

OUR VIEW

Commit to
a truly open
government

Here's an editorial for the people who work in Oregon government. They can be excused for not getting as wound up about government transparency as journalists or other members of the public do.

But Oregon governments, from the governor's office down to library boards, are supposed to be transparent. They are in a number of ways. But they don't always put their heart into it. Sometimes they don't follow the law. So when one part of Oregon government calls out another part of Oregon government for not being transparent, we pay attention.

The Oregon Secretary of State's Office recently released a follow-up to an audit it did in 2019. That original report encouraged the state — and in particular the state's Department of Administrative Services, or DAS — to enhance the transparency in the state's budget.

If it's not easy to find out where the state gets its money or how it spends it, that's a problem.

The department did implement a number of recommended changes since that 2019 audit. It worked with the Legislature to allow additional money to beef up the state's transparency website. And it hired a consultant to compare what Oregon does against some of the best practices of other states. That's good.

But DAS is not monitoring a practice of state agencies to use non-budgeted positions. And it's not using its position on the Transparency Oregon Advisory Commission to encourage the commission meet regularly and release transparency reports required by law in a timely manner, the report said.

For instance, there's a requirement in state law that the commission shall report to the Legislature on completed improvements to the transparency website and ways to improve it further by Feb. 15 of each odd-numbered year. The Legislative Fiscal Office missed that deadline in 2019. It apparently has missed it again this year. At least, we couldn't find it on the office's website.

EO Media Group recently emailed the two members of the Legislative Fiscal Office assigned to the commission to ask what was going on. No response.

The impact of the pandemic on state staff could have certainly been a reason. There could be other parts of a heavy workload that they chose to prioritize. It would be nice, though, if they were transparent about why they aren't filling a transparency obligation required by state law.

One other thing struck us about the way the Department of Administrative Services — which it is important to note is overseen by Gov. Kate Brown — responded to the audit. DAS chose to respond to some of the audit recommendations with what state auditors called "extraneous responses." DAS declined to even disagree or agree with some of the audit recommendations.

Do some employees at DAS not have a commitment to transparency in their heart? Is Gov. Brown going to insist they act like they do?

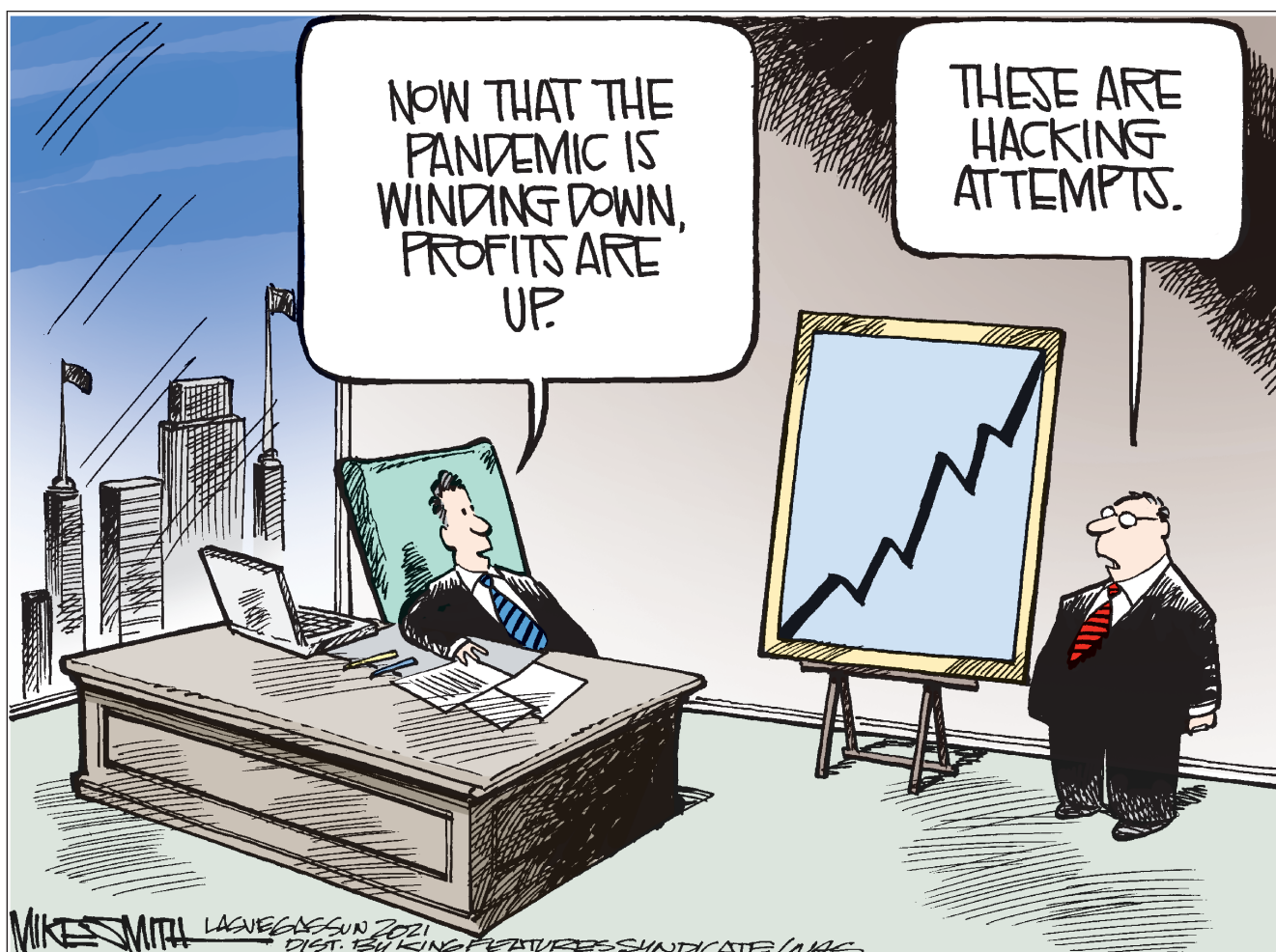
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Biden's budget batters the Army

By Thomas Spoehr

No wonder the Biden administration chose to release their 2022 budget just before a long holiday weekend. It's a common Washington practice for releasing news that officials hope will go unnoticed.

Biden's defense budget offers little to improve any of the uniformed services, but it would absolutely devastate the readiness of the U.S. Army.

The Army's 2022 budget needed to be \$180 billion just to keep pace with inflation. The Biden budget offers only \$173 billion, a loss of \$7 billion in purchasing power.

It's a budget calculated to take the Army back to the final years of the Obama administration, when readiness was miserable. After years of overuse and inadequate defense funding, Vice Chief Gen. Dan Allyn informed Congress in February 2016 that only three of the Army's 58 brigade combat teams were fit to go to war.

Biden's budget would cut crucial combat training, curtail needed end-strength growth and slash equipment programs. If all of this were to go through, it would reduce soldiers and units to the poor readiness levels of 2016, if not worse.

No element of the Army escapes unscathed.

Training for brigade combat teams, the Army's primary combat force, is cut by 30 percent. Army leadership tries hard to put a positive spin on this, stating they intend to focus training on lower echelons such as companies, instead of brigades, but the result will be inevitable — fewer units ready when the nation needs them.

Similarly combat training center rotations — the crown jewel in the Army's training program — are cut from 26 in 2021 to 17 in 2022 (15 Regular Army and 2 National Guard). The Defender-series of joint exercises with NATO allies, which the Army considers to be a tremendous success, is slashed by \$339 million. This will harm readiness and coordination among our European partners.

Not just training gets the ax. Most equipment programs are either put on life support or just cut outright. The Blackhawk, Apache, and Chinook helicopter modernization programs are all slashed, cut by at least a third. While most civilians probably wouldn't opt to ride in an older model helicopter, it looks like soldiers won't get that choice.

Procurement of key platforms like the armored Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, which replaces the unsurvivable HMMWV, are throttled way back to about 1,200 per year in 2022. At that anemic rate, the Army will need until 2055 to retire the HMMWV from its ranks. By then it will be 75 years old, the equivalent of driving the 1946 Willys CJ-2A jeep today.

The replacement for the venerable 1960s era M113 armored personnel carrier was supposed to be the Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle. After years of fits and starts, it is finally ready for mass production, yet the Biden budget proposes buying none in 2022. For the foreseeable future, then, soldiers will be forced to operate a vehicle their grandfathers used in Vietnam.

When he was Army chief of staff, Gen. Mark Milley frequently stated the

Army was too small and the regular Army needed to grow to a size of at least 500,000. Many experts, including the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission (which included the current deputy secretary of defense and Pentagon comptroller) agreed, saying, "Simply put, the United States needs a larger force than it has today if it is to meet the objectives of the strategy." But Biden's budget puts all efforts to grow the military on hold. In fact, it proposes cutting the overall force by almost 5,000.

All these cuts stand in sharp contrast to the average increase of 16 percent that the Biden administration proposes for every federal department other than Defense and Homeland Security — the two departments responsible for America's national security. How odd that those two should be targeted for what are effectively net decreases in spending.

America's adversaries are rapidly increasing and modernizing their military capabilities. They are also doing their utmost to intimidate their neighbors: think Vladimir Putin in Ukraine and Xi Jinping in the South China Sea. Meanwhile, the Biden administration proposes dangerous cuts to military readiness.

This is no way to keep us safe. Fortunately, Congress will get the final word on this budget. Let's hope they think it through better than the White House has.

A retired U.S. Army Lt. General, Thomas Spoehr is the director of The Heritage Foundation's Center for National Defense.

OTHER VIEWS

Those collecting unemployment
benefits should be looking for work

Editorial from The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:

Businesses are scrambling to fill job vacancies as the country continues to reopen from the coronavirus pandemic, but the reality is that there simply are not enough people looking for work. The state of Pennsylvania made the right move to pull back on the relaxed standards for unemployment benefits and to reinstate the requirement that those collecting benefits must be actively looking for work.

When the pandemic began more than a year ago, Pennsylvania relaxed some of its rules related to unemployment compensation. In addition to suspending the "waiting week" in which claimants did not receive benefits during their first week of unemployment, the state also lifted its work search and work registration requirements. Those collecting unemployment compensation during the past year have not been required to prove that they applied or searched for a new job.

With most restrictions on businesses now being lifted as more people are vaccinated, and since plenty of jobs are available, the state Department of Labor and Industry announced that starting in July the job search requirements will once again be in effect. It's a decision that makes sense.

If businesses are to rebound from more than a year of upheaval and uncertainty, they will need to fill the millions of job openings across the country. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in March the number of job openings nationwide reached a high of 8.1 million, while the number of new hires remained flat at about 6 million. The gap of some 2 million between job openings and hires was the largest margin on record.

Businesses in many sectors — notably the restaurant and hospitality industry as well as retail — are offering bonuses and perks to try to fill job openings that have caused them in some cases to reduce operating hours

because of limited staff. They should also remember the concept of supply and demand and consider a hike in hourly wage rates to attract prospective employees. In the end, it is about what the market will bear.

Some say the shortage of workers is linked directly to the pandemic-related extension in the unemployment compensation coverage period, as well as to the payout of "extra" unemployment benefits that amount to about \$300 a week. But there was a labor shortage even before the pandemic.

Unemployment compensation is designed as a stopgap to help individuals and families stay afloat financially while they recover from a job loss. Recovering from a job loss, over the long term, means (for most people) finding a new job. With businesses reopening and the economy inching back toward something resembling normal, state officials are right to once again require those collecting unemployment benefits to actively search for work.