

# Should Oregon cease federal jobless benefit?

It's taking something extra to attract workers. The Bulletin's Suzanne Roig reported 10 Barrel Brewing was offering a \$750 incentive. Sunriver Resort was offering \$25 an hour for housekeepers.

We don't fault workers for being choosy about jobs or cautious about COVID-19. But some states are going to stop sending out the supplemental federal unemployment benefits of an extra \$300 a week in June. Oregon does not plan to discontinue them until they expire in September. Should Oregon cut them off sooner?

"I know there's been a lot of discussion ... that people are being paid to stay home, rather than go to work," President Joe Biden said earlier this month. "We don't see much evidence of that."

We don't know how government would find much evidence. We doubt people would confess to it. It could get them in trouble.

In Oregon, the rules are that unemployed workers cannot refuse job offers or a recall to their previous job, if they were laid off, because of the amount of their unemployment benefit. It would be fraud to refuse to work solely for that reason. The state Employment Department even has a place where businesses can report someone who refused an offer of work.

People aren't eager to take some jobs for any number of reasons. It's not necessarily that the government is paying them to sit on the couch and exercise their Netflix account.

Sure, they might not like doing the jobs available. They also may not have access to child care. There still can be uncertainty if schools are going to remain open. COVID-19 fuels uncertainty, even with the effectiveness of the vaccines. And to return to work only to be told you have to be the vaccine police for a business and confront customers, well, that wouldn't be something to get excited about.

It wouldn't be fair to say that it's the fault of the federal and state government that workers can be hard to attract. But, yes, the extra \$300 a week can be a factor. The thing is: How do you decide when is the right time to end it?

Yesterday was the right time for many businesses. September will be too early for some workers.

"We do not want those who need those benefits to lose access to them before the programs end," said David Gerstenfeld, acting director of the Oregon Employment Department. "While we are watching current economic conditions, we do not have any plans to end the federal benefit plans early."

So if you want the state to end the benefit early, tell Gov. Kate Brown. Or if you want to keep it, tell her that. You can send her your view at [tinyurl.com/tellgovbrown](https://tinyurl.com/tellgovbrown).

# Let the governor pick the state forester

In this Legislature, when a bill has bipartisan supporters it tells you something. Oregon Senate Bill 868 would strip the power to appoint the state forester from the Oregon Forestry Board and hand the authority to the governor.

State Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, joined Democrats as a sponsor of the bill.

The Oregon Forestry Department, run by the board, has been a financial mess. It's been a managerial mess. And it's a mess that needs cleaning up. An Oregonian article in The Bulletin summed it up.

A department that oversees forest policy is going to be kindling for controversy. It also has not kept up in collecting wildfire costs from federal agencies. It had a backlog of \$100 million in collections in 2019. Legislators got so worried about the department's financial state they demanded a monthly memo from the

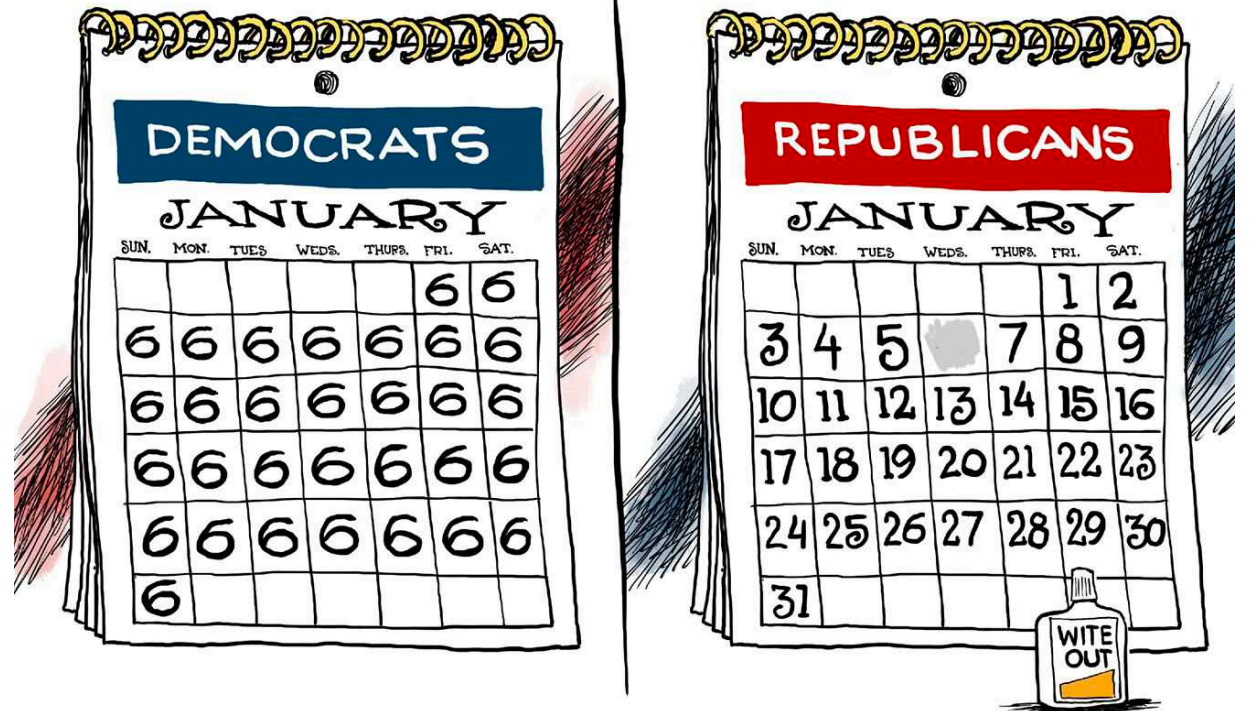
state forester to outline what it was doing to climb out of the mess. If that wasn't enough, there's the matter of a \$1 billion lawsuit made by counties who claim the state didn't do enough to sell timber. The state forester resigned a few weeks ago.

The leaders of most state agencies report to the governor. The state forester reports to the state forestry board, instead. There's nothing inherently wrong with that relationship. It could work. It hasn't worked well in Oregon.

Some people won't like handing more power to Oregon's governor, which this bill would do, in a way. But it does also hand the governor more responsibility for ensuring the department fixes problems. When Gov. Brown got more involved in overseeing the state's Department of Human Services, it helped. Maybe, SB 868 would lead to improvements at the Forestry Department.

Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.

# Congressional Calendars



# Reassess Central Oregon water needs

BY YANCY LIND

As Bulletin readers know, we are in a drought. As of May 20, most of Central Oregon is experiencing "extreme" or "exceptional drought," our snowpack is at 81% of average, and groundwater is far below normal. Consequently, rivers and reservoirs are also low.

While diminished water availability will create hardship for some, though not all, local irrigation districts, let's not forget that the drought will create lethal conditions for fish in many local waterways. Here's a look at one example, the Crooked River.

Prineville Reservoir is at 56% of capacity, far below average for this time of year with little snowpack remaining in the Ochocos for spring runoff. During irrigation season, water will be released from the reservoir to meet irrigation demands from Ochoco Irrigation District and a much smaller amount for North Unit Irrigation District. Essentially all of it will be withdrawn by the time it passes through the city of Prineville, the location of the last major OID diversion. NUID has a diversion below that, just above Smith Rock State Park. When they call their water from the reservoir, there will be temporary spikes in flows below Prineville, but that water will be diverted as well.

The Bureau of Reclamation maintains a website ([www.usbr.gov/pn/hydromet/destea.html](http://www.usbr.gov/pn/hydromet/destea.html)) where you can see flows in the upper Deschutes River Basin. On Friday, flows out of Prineville Reservoir (seen in the PRVO gauge) were 180 cubic feet



Lind

*As of Thursday, three adult spring chinook have gone up the Opal Springs fish ladder near the mouth of the Crooked River. They will not make it far, however, due to low flows making the river impassable upstream*

per second after being at 230 cfs the prior week. Flows below Prineville (CAPO gauge) were at a lethal level of 9 cfs after being just above 60 cfs. The changes in flow are from NUID calls on their water.

Most Central Oregonians are familiar with the federally designated Wild and Scenic River section of the Crooked immediately below Bowman Dam, which will have adequate flows, but the entire river is important for fish. Nine cfs is not healthy aquatic habitat. It will not adequately support redband trout, juvenile steelhead, or currently returning adult spring chinook salmon. As of Thursday, three adult spring chinook have gone up the Opal Springs fish ladder near the mouth of the Crooked River. They will not make it far, however, due to low flows making the river impassable upstream.

Sudden, dramatic swings in flows from NUID calls are also detrimental, potentially stranding fish and stirring up sediment.

It is also important to know that the Crooked River below Prineville is highly polluted from agricultural

runoff. This has been well documented by the Crooked River Watershed Council and a study by Portland General Electric, which was looking into sources of pollution in Lake Billy Chinook. Low flows concentrate those pollutants in the river.

The Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan does have provisions for drought years and preserving flows below Prineville, but only during non-irrigation season (winter). In those months, a minimum of 50 cfs is required from Bowman Dam all the way to Lake Billy Chinook. Paradoxically, this is not a year-round requirement.

Even with the drought, water in Central Oregon remains adequate to meet the needs of people, farms and fish but is allocated based on decisions made over 100 years ago. Eighty-six percent of our water supply is used by patrons of irrigation districts, frequently by landowners who do not use it for economically productive agriculture. It's past time to reexamine how water is allocated in Central Oregon.

■ Yancy Lind lives in Tualuma and blogs at [www.coinformedangler.org](http://www.coinformedangler.org).

## Letters policy

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

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## How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

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# Shifts in academic discourse are why economics is failing us

BY TYLER COWEN  
Bloomberg

Economics is one of the better-funded and more scientific social sciences, but in some critical ways it is failing us. The main problem, as I see it, is standards: They are either too high or too low. In both cases, the result is less daring and creativity.

Consider academic research. In the 1980s, the ideal journal submission was widely thought to be 17 pages, maybe 30 pages for a top journal. The result was a lot of new ideas, albeit with a lower quality of execution. Nowadays it is more common for submissions to top economics journals to be 90 pages, with appendices, robustness checks, multiple methods, numerous co-authors and every possible criticism addressed along the way.

There is little doubt that the current method yields more reliable results.

But at what cost? The economists who have changed the world, such as Adam Smith, John Maynard Keynes or Friedrich Hayek, typically had brilliant ideas with highly imperfect execution. It is now harder for this kind of originality to gain traction. Technique stands supreme and must be mastered at an early age, with some undergraduates pursuing "pre-docs" to get into a top graduate school.

At the same time, the profession is pursuing a kind of "barbells" strategy. On Twitter (and, earlier, blogs), barriers to entry are very low, and a Ph.D. is not required. That can be a good thing, but quality checks are extremely weak.

Here's the dirty little secret that few of my fellow economics professors will admit: As those "perfect" research papers have grown longer, they have also become less relevant. Fewer people — including academics — read them

carefully or are influenced by them when it comes to policy.

Actual views on politics are more influenced by debates on social media, especially on such hot topics such as the minimum wage or monetary and fiscal policy. The growing role of Twitter doesn't have to be a bad thing. Social media is egalitarian, spurs spirited debate and enables research cooperation across great distances.

Still, an earlier culture of "debate through books" has been replaced by a new culture of "debate through tweets." This is not necessarily progress. By demanding so much rigor in academic research, they've created an environment in which most of the economics people actually see is less rigorous.

There is also a political effect. Twitter is a relatively left-wing social medium, and so the tenor of popular economic discourse has moved to the left.

I have mixed feelings about the evolution of ideology in the economics profession. In earlier times there were schools of thought — Keynesian, Austrian, Institutionalist, the Chicago School and so on — associated with coherent world views. That was unscientific, and it led to people embracing both policy and empirical views that weren't always backed by the evidence.

Explicit schools of thought have since faded — but ideology has not. The new, often unstated dominant ideology is a mix of wokeism and center-left Democratic technocratic policy reasoning.

I am not sure that most economists, who come from many nations and cultures, endorse that approach. They just don't work very hard against it, and so it is the unstated default norm. Furthermore, more economic research these days is done in large teams, rather than solo, so the incentive is "go

along to get along."

Not long ago, Harvey Mansfield suggested that Harvard, where he has been on the faculty for almost six decades, has not hired a single openly conservative professor in the last 10 years — in any field, not just economics. It's hard to argue that the political biases so evident on Twitter somehow do not infect the academic side of the profession.

As economics has become more ideological, it has also become less forthcoming about its ideologies. And that has led to less intellectual diversity and fewer radical new ideas. That, in a nutshell, is the main problem with the economics profession. At least our research papers are ever more accurate in their estimates of the coefficients.

■ Tyler Cowen is a Bloomberg columnist. He is a professor of economics at George Mason University and writes for the blog *Marginal Revolution*.