership.

And why shouldn’t Wallowa County join the fight? More than 50 percent of the county belongs to the federal government in the acreage of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Bringing ownership a little closer to home could results in better and quicker management.

In the middle of October, Wallowa County Commissioner Paul Castilleja will be traveling to Utah to learn more and share thoughts about this corner of Oregon and the Transfer of Public Lands Act.

For more information, contact Commissioner Castilleja at the county courthouse.

Rocky Wilson
Wallowa

Submit a letter

You can submit a letter to the Wallowa County Chieftain in person; by mail to P.O. Box 338, Enterprise, OR 97828; by email to editor@wallowa.com; or via the submission form at the newspaper’s website, located at wallowa.com.

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