

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

State pay study is misleading

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Some lies are cheap. Some are costly. Just before Christmas, the state delivered a present that will likely be costly for Oregonians.

The state twisted its new compensation study to conceal the costs of its employees. The study ignored some inconvenient truths about medical and pension benefits.

The state does a study every even-numbered year looking at the salaries and benefits of state employees. Does Oregon pay too much, too little or is it just right?

The study concludes total compensation for state employees was just about right. It was “on average 97.5 percent of market, a result that falls within the 95 to 105 percent range the state considers competitive,” according to The Oregonian. Salaries are at about 92 percent of market, but benefits make up for that.

“Essentially, the report shows we’re a market employer, especially when you take the benefits structure into account,” Mark Rasmussen, the state’s manager of classification and compensation told The Oregonian. “We’re within the range we should be.”

But what’s troubling is the way the study was manipulated. State employees may be due a pay cut. The study failed to include the profound difference between state employees and the labor market in out-of-pocket expenses for medical premiums. State workers pay \$5,439.48 less on average per year. That’s like a \$5,400 increase in pay that the state did not count.

The state study was misleading when it comes to retirement benefits. It didn’t include pension benefits for employees hired before Aug. 28, 2003.

Why not? Because that enables the state to ignore the higher costs of those earlier hires and how those costs get passed on to taxpayers — paying off the billions in the underfunded state pension system.

And here’s another neat trick the study pulled: It included the money the state makes off of bonds issued to help make payments on the retirement system but not the costs of the borrowing.

When Oregonians can’t trust state government to be honest about how it compensates employees, they should not trust it with Gov. Kate Brown’s plan for \$2 billion in new taxes.



Don't let nostalgia define you

“It’s very important to be one’s age,” poet W. H. Auden reminds us. “You get ideas you have to turn down — I’m sorry, no longer; I’m sorry, not yet.” 2019 is our age.

As we head into New Year’s Eve, which more than any other holiday asks us to distinguish between the no-longers and not-yets in our own lives, we should take advantage of the pause and consider what’s gone and what’s ahead.

Commentators more informed than I will provide lists, timetables and catalogs of the historical, political and social events that shaped 2018. They’ll give us a receipt for what we’ve packed into this sack of a year, ringing us out like the cashier at the grocery store as we ring in 2019.

Pundits will be discussing, I’m sure, that to which we collectively seem to be saying no longer: 2018 was, after all, a year when a lot of folks said “Enough” or “Time’s Up” or “Me Too” and the folks they said it about got caught, got time, didn’t get their \$120 million exit packages from CBS, or got appointed to the Supreme Court anyhow.

It was a year when the most gentle, patient and open-minded of us were no longer able to discuss anything without wanting to slap somebody. Tongue-biting became a medically recognized condition, one that could be treated only by restricting the daily intake of electronic media.

2018 became the year when strangers could no longer discuss a topic even as bland as the weather without raising



GINA BARRECA

their blood pressure because 1) If you believe in climate change, it now implies that you don’t believe in an omnipotent supreme being who, having created the earth, therefore regulates its temperature at will with a cosmic version of a pop-up poultry timer; 2) If you don’t believe in climate change, it implies you’re an anti-science dolt who listens to nothing but Charlie Daniels’ fiddle as the world burns.

But I’m trying to think more locally this New Year’s Eve.

I’m picturing Auden’s no-longers and not-yets as the two fixed points holding up the hammock of right-now. Or maybe they’re like the two top points of a sling-shot, and right-now is at the center.

Too outdoorsy?

How about this? 2019 is a locale — and so is every other year. Years are addresses where we once lived but to which can no longer return as residents. There’s no real harm in revisiting as long as you remember you’re only passing through. If you’re going back to remind yourself of what it was like, it can be fun. If you return to measure the differences, for better or worse, from whom you were when you lived there and who and where you are now, it can be interesting.

But it’s best to keep your windows rolled up and not pause for too long, be-

cause you don’t want to get stuck. If you sit in idle in front of your ex’s, or your high school theater, or your grandma’s house, or your college’s football field, or wherever you had your worst or best moments, you can end up stuck. And you don’t want to be one of those poor souls who needs to get towed away. You don’t want to stay in one old cul-du-sac for so long that they’ll send in heavy equipment or a flatbed.

But we all could do a memoir with addresses for each year. For example, when I was 16, I lived at 1973 Boulevard of Broken Dreams. We’ve recently been living on 2018 Privileged Drive in Political Chaos, but we spent the past weekend with friends from the old neighborhood, 1987 Barely Makes Rent and 1978 Not A Clue.

Even if we picture the year ahead as terrain, however, we still can’t set a GPS for 2019. Maps and guidebooks can give us general directions, but here’s all we really know: No-longer is in the rear-view mirror, and not-yet is somewhere down the road.

Right now, we are facing this moment, this day, this night. Let’s welcome the new year, cross the fresh threshold, turn up the music and make ourselves at home.

Gina Barreca is a board of trustees distinguished professor of English literature at the University of Connecticut and the author of 10 books. She can be reached at www.ginabarreca.com.

Letters to the editor

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Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald,
P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814
Email: news@bakercityherald.com

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.
U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.
U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.

GUEST EDITORIAL

Editorial from The New York Times:

Public health officials in New York and New Jersey are fighting a measles outbreak that has sickened dozens of people since November, most of them unvaccinated members of orthodox Jewish communities. The virus was traced to travelers from Israel, which is dealing with its own measles outbreak at the moment.

So far, the outbreak has been relatively small because, despite gaps in what’s known as community immunity, the overall national vaccination remains high enough to prevent wide-scale epidemics such as the one that raged through parts of Europe this year. But Americans should be alarmed, nevertheless. The next measles outbreak — and there will be one — could be much worse.

That’s because immunization rates among U.S. school-aged children are — incredibly — declining in certain states, thanks to unreasonably permissive immunization rules. All but three U.S. states allow parents to opt out of vaccination requirements on religious grounds, and 18 of them allow exemptions based on what they call personal belief, which is an even less strict standard. That’s become a problem in recent years as the gospel of ignorance being pushed by the “anti-vax” movement has gained traction across the country. Many vaccination opponents believe the medicine in vaccinations for measles,

mumps, rubella and other real diseases causes autism and various “vaccination injuries.” They have no science to back this up, only misinformed anecdotes that serve to scare gullible parents.

And they’re gaining ground. A study published earlier this year found that nonmedical exemptions have been on the rise in 12 of the 18 states that allow personal belief exemptions. The World Health Organization attributes a global spike in measles in the last two years to the spread of misinformation by those opposed to vaccinations.

The opponents of vaccination aren’t just pushing bad facts. Organizations such as the National Vaccination Information Center are behind legislative efforts to make it easier for parents to refuse to immunize their children. One example was a proposed bill in New York state that would have barred school officials from asking for supporting information when a parent claims a religious exemption. That bill didn’t pass.

Happily, California has gone the other way — tightening its immunization requirements. California is one of only three states that allow neither religious nor personal belief exemptions. A serious measles outbreak in 2014 that was traced to Disneyland brought attention to the state’s declining immunization rates, particularly in communities where the anti-vax fears had taken root.

That outbreak was scary, but it served

as a wake-up call to California lawmakers, who just months later banned all exemptions for vaccinations except those for medical reasons. Childhood immunization rates immediately rebounded statewide, reaching 95 percent for the first time in decade, including in school districts where rates had dropped the most precipitously.

Opposition to mandatory vaccination in California continues, however. When personal belief and religious exemptions were banned, medical exemptions increased. The rise is still too small to impact overall rates of protection, but it is a trend that bears watching.

It’s frustrating that some parents are more concerned about protecting their children from imaginary threats than from a well-documented killer. Measles is nothing to mess around with; it is extremely contagious, in part because sick people can infect others before they realize they are suffering from more than the sniffles. And it can be particularly deadly for unvaccinated adults. Before a vaccination was developed in the 1960s, about 2.6 million people died from measles every year, according to the World Health Organization.

No one has died yet in this particular East Coast outbreak. That’s a relief. But it shouldn’t take death to wake the public to the fact that the rhetoric behind anti-vaccination arguments has real and terrible consequences.