

Brown's priorities take steps toward unity, bipartisanship

Gov. Kate Brown outlined three priorities in her inaugural speech Monday, which — if she and the 2017 Legislature achieve them — could dramatically improve Oregon:

- Create more and better jobs in rural Oregon.
- Expand health insurance so all Oregon children are covered.
- Improve Oregon's dismal rate of high school graduation.

Brown's nearly two-year tenure as governor has been a decidedly mixed record, pleasing to liberal and urban Oregonians and frustrating to conservative and rural residents. Monday's speech could be a welcome turning point for Democrat Brown, who now is an elected governor instead of an appointed one. Her speech was bipartisan, pragmatic and focused, avoiding her penchant for pursuing dozens of ideas.

Much of urban Oregon has recovered well from the recession. As Brown put it, "For those living in urban Oregon, it seems like the economy is growing like a gangly teenage boy: overnight and out of control."

"For the first time in almost two decades, the statewide unemployment rate dropped below the national average. News outlets from Forbes to Fortune to Bloomberg are writing glowing profiles of Oregon's job-producing economy."

Yet, she said, "there is a disturbing gap between the unemployment rate in urban Oregon and rural Oregon."

One antidote is the Oregon Manufacturing Innovation Center, which is being developed in Scappoose, thanks to the determination of Sen. Betsy Johnson. Twelve large manufacturers have made commitments to the

center. Some are interested in opening their own facilities in Scappoose.

But Brown also sees other opportunities for rural economic development, starting with preparing for the Big One.

At least 100 coastal bridges would be destroyed or severely damaged in that inevitable major earthquake. Seismic retrofitting of coastal bridges and roads would create good, family-wage jobs. So too would improving U.S. 97, which would become the state's major north-south arterial when the big quake makes Interstate 5 impassable.

Brown also spoke of the importance of water projects for agriculture, such as in the Umatilla Basin, and of increased timber harvests on U.S. Forest Service land.

All these projects make sense — if the governor and Legislature will follow through.

"By leveraging the human, material and natural resources that once made our rural communities the most prosperous in the state, we have a real chance to tackle the economic fault line that has split our state in two," Brown said.

There is a side benefit as well, one that Brown did not dwell on. More jobs and better-paying ones mean more tax revenue for the state, not just economic improvement for families and communities.

State government and schools face a projected \$1.7 billion deficit in 2017-19 — if all programs were to be maintained at their current level. The biggest challenge facing this year's Legislature is to balance that state budget, including paying for health care and education.

A healthy economy throughout rural Oregon would be a blessing for the entire state.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Each of us can make Grant County better

To the Editor:

My horse stepped on my little toe and broke it. To move my foot was an experience that lasted for at least two weeks. In all these years, I have taken my little toe for granted; it was just there. I've never made New Year's resolutions, but thinking about how I take my eyes, nose, ears, hands and my beating heart for granted, I decided to make a resolution for 2017. When I wake up in the morning, I will try to not take for granted that I am alive, that each day is important, is a gift, that everyone I meet, friend, someone I don't agree with, or someone I don't know, is important, that this county we live in, with its one spotlight, the forest, the river and every one of us who live here is important. In many small ways, each of us can make the quality of our lives and Grant County better each day of the year.

Jim Bahrenburg
Kimberly

State disbanded Public Forest Commission

To the Editor:

John George's (Jan. 4) letter contains numerous errors. I'd like to correct several of them here.

I didn't disband the Public Forest Commission. The state did, after it found the measure which established the Commission to be unconstitutional. I simply brought the matter to the state's attention per the legally appropriate venue.

Nor did I, as George claims, seek to disband the Commission because it could be used to "coordinate on projects in the county" and put me out of work. The Commission never enjoyed coordination status.

Indeed, it's surprising folks make such a claim: The Public Forest Commission was established to manage all public lands in Grant County, not represent county residents or coordinate with the Forest Service about how

they manage public lands.

I've provided the Eagle with copies of the information originally submitted to the County Clerk for ballot review, the ballot title as finally approved by the DA and accepted by Chief Petitioner Dave Traylor, and the 2002 ballot measure county electors approved. I hope the Eagle posts this information and readers review it. Folks who do will find that I am right about the Commission.

Ironically, no Commission member ever did the job voters authorized and elected them to do. Instead, some worked constructively with the Forest Service in a representative fashion, but most simply groused about the agency.

That changed in 2015 when the complainers began to think and behave as if they could order the Forest Service (and County Court) around. That's also when several Commission members worked with Sheriff Palmer in secret to create land use laws intended to control the agency, and later participated in efforts to expand the militia occupation occurring in Harney County to Grant County.

Such actions reflect an unacceptable disregard for state and federal laws, government overreach of the worst sort, and a willingness to compromise public safety in Grant County for personal gain.

Good reasons, I thought, to bring the Public Forest Commission's legal status to the state's attention. On review, the state disbanded the Commission because it was unconstitutional. And now Grant County is better off.

Mark Webb
Mt. Vernon

Editor's note: The documents Webb submitted with his letter are available to view with the online version at myeaglenews.com.

Refuge occupation 'awakened thousands'

To the Editor:

An open letter to Judge Brown: My original letter to you was

meant as a private communication, pointing out some of the daunting liabilities the government would face in any second Malheur trial. I had hoped, as I said, that you would see discretion over valor, and write off the whole can of worms. It appears now that those discredited conspiracy theorists Knight, Barrow and Gabriel will resume their Quixotic tilting, this in the face of an across-the-board exoneration of we, the first seven. The government boys have passed by any avenue toward face-saving and cost-saving retreat.

Isn't some mature intervention called for?

Our rural electrification project has awakened thousands, a magnificent camaraderie, lifting us in a cause greater than ourselves. Telling to note the expanse of terrain we have "occupied" in the Beaver State psyche, and in minds, and hearts, across the nation. How is it that a strong contender for Oregon person of the year could also be held on federal charges? Every vote for Ammon would say that the federal culture is a sick, alternate reality, a through-the-looking-glass world, divorced from and inimical to the people. We would also assert the era of coercive bureaucratic tyranny has reached fin die Siecle, and must be ended. Those "swarms of agents sent out to harass us and eat out our substance" will have to find honest work — elsewhere.

Black comedy plays out in Hatfield Courthouse, with the government busily destroying its credibility as it desperately tries to save it. Regardless of the outcome of this second Malheur trial, a higher, more enduring, verdict will be rendered, one that weighs accused and accuser alike. It will be the verdict of history. And we will write it.

Neil Wampler
Los Osos, California

Editor's note: Wampler was one of seven defendants acquitted of federal conspiracy charges related to the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County in 2016.



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- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).

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