

## EDITORIAL

## State needs to be held accountable

These days, it seems that whenever a state program goes awry, leaders call for an audit. The unemployment debacle that delayed payments to thousands of laid-off workers for much of 2020? Check. The months-long delay in issuing rental assistance? Check again.

So, credit Secretary of State Shemia Fagan for thinking proactively. Last month, she released a “systemic risk report” that outlines threats to the effectiveness of new K-12 educational investments and strategies set forth in the 2019 Student Success Act and the 2016 passage of Measure 98. Billed as the first of its kind, the report from Fagan’s auditing division synthesizes the findings of six previous K-12 audits and urged leaders to guard against the weak scrutiny, lack of data-based guidance, funding instability and ever-changing ambitions that have plagued state oversight of education.

The hope, she told legislators last week, is that reminding leaders now of such known risks and offering solutions will help the state “stay on course toward that north star that we all share of improving the lives of our students and our schools.”

It’s a valuable message that legislators, educators and Oregon’s next governor must hear. With \$1 billion in additional revenue flowing in each year from a new corporate activities tax, the ability to significantly boost the quality of public education is within reach.

But Oregon risks squandering this opportunity if leaders — from local districts through state government — fail to make accountability a daily commitment, rather than something that comes only after a disaster occurs.

The risk report offers several recommendations for how to shore up weak spots. Among them: improve and expand data collection to better track student progress; check in on the Department of Education’s monitoring of district performance and implementation of grant-funded programs; require more transparent reporting of challenges standing in the way of school improvement; strengthen the agency’s enforcement of state standards on districts, such as diploma requirements and academic content expectations; support the education department in developing a comprehensive approach for improving K-12 education and clarifying or strengthening the education department’s authority in statute.

The report also gets at the longstanding tension between oversight from Salem and local control of school districts. Even though the vast majority of districts’ funding comes from state revenue, the education department has hesitated to take a stronger hand in guiding or demanding more from districts, even with student outcomes hanging in the balance.

Changing this dynamic will take commitment from the governor, who serves as Oregon’s superintendent of public instruction and appoints the education department head, and legislators who must assist in stabilizing education and keeping focused on achieving goals.

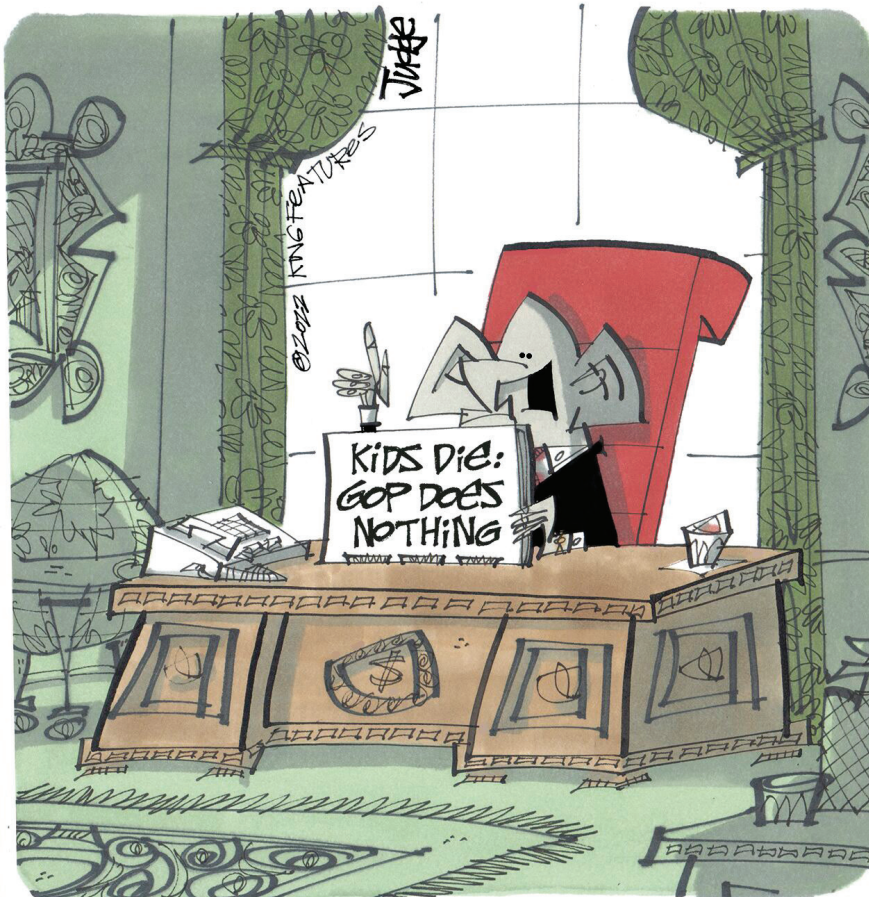
Oregonians should press the three candidates running for governor on what specifically they would do to shore up K-12 education and ensure that new revenue is achieving the objectives that policymakers identified. They should urge stronger and more visible leadership by the Oregon State Board of Education on the way forward for schools. And they should demand more of their legislators, who have, at times, undermined education improvement efforts or sent mixed messages about what Oregon values.

Among their baffling decisions: Democrats used their majority power last year to abolish a requirement that high school seniors either pass a test or produce a portfolio of work to demonstrate their proficiency in key areas to graduate. Education leaders — school districts, the state education department and the school boards association — had not called for such a change. But anti-testing advocates supported the move.

And yet legislators failed to advance a bill this year that would allow quicker state intervention for families of children with disabilities whose instructional needs are being shorted or denied by their local districts. Neither of these actions suggest a Legislature that understands what problems it should seek to solve.

Fagan’s risk report breaks with tradition in proactively asking leaders to reconsider their business-as-usual tactics to make sure that our educational system achieves the outcomes that students deserve. Oregonians should hope that the message comes through. We must stop making accountability an afterthought when everything goes astray.

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"JUST LIKE WE DID WITH OUR HEARTS."

## COLUMN

## A better way on student loans

BY RACHEL GRESZLER AND LINDSEY BURKE

President Joe Biden is set to “forgive” \$10,000 worth of student loan debt per borrower, for a total of \$360 billion in loan elimination. This may sound like a neat and easy solution, but the direct result will be to increase inflation, drive college costs even higher, and place lower-cost and more effective education alternatives at a disadvantage.

College is far more expensive than it should be, and many students graduate with significant loan debt. Worse, employers increasingly report that colleges are not equipping students with the education and skills they need in the workplace.

Those are significant problems in need of solutions. But Biden’s plan papers over the fact that government policies are the cause of these problems. Student loan “forgiveness” will exacerbate these problems, not eliminate them. And it’s morally wrong, economically bad and educationally harmful.

Morally wrong. Forgiving a debt could be a morally virtuous act, but forgiveness — by definition — can only come from the one to whom the debt is owed. In the case of federal student loans, that’s the taxpayer. Biden’s plan to transfer \$360 billion worth of individual student loan debts to taxpayers without their consent is closer to theft than “forgiveness.”

Canceling student loan debt is also incredibly regressive, as individuals with a higher education tend to have the highest earnings. Fifty-six percent of all student loan debt is owned by a select group of individuals with advanced degrees, such as doctors, lawyers and engineers. Meanwhile, the much larger group of people in the U.S. — 37 percent of all adults ages 25 and older — who have a high school degree or less hold no student loan

debt at all.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimates that households in the top two income quintiles would receive 57 percent of student loan “forgiveness,” while those in the bottom two quintiles would receive only 17 percent. Working-class Americans without college degrees, people who worked their way through school without loans, and those who’ve worked hard to pay off their loans will be the ones paying for others’ student loan “forgiveness.”

Economically bad. The economy and inflation are Americans’ top concerns today, and loan forgiveness would hurt both. On top of trillions of new dollars in federal spending, the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimates that 90 percent of the new consumption induced by student loan forgiveness would lead to price increases instead of economic growth. Boosting the spending of high-income households as the average worker has become \$1,800 poorer over the past year due to inflation is bad economic policy.

Educationally harmful. Most pertinently, student loan forgiveness would exacerbate existing problems in the U.S. higher education system. The root cause of problems like college costs more than doubling (in real, inflation-adjusted dollars) over the past two decades, poor graduation rates — with only three in five students completing a four-year degree within six years — and graduates failing to gain the knowledge and skills they need in the workplace is government intervention in higher education.

Student loan subsidies drive up education costs without increasing the value of degrees. A Federal Reserve study found that each dollar of federally subsidized student loans that colleges receive leads to a 60-cent increase in tuition. Federal subsidies for higher

education have also restricted the growth of more effective, lower-cost alternatives, like performance-based and income-sharing arrangement education programs and employer-driven education.

Forgiveness would likely encourage students to borrow at even higher rates in the future, in anticipation that they, too, would have some portion of their loan balance forgiven. And they could be induced to attend more expensive schools as well.

Instead of adding yet another problematic and harmful policy on top of existing ones, federal policymakers should remove current policies that are driving up college costs, increasing student loan debt, and widening the growing skills gap.

Among the solutions in a recent Heritage Foundation report:

- Phasing out federal subsidies for higher education to reduce inflated costs and allow a more level playing field across different education options.

- Allowing apprenticeship programs to expand by directing the Department of Labor to revive the nascent but flourishing Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Program.

- Ending failed federal job training programs so that individuals can obtain more effective training from the private sector and better-tailored state and local government initiatives.

Removing problematic policies may not be as politically appealing as “gifting” the most affluent Americans \$10,000 of other people’s money, but it would provide far more good for civil society, for the economy, and for the future of the American workforce.

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## OTHER VIEWS

## West must bridge the Ukraine divide

## EDITORIAL FROM BLOOMBERG OPINION:

One aspect of the war in Ukraine demands much closer attention — the failure of the U.S. and its rich-country friends to build strong partnerships with the developing world. Many governments in Africa, Latin America and Asia have distanced themselves from the allies’ response to Russia’s aggression. This is helping Moscow and does nothing to discourage other regimes with expansionist ambitions. The neglect that allowed it to happen was a serious error, and putting it right should be a high priority.

When the General Assembly of the United Nations voted to condemn the invasion shortly after it started, 35 countries abstained. It wasn’t just China and fellow dictatorships such as Cuba and Nicaragua, but also India, South Africa and Senegal. Others, including Ethiopia and Morocco, didn’t vote at all. A combination of Russian arms supplies, Chinese investment and American inattention persuaded too many governments that their interests weren’t served by aligning with the U.S.

It’s part of a wider pattern. The Summit of the Americas, taking place this week in Los Angeles, was seen partly as a way to atone for Donald Trump’s refusal to attend the event in 2018. It’s instead become another source of friction, with the region’s leaders balking at U.S. efforts to manage the guest list. President Joe Biden’s administration has little goodwill to fall back on and

continues to struggle with basics like appointing ambassadors. Obstructionist senators are partly to blame for that — but the White House doesn’t disguise the fact that it has other priorities.

In May, a U.S.-ASEAN summit in Washington fizzled, ending with just \$150 million of new initiatives for Southeast Asia. The Biden administration is now talking up its Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity — an initiative notable for its lack of ambition, which left many of America’s would-be partners distinctly unimpressed. Last year’s promise of a summit with Africa’s leaders to counter China’s triennial Forum on China-Africa Cooperation gathering has gone nowhere.

Meanwhile, China’s policy banks have provided more than \$130 billion in loan commitments for Latin America and the Caribbean alone between 2009 and 2019. Beijing supplied COVID-19 vaccines to many desperate nations. Russia is a crucial seller of weapons to India and much of Africa, and a main supplier of grain and fertilizer. Neither Moscow nor Beijing asks too many questions about free elections and human rights.

To win better support from developing countries, on Russia and other matters as well, Western governments should, for a start, be less quick to admonish. Appeals to liberal values tend to fall flat with people who remember less principled Western interventions.

Also, many see the war in Ukraine as a proxy fight between Moscow and Washington — one where they have little at stake. The remedy is to frame the conflict not as punishing Russia and its autocratic leader, but as aiding Ukraine’s fight for self-determination. A powerful nation started this war by scorning sovereign borders: That’s a threat all can recognize.

Here’s another. A prolonged war will keep food, energy and fertilizer prices elevated, and this puts poor countries, with fewer resources to buffer the impact, in particular danger. It makes sense for the allies to say so, but their warning will get a better response if combined with prompt and generous support for the countries worst affected and most in need. Looking farther ahead, new efforts to address deeper economic vulnerabilities — for instance, by supporting African agriculture and logistics — would serve the diplomatic purpose and help deliver longer-term prosperity.

Resources aren’t infinite, but supporting closer cooperation with the developing world would be money well spent. Whether it’s weaning countries off Russian weapons, improving food security for the planet’s poorest people, or promoting efforts to address climate change, the benefits would be huge. The Global South’s unnerving tolerance of Putin’s crimes marks a failure on the part of the U.S. and its friends. It needs urgent attention.