

OUR VIEW

Time to call
Legislature

There is a growing probability that Gov. Kate Brown will call a special session of the Oregon Legislature within the next few weeks to deal with expected budget shortfalls created by the COVID-19 virus outbreak.

Brown should call the special session and shouldn't wait very long to do so.

That's because the state is beginning to stagger after weeks of closed businesses and high unemployment. Already, Brown has asked state agencies to create a plan to slash their budgets by 17%. And earlier this week state economists predicted the state will be facing a \$3 billion shortfall in its budget.

Oregon faces another challenge — the state constitution demands a balanced budget.

Unlike the federal government, Oregon can't put everything on a virtual credit card and let the future take care of itself.

That creates steep challenges for lawmakers and their jobs during the special session will be crucial. What simply cannot happen is a divergence away from the budget woes and how to deal with COVID-19 into yet another series of legislative battles over issues tied to party dogma.

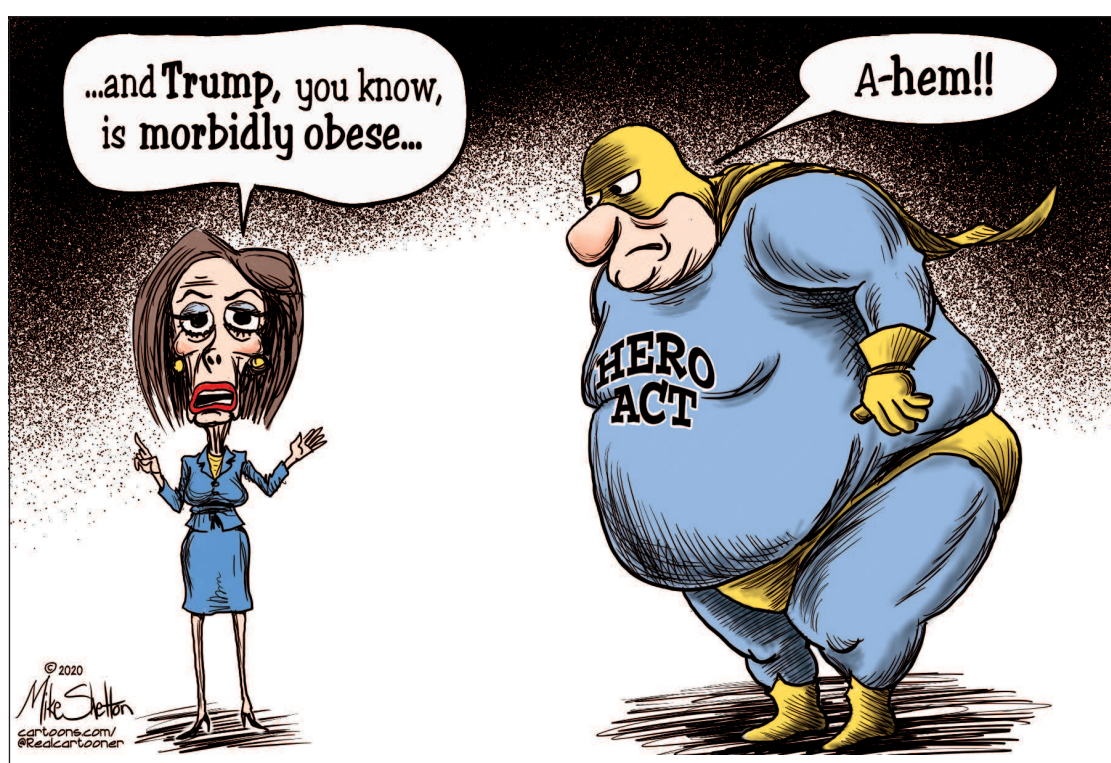
We don't have the time now to watch the special session descend into chaos because a group of lawmakers suddenly decide to resurrect some flashpoint issue from the past. The only goal must be to face the budget shortfall and balance the budget, and then get back to dealing with the virus outbreak.

Anything less will be a betrayal of voters. Party leaders and the governor need to meet before the special session and craft an agreement that narrowly defines what the special session will tackle. That agreement must be clear and precise and include provisions that there will be no deviation from the pressing matter — the state budget — at hand. Oregon lawmakers no longer have the privilege of wasting away days on the legislative time clock fighting over pie-in-the-sky, New Age political initiatives. Lawmakers can do that later. Policy issues that are not related to the state budget and the COVID-19 outbreak should be jettisoned.

As is always the case, elected leaders from both parties will have an opportunity to do some good work if a special session is called. They will be presented with an opportunity to face a serious set of problems, work on them together and solve them.

Wasting time in any other fashion is simply that — wasting time. Time the state does not have.

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Your views

Wish there were more
dine-in options in Baker

When will Baker reopen? It's been a week and most restaurants are still closed except for takeout. I refuse to order takeout from a dine-in restaurant, I mean

what's the point, right?

I notice all the local restaurants have a "shop local, support local" signs but still are not open. So I can't support what won't open.

A group of neighbors and friends now go to Boise to shop

and dine and we've learned to enjoy the day out once a week.

Glad Idaho has open shops and great restaurants for us to dine in.

Thomas Wilcoxson
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from The Dallas Morning News:

The next two weeks, which include Memorial Day, will be a test of our resolve to gather safely.

Gov. Greg Abbott is right to widen reopening, but its success depends on Texans' common sense.

Most businesses in Texas have the go-ahead to reopen, albeit with restrictions. Families and friends are also sure to gather in larger numbers on Memorial Day for the first time in weeks.

Abbott deserves praise for navigating a difficult course through the medical and economic challenges posed by the coronavirus. Office buildings can reopen if businesses operate with no more than 25% of their workers in the office and practice social distancing protocols. Child care is back, a necessity for working parents and a dry run for the challenges schools will face.

Restaurants will be allowed to increase to 50% capacity. Youth sports competitions and camps can resume by the end of this month, and summer school can begin on June 1.

Although this sounds like a return to normal life, it isn't, at least not yet. There is much about this return to a more normal existence that we can't predict. The coronavirus is still a threat. We should wear masks, sanitize surfaces, socially dis-

ance and take other precautions to protect each other. And older people with underlying health conditions should be especially careful.

Statewide, a declining infection percentage supports the governor's decision to gradually loosen the reins. Challenges will differ from county to county, city to city and neighborhood to neighborhood. How we deal with those challenges will determine the next steps.

Key to this is close cooperation between state and local governments. More diagnostic testing and contact tracing, with special focus on potential hot spots, is required to keep the state ahead of the virus. This is good public health policy and a way to build public confidence in the future.

It is important for us to remember that Abbott's orders establish the minimum statewide requirements for reopening the economy. All of us have sacrificed in some way to keep ourselves and our neighbors safe, and it may be quite awhile before we can expect to enjoy the Texas we knew in the way we knew it before the coronavirus so dramatically changed our lives.

The best way to make sure that our sacrifices haven't been in vain is to do all we can to protect those gains.

Skyjackers actually had a 'golden age' in the US

I grew up in Western Oregon during the 1970s and '80s, which means I also grew up knowing who D.B. Cooper was.

In a manner of speaking, anyway.

To be precise, the only people who actually know D.B. Cooper's true identity are the man himself and, possibly, some of his friends and relatives.

(And Cooper very well might be dead.)

Nearly half a century has passed since a man in a business suit hijacked a 727 flight from Portland to Seattle and then parachuted from the airliner over Southwestern Washington the day before Thanksgiving 1971, with \$200,000 in \$20 bills strapped to his body. Yet even after all that time, Cooper's actual identity, and what became of him, persist as one of the great mysteries in America's crime annals.

(The skyjacker actually bought his ticket using the name "Dan Cooper," but a garbled phone call led to his being identified in an early media report as "D.B." and "D.B." he remains.)

Thirty years after Cooper's caper, America was again transfixed by skyjacking.

The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were quite different, of course, having in common only the commandeering of commercial aircraft.

In the Cooper case nobody, except possibly Cooper himself, was killed.

Yet aside from these two episodes, separated by more than a generation, I wonder whether many Americans know much about the history of skyjackings in their



**JAYSON
JACOBY**

country. In particular I wonder whether any significant number of my compatriots realizes that there were a few periods when airliners were hijacked more often than banks were robbed.

I certainly did not.

Thanks to my ignorance, I was predisposed to be captivated by Brendan I. Koerner's 2013 book, "The Skies Belong To Us: Love and Terror in the Golden Age of Hijacking."

I read the Baker County Library's copy a few years ago and found it an unusually compelling work of true crime, a genre that is among my favorites. When I saw a nearly pristine hardcover earlier this year at the Library's winter book sale — this being in the halcyon, pre-pandemic period — I could hardly pass up the \$1 bargain.

My second reading — and no good book deserves only a single go-through — both refreshed my appreciation for Koerner's narrative skill and further piqued my interest in a topic that seems to me curiously underrecognized.

Considering how many tens of millions of us are so accustomed to X-ray screening and other airport security measures that we scarcely think of the procedures except as annoyances, it strikes me as passing strange that the rashes of skyjackings Koerner writes about

aren't more deeply ingrained in our history.

For a nation that will forever be scarred by memories of 9/11, the reality that at times in the past airliners were hijacked in America's skies almost literally on a weekly basis — and on a few occasions more than one in a single day — seems like rather more than a footnote.

If nothing else, because many of the skyjackers from the 1960s and '70s whom Koerner writes about were motivated at least in part by their opposition to the Vietnam War, I would have thought their actions would join campus protests and urban riots as symbols of that raucous era.

But I do not believe this is the case.

Certainly the skyjacking that dominates "The Skies Belong To Us" — the June 3, 1972, crime perpetrated by Roger Holder, a disgruntled Vietnam veteran, and Cathy Kerkow, who grew up in Coos Bay — is nothing like as well-known as, to name just two incidents, the 1968 Chicago riots or the Rolling Stones' disastrous free concert at Altamont, California, in 1969.

Part of the explanation is obvious enough — no one died in the skyjacking that Holder and Kerkow pulled off.

And although neither of the pair dominates as Cooper did — indeed, both government officials and the media knew their final destination was Algiers, Algeria — Holder didn't return to the United States for 14 years, having spent most of the intervening time in France.

Kerkow remains a fugitive, her whereabouts, and even whether she's still alive, unknown. Kerkow, who would be 68, is still wanted by the FBI for air piracy.

If somebody hijacked an airliner today, I feel certain that, in the absence of a war or an impeachment, the crime would be the lead news story even if nobody was hurt.

This level of publicity would reflect both the extreme rarity of skyjacking in the past two decades and the lingering effects of 9/11.

Yet consider this excerpt from "The Skies Belong To Us" — "Between 1961, when the first plane was seized in American airspace, and 1972 ... 159 commercial flights were hijacked in the United States. All but a fraction of those hijackings took place during the last five years of that frenetic era, often at a clip of one or more per week. There were, in fact, many days when two planes were hijacked simultaneously, strictly by coincidence."

This stunning statistic prompts the obvious question of how the skyjacking epidemic could continue so long when we know that security measures such as X-raying baggage — technology available during most of that era — can prevent most hijackings.

Koerner answers that question in great detail.

I was especially fascinated to learn that in 1972, the peak year of what Koerner brands the "Golden Age of Hijacking," when more than 30 planes were taken over, U.S. Sen. Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania introduced a bill to require airlines to mandate every passenger walk

through a metal detector.

The Senate passed an amended version of Schweiker's bill 75-1.

But after intense lobbying by the airlines, which argued that mandatory screening of passengers wasn't feasible, the bill died in the House of Representatives.

The airlines' reluctance to endorse a law designed to protect their customers' lives might sound contrary to the industry's interests but it's easily enough explained — the number of passengers continued to rise despite the increasing odds that a person's flight to, say, Seattle or San Francisco would instead land in Havana or Algiers.

Koerner's book is a treasure both as a work of history and of true crime. But I think its greatest contribution is to highlight the stark changes, over a relatively modest period, in an activity — commercial air travel — that is authentically American in much the same way that freeways and shopping malls are.

I suspect almost any reader would find it fascinating that flying, an intensely regulated and regimented way to travel, was, little more than a generation ago, so loosely controlled that most anybody with a pistol or a road flare, or even a briefcase that allegedly contained a bomb, could turn a 747, at least for a while, into his own private Air Force One.

And I used to think it was amazing that airline passengers were allowed to smoke cigarettes.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.