

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Union rule change makes sense

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

The Trump administration's Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is poised to undo an administrative rule created by the Obama administration in 2014. As you might expect, the response from public employee unions has been vociferous.

The change makes good sense, however.

Currently state governments, including Oregon's, can deduct Service Employees' International Union dues from paychecks from home-care workers, whose checks come from Medicaid. The workers, by the way, are not state employees, according to the Department of Human Services, though their paychecks are handled by the state.

Home-care workers provide the services that allow many disabled or elderly Oregonians to stay in their homes. Some live in a client's home, others work full time or part time or come in only occasionally.

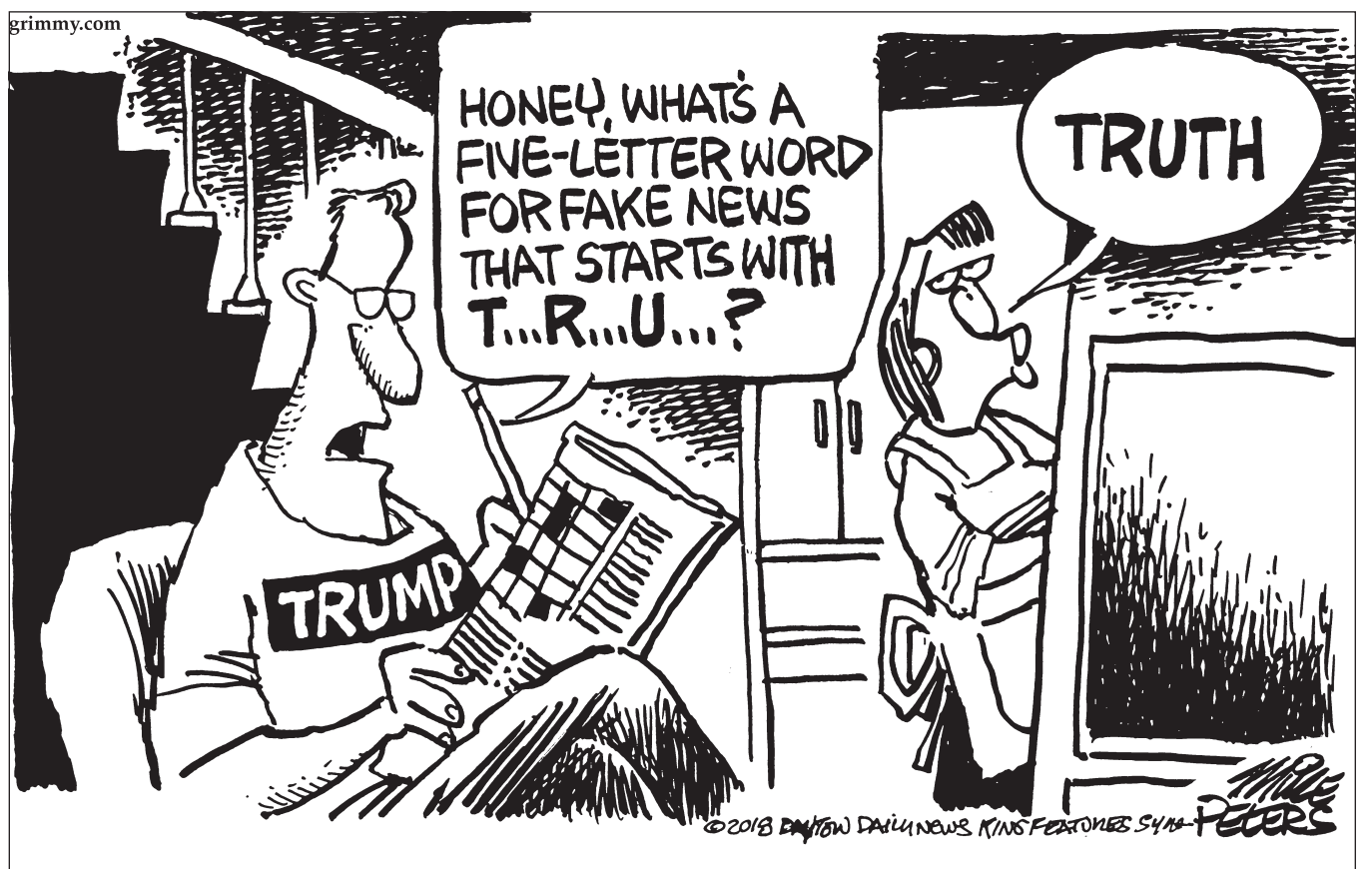
Until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled earlier this year, home-care workers either belonged to SEIU or were required to make payments to the union to support its wage negotiation activities. Collectively, they pay SEIU some \$6.6 million annually.

In June the court, on a 5-4 vote, sided with Janus in its *Janus vs. AFSCME* ruling that non-union employees could not be required to make the so-called fair share payments because doing so violates their free speech rights.

CMS argues it's just following the law, which, it says, requires workers to be paid directly, without having pay diverted to third parties, though there are some exceptions. The rule change will not prevent workers from either joining or leaving the union. Rather, it will mean that those who belong to the union will have to pay their dues directly, without the state acting as middle man.

That's as it should be. Union membership, even by public employees, is a private decision. In Oregon, a majority of home-care workers belong to SEIU, and the rule change would have no effect on that. The unions are worried, however, that the perceived hassle of having to write a check to the union would be so great that some workers would opt out completely.

That may be. If so, it says more about how much the dropouts value the union.



Evacuate: What will you take?

Those of us who live in canyons of kindling are jumpy these days. California is in flames, the stories are ghastly, the pictures astonishing and terrifying. Cooking smells are alarming, as are helicopters and sirens. Nights are the worst. What if we're sleeping when the fire starts? What if my husband's snoring and the fan on high drown out the warnings and alarms? What if there are no warnings and alarms?

The first time we evacuated, in 2009, our canyon walls were popping and cracking like a campfire. I don't know why I was surprised that big fires sounded like big little fires. I remember standing in my living room, in a numb emergency-calm-trance-panic, looking at my everything. I knew I was supposed to take the computer and insurance documents and deeds and maybe birth certificates and what else? Passports? All that paperwork was theoretically grabbable, in a readily accessible envelope marked URGENT & ESSENTIAL GROWN-UP STUFF!

But what about the paintings by my friends and dead relatives? The kids' first drawings and their stories? The Mother's Day cards they gave me? The soup tureen I inherited from my grandma? My favorite coffee cup?

I called my kids and asked what three of their possessions they'd most like to see again: Musical instruments, and Diana, the sacred cow my daughter still sleeps with every night. I didn't need to be told about Diana. She'd hopped into the car with my first armload of photo albums. I had also mashed the guinea pig and the bunny into one small cage and put the turtle

AMY KOSS

in a pot for easy transport. Then our dog, Sweetie, and I drove to meet the rest of the family at a friend's house.

Sleeping there that night, all of us and our menagerie, I wondered what we do if all was lost in a roar and a flash. How long could we couch surf? What would we miss the most? The only upside — all that simplifying and tidying and downsizing I was supposed to be doing would have been handled. But what if the one or two artifacts left in the char were precisely the things I had meant to throw out?

We were lucky: We returned to an unharmed home, put the photo albums back on the shelf, released the beasts, replaced the essential grown-up stuff, and felt a little silly for having been so scared.

Since then we've had the occasional quickly extinguished brush fire or car fire in our canyon. We've smelled the smoke stench and cleaned up the ash-fall from infernos in neighboring foothills. One fire blocked our canyon exit and for several hours the only way out was on foot, but it was contained before we had to load our pets into our pockets and the essential envelope into a backpack.

A recent house guest from Minnesota flicked his cigarette butt to the ground and was surprised when I freaked out. Folks from rainy, snowy, wet places don't know — yet — from red flag warnings. They think fires are hard to light. A one-match campfire is

an accomplishment where they live. Not so for those of us who've gathered in a hospital parking lot to witness the spectacular destruction of acres of neighboring hillsides.

It will happen again, and what will I take? When I was a kid, I would have saved my Barbie. A bit older, my Carole King, James Taylor, Laura Nyro, Marvin Gaye and Joan Baez albums. Later still, my journals, notebooks and love letters. In '09, I recall surveying my living room for what I feared was the last time and deciding: photos.

But between then and now I have dismantled my parents' and my mother-in-law's homes, sorting and scattering their possessions. In doing so, I encountered several photo albums full of unidentified strangers. What was my responsibility to them? Were they to take up room in my car next time I had to flee? Would my children or my children's children one day wish I'd saved something from the flames other than photos of people they'd never met or barely remembered? What did my grandparents carry away from their shtetl when they escaped the pogroms?

Now, as this fire season rages, besides the old URGENT & ESSENTIAL envelope, it may come down to the pets, my antidepressants, eye-glasses, lip balm, phone and charger and library card. All else will or won't be intact in memory. And in the end, doesn't anything saved from a fire stand for all that is lost?

Amy Koss writes often for *The Los Angeles Times Opinion*.

When gas ran the world (and washed clothes)

For a while back in the early 20th century Americans were convinced they could accomplish just about any task by burning gasoline.

Or take anything they were already doing, and do it better.

These days, of course, we're trying to wean ourselves from petroleum, and the kilowatt-hour is gradually, but apparently inexorably, replacing the gallon as the key unit of measurement.

I was reminded recently of how enthusiastic we once were about using readily combustible liquids to make our lives easier, and indeed often hotter and smokier. The source is an exhibit at the wonderful Eastern Oregon Museum in Haines that features antique clothing irons and washers.

As outlandish as it might seem today, when even a product as benign as hand soap includes three paragraphs of dire warnings about its potentially lethal qualities, people once believed it was reasonable — in fact desirable — to employ internal combustion for all sorts of household jobs.

Our homes were almost literally awash in gas, kerosene and other fuels prominently featured in medi-



JAYSON JACOBY

cal texts dealing with skin-grafting techniques. We spewed, and inhaled, all sorts of noxious fumes and we reveled in the rich aroma of the hydrocarbon-powered future.

Women — who in that less enlightened era were expected to run their household with no assistance — apparently were gleeful at the prospect of ironing clothes with a device designed to intentionally produce lots of heat one inch from a tank of gasoline.

Nowadays this would spawn OSHA seminars and at least half a dozen class-action lawsuits.

The gas-powered clothes washer is another matter. It strikes me as the sort of thing a shade tree mechanic might cobble together once he finished gapping the spark plugs on the farm truck.

There is a certain logic to the contraption, to be sure.

If an internal combustion engine can propel cars at 100 mph and

lift airplanes into the sky, imagine what it will do with grease spots, grass stains and that unsightly and embarrassing ring around the collar.

The competition between gasoline and electricity was hardly an even match, of course, at least in the arena of household appliances.

Most of these don't need much in the way of portability. And in the case of larger items such as washers and driers, we'd just as soon leave them be once we've wrestled them into their assigned corner and gone off to doctor our bruised elbows and smashed fingers.

By the 1950s electricity was ubiquitous and we could happily tether our machines to their convenient cords, rather as we might confine a puppy prone to running off.

As far as hazards go I suppose the transition from gas to gigawatts was more equivocal.

We no longer had small explosive devices scattered about, certainly. But we had enlivened our homes with the possibility that junior, with his penchant for experimenting with kitchen utensils, would have a go at an outlet with butter knife.

When it comes to automobiles,

by contrast, gasoline has enjoyed a much longer reign over electricity.

The whole purpose of cars is mobility, obviously, and even a trip to the grocery store is likely to overwhelm the average home's combined length of extension cords.

Not to mention the tripping hazards and the potential to decapitate unwary cyclists.

Gasoline contains a great deal of power by weight and volume, such that an ordinary modern passenger car can carry enough fuel to travel 300 miles, and in some cases a great deal farther, without refilling the tank.

Moreover it can do so in relative safety.

(I'm well aware of the Pinto, having once driven one that was painted in an alarming shade that somewhat resembled congealed pea soup, but I specified that we're dealing here with modern cars, which the Pinto most assuredly is not. And since Ford, with the exception of the Mustang, apparently is giving up on assembling cars to concentrate even more heavily on SUVs and pickup trucks, the company isn't likely to rejuvenate its other, but unlamented, equine-linked model.)

And yet technology, though it sometimes pauses for decades, never stops altogether.

Battery technology, in particular, seems destined to do for personal transportation what the Rural Electrification Administration once did for gas-powered home appliances.

I accept this trend, and appreciate its potential environmental benefits, but not without a certain sense of loss.

A Tesla Model S is an elegant machine, but the anodyne hiss of its electric motor is utterly lacking in the visceral attractions of a finely tuned V-8 engine — the guttural purr of its mufflers, the heady scent of its exhaust, the precise metallic clatter of its valves.

Yet even as I lament the gradual demise of the gas-powered car I look back, my view guided by that exhibit at Haines.

What a giddy time it must have been to be alive in America, an era when doing the wash involved pouring gasoline and yanking on a pull cord, tasks today mainly restricted to cutting the grass.

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