

# Opinion

## GUEST EDITORIAL

# Stock gains don't solve problems with PERS

### Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

You'd think, with the state Public Employees Retirement System's pension funds showing a whopping 15.4 percent rate of return on investments in 2017, that Oregonians could quit worrying about the financially strapped retirement system.

You'd be wrong.

While 15.4 percent is more than double what the PERS governing board expected to get, it isn't enough to dig the system out of its unfunded liability hole. Nor is it reasonable to assume the system's investment managers will be able to duplicate last year's rate over time.

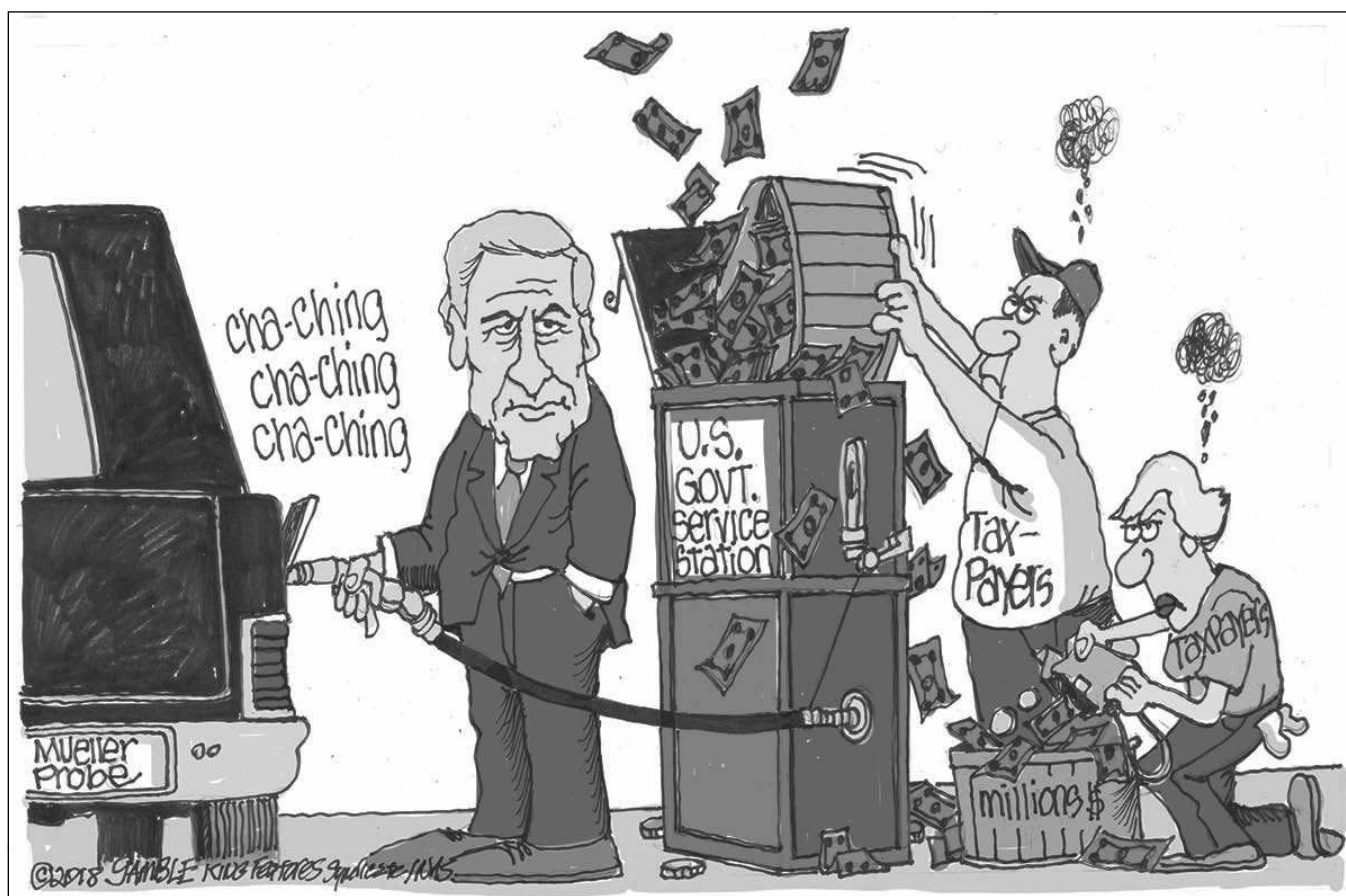
The PERS unfunded liability — money it's committed to paying retirees that the retirement system does not have — was some \$25.3 billion in 2016; by the end of 2017 it had dropped to \$22.3 billion.

Put another way, the state now has 73 cents in hand for every \$1 it expects to pay out, an improvement of 4 cents on the dollar. But school districts, state government, cities, counties and special districts around the state still will be on the hook for substantially more money for PERS in the next biennium than they were in this one.

Together, they'll be required to contribute about \$4 billion to PERS in the 2019-21 budget period, a 38 percent increase over what they're paying during the current one. That's going to mean that some school districts may lay off teachers, and other agencies also will have to make do with less.

It would be nice to think that last year's market performance was the new norm, but it wasn't. While the market has done well during the current decade, that sort of performance is generally followed by a decade of mediocre returns, according to the Market Watch website. Overall, the market has averaged a 9.6 percent return since the 1920s.

Without genuine reform, which the Democratic-controlled Oregon Legislature so far refuses to consider, the PERS problem will continue to bleed schools, cities and others of precious resources for years. It's time lawmakers got the message.



## Kavanaugh wrong for High Court

When you look at our United States Constitution, our Founders' message is clear: "We the People." Those words are deliberately written larger than everything else — large enough that you can read them from across the room.

And at the core of the "We the People" vision is a strong, independent judiciary.

As I look at the United States Supreme Court now, I see a stolen seat filled by a nominee who was approved by the Senate after an unprecedented political power grab by the majority party. I see an upcoming nominee who would act as President Trump's get-out-of-jail-free card, who says that presidents should not be subject to America's laws. I see a political yes-man for the privileged and powerful, not a free and fair stalwart ensuring we remain a nation "of the people, by the people, for the people."

A woman at a recent town hall in Eastern Oregon asked me if this nomination makes me fear for our democracy. My answer is yes, yes it does.

First, the president is being investigated for possible collusion with a foreign power. As such, it is a massive conflict of interest for him to nominate a justice who could end up being the deciding vote in rulings on whether he can end the investigation into his campaign, or even whether he can pardon himself.

Second, Brett Kavanaugh has extreme views that are fit for a king in a kingdom, not for a president in a republic. Kavanaugh says that a presi-



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dent should not have to enforce laws he claims are unconstitutional, even if they've been upheld by the courts. He has argued that sitting presidents should be immune from prosecution; immune from indictment; and immune from investigation. He even argues that a president should have the sole power to appoint and fire special prosecutors at will. With this nomination, President Trump is striving to print his own get-out-of-jail-free card.

Third, Senate Republicans are working overtime to block access to Brett Kavanaugh's full record of service in George W. Bush's White House. What are they trying to hide? When President Obama nominated Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court, Republicans insisted that reviewing her full record as a White House staffer was essential for the Senate to fulfill its advice and consent responsibility. Democrats fully cooperated with their request. But now, Republican senators are abandoning the standard of transparency they insisted on for Kagan, covering up the records from when Kavanaugh served in the White House. This is unacceptable. If Republicans are so afraid of the secrets they're working to hide, the president should withdraw the nomination.

Even without the White House

records, we already know that Brett Kavanaugh has extreme views. He has argued in favor of bosses overriding women's access to birth control. He has signaled that he wants to roll back women's constitutional rights, including access to safe, legal abortion. He dissented from the D.C. Circuit Court opinion supporting the power of the Affordable Care Act to provide coverage for Americans with preexisting conditions. His record to date is anti-worker, anti-consumer, and anti-equality.

In summary, Kavanaugh's view is that the Constitution is all about "by and for the powerful," not "by and for the people."

The individual who fills Justice Kennedy's vacancy on the Supreme Court will shape the laws of our country for a generation. That means we are in a fight for the soul of our democracy. Now is the time: We must be fierce in the fight, and to insist only on a nominee who believes in the "We the People" vision of our constitution. Calls to my office are running against Kavanaugh's nomination, and I urge all Oregonians to keep making their voices heard. And importantly, encourage friends and family across the nation to make their voices heard, as well. I know that together, we can build a more prosperous, powerful, and successful America.

*Jeff Merkley is a Democratic U.S. senator for Oregon.*

### Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.

- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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# Brushing up on patience: Painting the house

There comes a point early in any major house-painting effort when it seems you've set for yourself too great a task.

Too many square feet of siding.

Too many corners where a clumsy brush hand will splatter the wrong color in the wrong place.

Too many dimples in the wood that seem to resist the brush and the roller as tenaciously as a Teflon-coated pan defies egg whites.

Too many drips of paint in your eye.

Although the latter might be a problem unique to my brand of ineptitude.

Houses don't want to be painted, I'm sure of that much.

I don't know why this should be so, only that it is.

I played a minor supporting role in repainting our house, an endeavor that stretched over several weeks this summer. The job was extended by vacations and incessant heat and by the methodical way that my wife, Lisa, went about planning what



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JACOBY

was in fact her idea.

Methodical, of course, is the proper way — the responsible and ultimately the sane way — to handle this sort of project.

I initially considered procuring one of those clever paint-sprayers, assuming we could knock off the job in one fast-paced and frankly exciting afternoon thanks to modern engineering and high-powered electric motors.

Lisa said she was not in a hurry. I believe this to be true but I'm certain it wasn't the only reason she rejected my scheme to mechanize the repainting.

In retrospect I must concede she was right to be leery of adding motors of any sort to a job for which I might play a role, however limited.

I had enough trouble with brushes and rollers and, to be honest, even with those wooden paint-stirring sticks, none of which tends to move on its own accord.

I shudder to think what might have happened had I been equipped with a device literally designed to spew high-gloss enamel at supersonic speeds and with spillway-like volume.

The phrase "Superfund site" no doubt would have been applicable, and federal indictments almost guaranteed.

Also, because we were replacing the house's sun-faded blue with a steely gray, I would have ended up looking much like the Tin Woodman from "The Wizard of Oz."

And I don't even own an axe. (I also still have all 20 digits with which I was born. This is not a coincidence.)

Although I abandoned the sprayer plan I wasn't always able to resist the urge to set timeframes for parts of the task, a temptation that is all

but an addiction for a person who has dealt with frequent deadlines for 26 years.

Once I started on one side of the house I felt a compulsion to finish it before peeling off the gloves and dunking the brush in mineral spirits. This led to me performing stunts on a ladder that were reckless but probably entertaining had anyone been about to watch.

But in the main I accepted Lisa's moderate approach with equanimity and, as the project proceeded, growing appreciation for its wisdom.

It's far more sensible to accept the painting of a house — even one of quite modest proportions, as ours is — as a series of small tasks, each contributing to the whole.

There is a tangible sense of accomplishment, I found, in finishing even one small section.

I learned too that painting can be rather peaceful when you're not using a machine that in your untutored hands is apt to explode in a silver cloud at any moment.

When you rely solely on manual tools, painting is very nearly a silent activity, with only the soft and soothing hush of the brush gliding across wood and the occasional slight squeal of the roller.

And when you spend hours crouched beside the foundation, or standing on a ladder peering under the eaves, you gain a fresh perspective of this structure where you spend most of your time and devote so much of your income. There is an inevitable intimacy to painting, a kinship with the boards, that I found pleasant.

It is one of the many activities that tie us to our homes, that strengthen the bond between person and place.

Also there's nothing quite so exquisite as sitting in the shade, sipping a cold beer and gazing with a lover's eye at the comely sight of a freshly painted wall.

*Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.*