

A caution sign for big hikes in minimum wage

Oregon's minimum wage increased 15 cents on Jan. 1. The new rate — \$9.25 per hour — remains the second-highest in the nation, behind only our neighbor to the north, Washington. Yet several Oregon politicians already are ginning up support for a \$15 minimum wage.

We're pleased to read that Peter Courtney, president of the state Senate, is lukewarm to the idea. He cautioned fellow Democrats not to over-reach on the issue, saying it could jeopardize their party's new majority in Salem.

Courtney's advice is wise for more than reasons of political power. A sharp increase in the minimum wage in a state that is still recovering from a brutal recession is risky. There is scant evidence that such a boost would benefit the state or local economies.

The economic impact of hiking minimum wages is unclear. There are dozens of research papers on the subject. Their conclusions are conflicting.

Some argue that minimum wage increases boost consumer spending. Others say the impact is short-term, encouraging low-wage workers to take on more debt for big-ticket items such as cars.

Much depends on how employers would react to a

large increase in the minimum wage. They could hire fewer workers. Or raise prices. Or lay off higher-paid employees. Again, economists disagree on the potential response.

In Grant County, where minimum-wage jobs are a larger proportion of total jobs, many workers would benefit from a substantial hike — but not if their jobs are eliminated as a result of a statewide mandate.

Oregon's minimum wage is adjusted each year for inflation. This has kept it at half the median hourly wage for all Oregon workers. That is a sound level for a wage for unskilled workers compared with employees with years of experience or specialized skills.

The \$15 minimum wage appears to be the new gold standard for activists, unions and others doing battle in the name of economic equality. The city of Seattle was the first to make the leap, though its city council tempered the impact by phasing the increase over several years. San Francisco soon followed suit.

Oregon legislators should at least wait to see how those jurisdictions fare under the \$15 minimum before following their lead. As Mark Twain said: "Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please."

By the numbers

	Minimum Wage Jobs	Percent of Total Jobs
Oregon:	102,485	5.7%
Grant County:	170	8.1%

Source: Oregon Employment Department. Estimates are for Q1 of 2014.



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MEMBER OREGON NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

PUBLISHER Marissa Williams, marissa@bmeagle.com
EDITOR Scotta Callister, editor@bmeagle.com
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT Alyssa Cone, alyssa@bmeagle.com
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Cheryl Hoefler, cheryl@bmeagle.com
COMMUNITY NEWS Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
SPORTS Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
MARKETING REP Kim Kell, ads@bmeagle.com
CUSTOMER SERVICE REP Lindsay Bullock office@bmeagle.com

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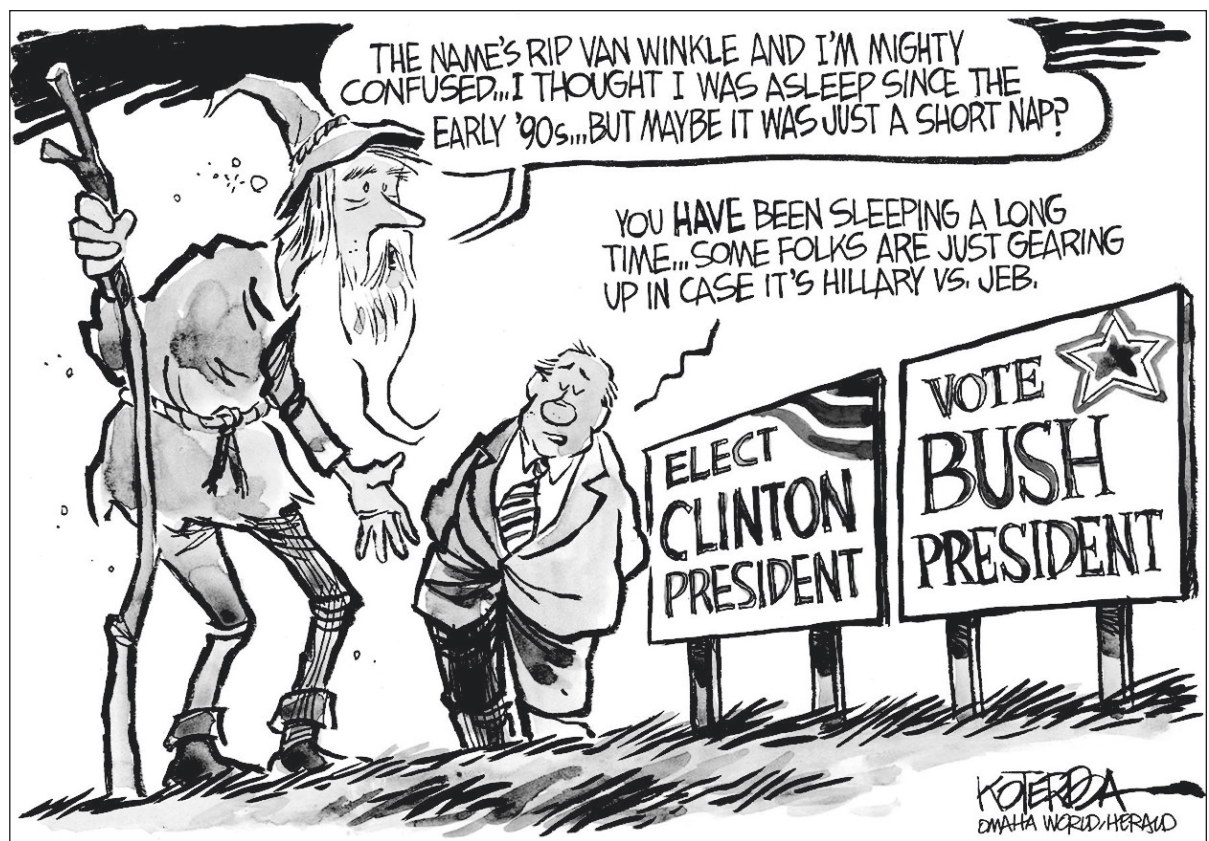
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Manage predators, optimize herds — revenue will follow

By Ty Stubblefield

To the Blue Mountain Eagle

The management of Oregon's fish and wildlife has never been in a more compromising position than it is today.

ODFW faces a \$32 million budget shortfall. Plagued with depressed deer and elk numbers and increasing predator populations, coupled with a decline in hunter numbers, it seems the plight couldn't get much worse.

That's unless you consider the severe decline in managed habitat on much of the state's federally managed lands, over which ODFW has no control. Now the agency is looking for a new leader to right this listing ship.

Then add pressure from non-hunting groups who recently wrote a letter to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission and the governor asking that the new director reform the agency to be less dependent on license and tag dollars and be more "conservation minded."

Excuse us?

Hunting and fishing has been the funding source of conservation since the 1930s.

In fact, of ODFW's 2013-15 projected revenues, \$131.9 million comes from Pittman-Robertson

funds (a federal excise tax on firearms, ammunition, archery equipment and firearm-related accessories). Another \$103.8 million of the agency's budget comes from license and tag fees. That's \$235.7 million of ODFW's budget — the vast majority — derived from hunter and angler dollars.

Hunters and anglers are on the forefront of wildlife conservation. Success stories abound, including the return of elk herds in the early 1930s, reintroduction of mountain goats and California bighorn sheep in the 1950s, and reintroduction of Rocky Mountain bighorns in the 1970s. These efforts were all funded by sportsmen.

The real question is: what should we expect of the new director? First and foremost, the new director should be a true hunter and fisherman. His or her focus should be fish and wildlife, not politics and people. Too often politics steer the management of the department rather than sound science.

The director should also manage the agency within its budgetary means, but that doesn't have to be the Herculean task it's often made to seem.

Taking seriously ODFW's mandate to optimize wildlife populations

will also address the need to optimize the agency's revenue. Build better deer and elk herds, and hunters will beat a path to the point of sale machines. Conversely, if hunters are unsuccessful year after year, eventually they will find somewhere else to devote their time and money. The downward trend in hunting license and tag sales that parallels the decline in deer and elk numbers leaves little doubt.

A serious look at predator population control is a key part of the simple equation: more unmanaged predators prowling the landscape equals fewer deer and elk available to hunters, equals fewer license and tag dollars.

ODFW has a choice to make: restore our big game resources and re-establish the department's traditional funding base, or become a non-game wildlife agency with a skeleton staff dependent on elusive and unpredictable general funds. Which choice will the agency make? Its new director will exert considerable influence on that decision, and that's why OHA will work diligently to ensure the new director embraces a hunter's vision of conservation.

Ty Stubblefield is field administrator for the Oregon Hunters Association.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A forest resolution

To the Editor:

Forest Service, please note.

The current 10-year forest initiative to reduce overstocking in our forests is going way too far in removing the future of our forests. I don't know who is directly responsible for determining what to remove, but they are going way too far. In the head-over-heels effort to reduce exposure to wild fire activity, big game habitat is being butchered.

Several years ago, I was a part of a group that, working with the Forest Service, determined the best way to address the need for fire suppression and habitat needs was to create fire breaks and remove overstocking in a mosaic pattern. The group included Forest Service, ODFW, sportsmen groups and general citizens. This would allow reasonable approach to fire suppression and provide adequate habitat for the wildlife. All this has been thrown in the trash. Take a look at what is being done now. Vast areas where you can look for a half mile through what trees that are left. It is a desert with a few trees left. Not only that, but the trees that were thinned years ago, spaced, appropriately and growing nicely, are being marked for cutting. These absolutely do not need to be cut at this time, and I do mean absolutely. Where did common sense go?

You know what is quite interesting and unbelievable? One hundred and forty million feet of prime timber can burn in a major fire, and it will be left to deteriorate, rot and fall over, creating a quagmire of jungle that neither man nor beast can get through. This wastes a huge amount

of valuable resource, a resource that could feed our mills and bolster our economy. And yet, they seem unable to recover a resource that has already been destroyed and should be salvaged. But, they seem to be able to charge ahead with butchering our game habitat with the over story removal that is going on now.

We need some habitat left in our forest. This isn't management, it is destruction. Come on Forest Service, you can do better. Make a New Year's resolution — We will leave some game habitat.

Dean Elliott
Canyon City

Elected officials have personal agenda

To the Editor

I finally concluded recently (too late it seems) that a large number of Grant County elected officials come on board with their own personal agenda. This agenda is first served — law of personal survival. If the agenda would reflect unfavorably on their elected office, they then surpass in the art of fence riding — taking no side in any discussion, especially one that puts them firmly in the corner of Grant County residents who voted them into office. How many people that you trustingly voted into office to represent you believe they owe the federal government for their livelihood? If you aren't wading in the swamp, you won't see the snakes.

Here is a concept to consider: Schools and many local businesses depend on timber dollars that are fading fast. Timber dollars lent

greatly to the economy of Grant County. A percentage of timber road construction and reconstruction dollars also came back into the local economy. In the last 14 years, the Forest Service has done away with all but a minuscule amount of road construction and reconstruction and only do road maintenance — no dollars to Grant County — regardless of the condition of the roads used. They are hoarding their money now to put up road closure signs, gates, berms, tank traps, or restrictions on your public access roads, trails, stock driveways, and by-ways that have been historically and customarily utilized by Grant County residents. So you can't walk to hunt or recreate? A former Malheur Forest supervisor suggested that you think about giving up hunting. Looks like he is well on his way to attaining his goal. I know a contingent of 543 Eastern Oregon vets whose ages range from the WWII-era forward that would love to hear that sentiment.

So, did you vote in someone who held the lid off the economy pipeline so the federal government could trash that economy? Waiting to see how the school district crams 12 grades into one building? Sports programs might be the next to go. Should we cheer that Grant County ranks "number one" on the unemployment scale? Perhaps we can all stand by and watch our elected officials who dream of furthering their own agenda tread water when their raft of political ties abandons them to sink with the rest of us.

Bob Kerr
Canyon City

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WHERE TO WRITE

Salem
Gov. John Kitzhaber, D — 254 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111. Fax: 503-378-6827.

Oregon Legislature — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180.

State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario (District: 60), Room H-475, State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., Salem OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. E-mail: rep.cliffbentz@state.or.us.

State Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R — (District 30) Room S-223, State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-986-1950. E-mail: sen.tedferrioli@state.or.us. E-mail: TFER2@aol.com. Phone: 541-490-6528.