

OUR VIEW

PERS
problems
persisting

You don't have to be an accountant to know Oregon's Public Employees Retirement System is in trouble. School teachers, police officers and other government employees deserve good retirement plans. But it has to be a plan the state can afford.

Oregon's PERS moved from no liability in 2007 to \$17 billion in unfunded liability in 2017. Then it got worse. The actuary for the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System estimated it had grown to \$26 billion at the beginning of this year. A new report from the Oregon Secretary of State's Office on PERS will not put your mind at ease.

There is some good news. Long-term projections show the system will meet its funding objectives. The bad news could be getting between here and there.

The major problem for PERS has been that its investments have not been performing as well as expected. That has an unfortunate ripple effect throughout the state. It means less money goes into the classroom, to fix roads and for all the many other things government entities do, because it must instead be diverted to fund PERS. For instance, Bend-La Pine Schools had to dedicate about 18% of payroll to PERS for some employees for the previous two-year rate period. It's now at 23% for that same group of employees. That is expected to grow.

The new report zeros in on the investment assumptions that the PERS board has been making. The board makes the assumption that it will earn 7.2%. That may well be too high. And, in turn, that would lead to even higher contributions into PERS.

It was not a subject of the report, but what was refreshing about the 2019 Legislature is that it did pass some PERS reforms aimed at lowering future liability. For instance, it required cost sharing by public employees. Public employees would have a small percentage of their salaries diverted into paying down PERS debt. That is something that has long been a goal of people looking to reform PERS.

The Legislature also did some fiddling with the numbers. If the PERS shortfall was the equivalent of a car loan, the Legislature stretched out the payments. It's like the Legislature turned to Oregon's children and said: You pay PERS off.

Oregon public employee unions filed a lawsuit in August to overturn the cost sharing part of the reforms. We don't know what the courts will say about that case. Oregonians may well be left with a rising unfunded liability exacerbated by inflated assumptions about investments and more of the costs being passed on to the next generation. That's not a win for anybody.

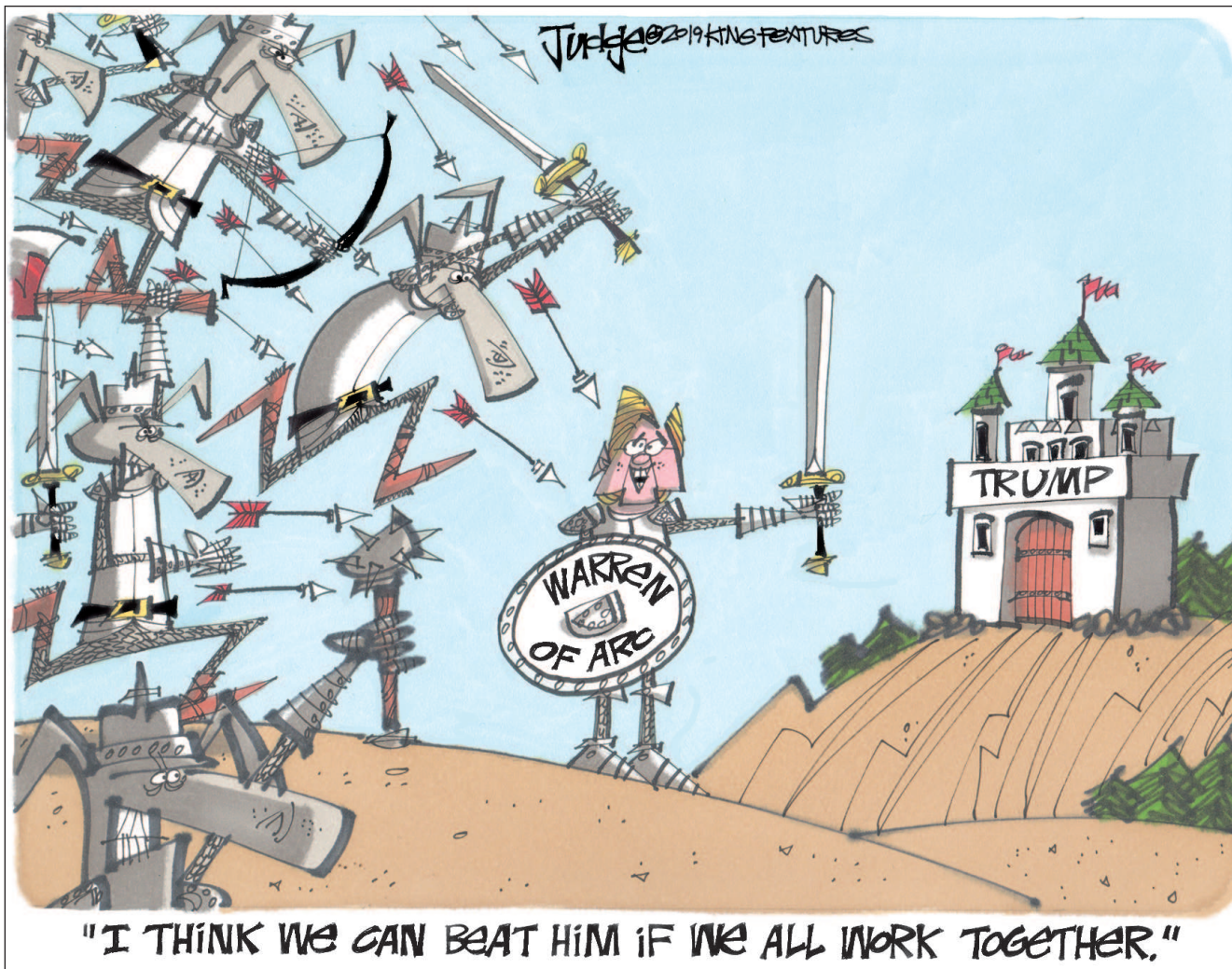
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"I THINK WE CAN BEAT HIM IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER."

Why I abandoned the GOP

With so much happening in the world, you probably don't want to read about my own personal dark night of the soul.

But at the risk of sounding narcissistic, I do think there is some value in examining why a person like me would feel compelled to leave the Republican Party.

It was only four years ago that I proudly, defiantly and publicly abandoned the Democrats. I'd left them in spirit many years before, mostly because of their insistence on treating abortion rights as fundamental. Nevertheless, apathy kept me from changing my registration for several years longer than I probably should have.

In 2016, John Kasich was my escape hatch. Changing my registration just in time for the Pennsylvania presidential primary gave me the sense that even if he didn't win the nomination, I was able to cast my vote for a genuinely pro-life candidate: pro-child, pro-mother, pro-worker, pro-immigrant, pro-faith. He spoke a language I understood, a language that had become mangled in the mouths of Democrats.

Watching the debates last week, I heard that confused rhetoric again, with the candidates all declaring their horror at the carnage of gun violence but completely at peace with legalized abortion. If I needed any reminder of why I stopped supporting the Democratic Party, it was right there on that

CHRISTINE M.
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stage.

But the comfort and fellowship I thought I'd found in the GOP was shattered when President Trump took a phone call from Turkey's president and decided to withdraw our troops from Syria, abandoning our Kurdish allies. While some GOP lawmakers spouted off righteous indignation and some invoked real pushback, for me, it was too little, much too late. The abandonment of the Kurds and the almost cavalier attitude of some of my Trump-supporting acquaintances was a wake-up call that this was no longer a party I wanted to belong to.

This was supposed to be the party that valued our relationship with NATO, the party of a strong national defense, the party that respected our military. This was supposed to be the party that didn't take a knee when the National Anthem was played, that wasn't embarrassed by overt expressions of patriotism.

My angry feelings toward the Republican Party were further compounded last week when two agencies of the federal government — ICE and the FBI — threatened to deport one of my immigration clients. My client has spent the last few years provid-

ing valuable information to them in exchange for being allowed to remain in the United States — but now that the investigation has closed, he's been taken into custody and it is likely that he'll be deported.

I believe strongly in loyalty. It's everything to me. That's why I can't get behind a Republican Party that is disloyal to everyone from our Kurdish allies, who supported us in the Middle East, to my client, who risked a lot to help America and was repaid by being sent to a detention center.

I've had enough. I will never return to the Democratic Party, because of how they embrace abortion, play games with identity politics, and think that gender is a matter of opinion. But I no longer feel that the Republican Party represents my morals.

This is my own Declaration of "Independent." Last week, I registered as an Independent. I will never again be a Democrat, particularly not in a city where that party is filled with people like Larry Krasner and Jim Kenney. Their principles are anathema to me. But the GOP abandoned the principles I loved.

And so, I abandoned them.

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OTHER VIEWS

Democrats risk losing focus on 2020

Editorial from Bloomberg News:

At a debate last Tuesday night in Ohio, 12 Democratic candidates discussed who was best able to defeat President Donald Trump in November 2020. Meanwhile, back in Washington, House Democrats continued an impeachment inquiry that seems likely to recommend that Trump should be removed from office before the election even gets close.

A certain tension between the party's presidential wing and its congressional wing is inevitable. Candidates for president need to present a broad yet coherent vision of the future — one that's buttressed by a range of policy prescriptions and wrapped up in a message that's both incisive and inclusive. (The record up to now on that is mixed.) House impeachment investigators are engaged in a very different business. They must drill down into the details of White House malfeasance, and be singularly focused on holding a wayward president accountable for wrongdoing.

Although these two pursuits are necessarily distinct, it's important that they should not be at odds. The most obvious danger is that a mismanaged impeachment inquiry might worsen the party's electoral prospects next year. The best way to guard against that is for each effort to take account of wider political currents and, above all, command the

confidence of Americans outside the Democratic Party's base.

So far, both wings are holding up well. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is a partisan leader, but she has proved a cautious and reluctant impeacher, resisting calls to proceed until the news of the president's improper dealings with the new president of Ukraine left her no choice. Since the inquiry began, she has wisely grounded the effort in constitutional imperative and congressional duty. Despite the administration's persistent defiance of congressional authority, the flow of information has been steady and damning.

Details of the shadow foreign policy run by Rudolph Giuliani, the president's personal lawyer, are only the latest in a series of remarkable improprieties now coming to light. These and much else demand further investigation. On Tuesday, Giuliani said he would ignore a congressional subpoena demanding that he turn over documents. The House should use all the tools at its disposal to force compliance.

It should also remember that the more clinical and less partisan these investigations appear to the public, the more likely they are to convince skeptics — and that's crucial. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and his Republican colleagues are unlikely to join

in holding Trump to account unless a sizable portion of Republican voters and Republican-leaning independents are inclined to abandon the president first.

If the inquiry is perceived as cynical and unprincipled, it will not only fail in its own right but also harm the Democrats' electoral prospects next year. Granted, the presidential hustings are inherently partisan: Candidates, after all, are appealing to fellow partisans to earn the nomination of their party. Yet there was encouraging evidence on the stage Tuesday night that most of the Democrats running for president also understand that partisanship is too pinched a response to a nation in crisis. Compared with previous debates, there was a greater — though not yet sufficient — emphasis on collegiality, and fewer efforts to ambush or embarrass rivals.

With public trust low, and many information sources polluted with misinformation, it's going to take patience, persistence and a good strong measure of respect for dissenting views to reach some of the men and women whose support Democrats will need. To defeat Trump — either sooner, through congressional action, or later, in a presidential election — Democrats should remain mindful of what matters, and of the people they need to persuade.