

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Don't enable secrecy in Salem

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Oregon Senate Republicans walked out of the state Legislature twice this year, in efforts to kill or change several bills. Democrats hope to limit the effectiveness of future walkouts by making them more difficult.

Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, wants to ask voters to replace the current quorum requirement in the state constitution. The requirement is two-thirds of members must be present. That could be changed, perhaps, to a simple majority.

But have legislators proven they deserve any change?

Switching to a simple majority would make it easier for a smaller group of legislators to be more secretive about what goes on in the Legislature than they already are.

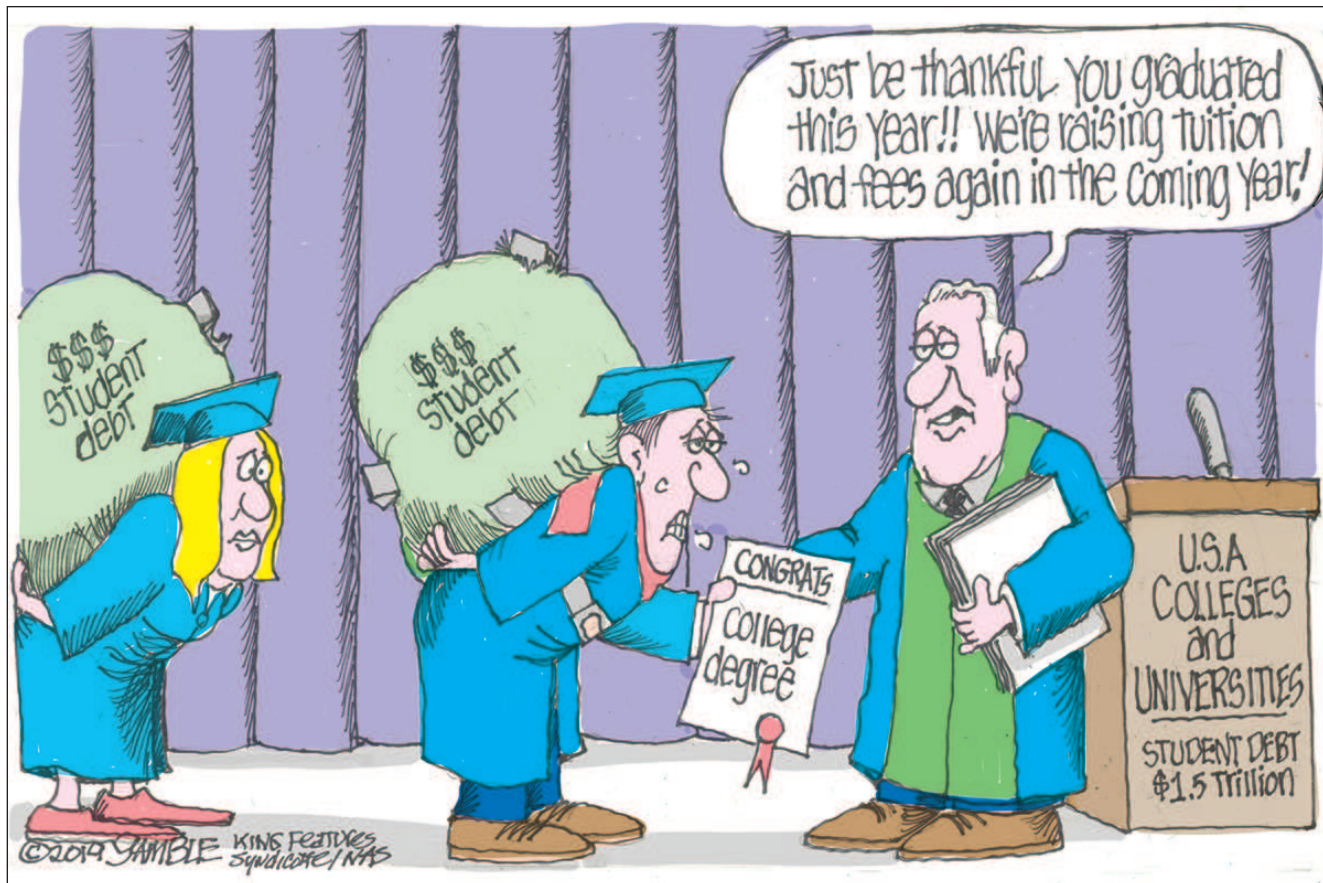
The Democratic majority went to Salem this year with muscles to flex, and so it did. A little less muscle and even a bit of willingness to compromise would have served both parties and the state better.

Consider cap-and-trade. As written, House Bill 2020 would have cost just about every adult Oregonian plenty. Fuel prices would have gone up. This in a state where, in rural Eastern Oregon, a car is a genuine necessity. In fact, says Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, had Senate Democrats been willing to deal on fuel taxes and include money to improve forest health, Republicans likely wouldn't have left in June.

In addition to a compromise/partisan problem, Salem has a transparency problem. The secrecy comes in many different forms. One change that should be made in Salem is the elimination of so-called committee bills and amendments. They allow important legislation to be introduced and changes in legislation to be made without clearly identifying who did it.

For instance, who killed an additional judge for Deschutes County? The position suddenly disappeared from the bill it was in without any clear accountability for the person or people who removed it.

Oregonians shouldn't consider granting legislators any changes they want to the state constitution until legislators begin showing a sincere commitment to transparency in the legislative process.



Celebrating a great tradition: It's time again to Let'er Buck

It's that time of year again.

Late summer, most county fairs are now over, the wheat harvest is wrapped up, and thoughts turn to back-to-school, football games, and the arrival of fall. Around these parts, it also means Round-Up time!

Having attended my very first Round-Up and PBR events last year, I now know what all the fuss is about.

Working the Rotary beer sales booth one day last year, I had the opportunity to do some serious people watching in between pours. Of course, I saw a large contingent of what I would estimate to be veteran Round-Up/Rodeo goers. They wear their boots and hats with an easy style that makes it clear that this is their frequent attire.

Other, shall we say, dudes and dudettes, appear in Western attire as well, but the newness of their embroidered jeans, the immaculate and crisply blocked hats, and the finely polished boots seem to give away that this was not a way of life, but rather an attempt to blend in. I myself own a clean straw hat that typically only makes it off the rack and atop my cranium just a few times a year, so I would be considered part of this "all hat and no cattle" crowd.

But I was also pleasantly surprised to spot several groups of what I would



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call Portland-style hipsters. Some might say, city slickers. The guys, in their 20s-30s, sported finely quaffed hipster beards, pork-pie hats, tight fitting rolled up jeans and the girls wore even tighter jeans, fashion boots (not Western) and whatever made one comfortable on a warm, sunny afternoon. I gathered that this was their typical uniform and they did not seem the least bit self-conscious or concerned about being out of place.

It's an interesting development and a good thing. Round-Up has grown beyond just an East Oregon event, or even a purely rural northwest event. It's now on people's bucket lists from all walks of life. As City of Pendleton Convention Center Director (and a regular Round-Up aficionado from way back) Pat Beard told me recently, Round-Up — now celebrating its 109th year — is seen as a nationally acclaimed spectacle and genuine cultural happening that must be experienced.

For one week out of the year, Pendleton may well be the hippest and happiest place to be in all of Oregon, if not the Northwest. The event's widespread

popularity has grown tremendously over the past several years.

Early ticket sales for this year's edition appear to confirm that positive trend. By almost every measure (attendance, concession and souvenir sales) the event is still growing. Hotels and campsites between Hermiston and La Grande will once again be fully occupied, restaurants and watering holes will be jammed, and hopefully, our local mom and pop stores will benefit from the additional traffic (and wallets) walking around town.

Included in today's newspaper, you'll see that we have inserted a complimentary copy of the 2019 Round-Up magazine with the theme, "People of Round-Up." As most locals know, it takes a virtual army of volunteers to pull off every facet of Round-Up, Happy Canyon, PBR, the Main Street Cowboys carnival, parades, concerts and more. We've tried to capture as much of that as we can in this 80-page volume.

We hope you enjoy these stories and images.

Now, let's all get ready to "Let'er Buck!"

Chris Rush is the regional publisher for the EO Media Group, which owns the Baker City Herald.

A new appreciation for police

It was a fake gun. It was a pretend criminal. But my anguish after shooting him was real.

It wasn't pulling the trigger of the propane-powered high-tech cap gun that bothered me. I'd already had to reluctantly do the same to two other officers posing as antagonists Friday in a three-part officer-involved shooting simulation at the Kansas City Police Department's Regional Police Academy.

No, the more disturbing part of the third shooting scenario they put me in was the fact that my "aggressor" had merely pointed a wallet at me.

Granted, it was in a dark room and the actor-assailant, who had just risen from a hiding place beside a bed, reached down and wielded the item suddenly. And I'd just been through two other scenarios in which I had no choice but to shoot in self-defense, so I was admittedly a little jumpy. I also took some solace from the fact that six of the nine of us ordinary citizens who experienced the one-at-a-time simulation did, in fact, shoot the actor with the wallet.

But still. It was a billfold, for Pete's sake. I felt awful, even with the chance to smile, shake hands and walk out with the guy. It was further distressing to imagine what would happen if I'd really been a cop and had really shot an unarmed man.

It absolutely could have happened to Kansas City Detective Paul Tilgels. The scenario we'd just been exposed to was based on an actual incident he once

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faced — except that something made him pause and not shoot.

Tilgels could've been killed himself. But the foolish fugitive whose life Tilgels saved that day had no idea how close he came to dying.

I could certainly tell him.

To put yourself in a police officer's shoes and in the line of fire, even within the safe confines of a simulation, is intimidating, humbling and eye-opening. It makes you realize how quickly officers must make life-and-death decisions. And it made me understand, if only a smidgen, how agonizing an officer's decision to pull the trigger is.

In fact, Kansas City Police Chief Rick Smith says his department loses more anguished officers to resignation or retirement after having shot someone than he does officers who get shot themselves.

Bad guys and heels often force the issue, sometimes on purpose because they're too cowardly or thoughtless to kill themselves.

Detective Tilgels' fateful but nonfatal encounter also makes you wonder: How many officer-involved nonshootings are there? How many lives and bullets and investigations and condemnations are saved by officers who do the insanely difficult in the blink of an eye and defuse an explosive confrontation?

We hear a lot about officer-involved shootings, as well we should. It's vital to the public trust of law enforcement and the credibility of officers that their conduct be scrutinized. But the truth is, we'll never know how many shootings are avoided, how many tragedies averted by quick-thinking — and sometimes slower-acting — officers. At their own peril, no less.

Tilgels credits his instinctive, life-saving action to the kind of police academy simulations I only tasted last week, which are exponentially more intense for aspiring officers.

Most defusing of situations is verbal, of course. Retired officer Bill Conroy, now a civilian firearms instructor at the academy, says 99% of policing is communicating, most often with folks who aren't necessarily crackjack communicators themselves. Yet the academy has seen sharply declining communication skills among today's young recruits, thanks to lives immersed in smartphones and tiny bursts of texted exchanges.

That's starkly ominous. As I've witnessed firsthand, safe streets, especially in today's incendiary environment, require law enforcement officers with superb law enforcement skills.

As well as a public that has a modicum of understanding of what officers go through.

Michael Ryan is a columnist for the Kansas City Star.

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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