

Too much at stake to bog down session with usual silliness

The 2017 Oregon Legislature will convene Wednesday amid acrimony, political silliness and dire predictions.

This is all part of the ritual dance that launches each legislative session, as the Republicans and Democrats, House and Senate, and individual lawmakers jockey for political leverage.

Gov. Kate Brown and legislative leaders from both parties predict this could be the most difficult legislative session in years, as lawmakers struggle to balance the state budget and develop a transportation package.

At some point — probably late spring, if this session follows the usual pattern — legislators will begin the difficult compromises on the budget and other contentious issues. No one wants a repeat of the era in which the Legislature repeatedly was called back to the Oregon Capitol to revise the state budget.

As state Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, said last week, “I think everybody just needs to take a deep breath.”

Legislators can speed the political process by abandoning some of their political silliness, especially in the House, where Republicans are threatening to slow daily business.

Democrats outnumber Republicans 35-25 in the House and 17-13 in the Senate. Those numbers give Republicans little influence except on tax measures, which require a supermajority for approval.

That is why Republicans may demand that the House devote far more time to publicly reading legislation aloud, word-for-word. That would slow the legislative process to a crawl, ensuring fewer bills become law, which some Oregonians might see as a blessing. But that threat also gives Republicans a bargaining chip: Give us more

of what we want and we won't slow the process.

Whether that is obstructionism or pragmatism is in the eye of the beholder. House Republican Leader Mike McLane of Powell Butte had a fair point when he noted that the Democratic leaders in Congress also employ such “obstructionist” tactics because their party is in the minority.

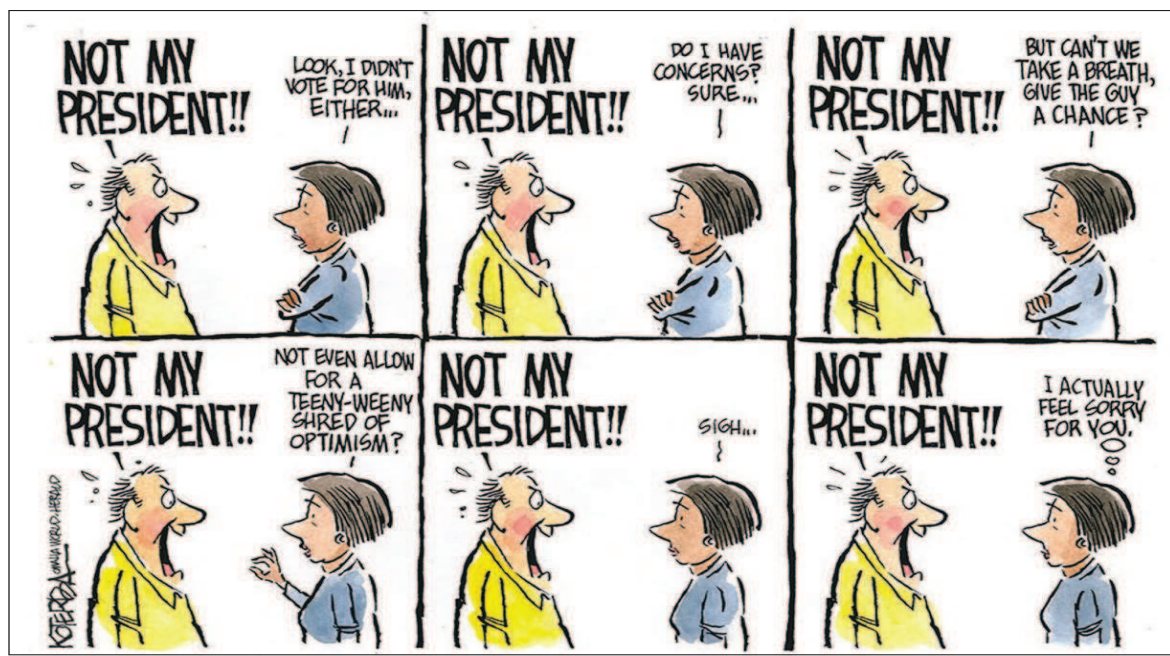
Congress is an awfully low bar for comparison. Oregonians expect more of their Legislature. That includes having the majority party make concessions to work well with the minority party, and vice versa.

Republican leaders have admitted that the 2017-19 state budget will be untenable without more revenue. Democrats need Republican votes for any tax increases, which require a supermajority for passage. In return, Democrats should accept the need for continued reforms to hold down the cost of government, including the Public Employees Retirement System.

Some people want to delay PERS discussions, possibly until a special session. That is a very bad idea. Special legislative sessions come with no guarantees.

Likewise, the 2017 Legislature should meet both Democrats' and Republicans' needs in putting together a transportation package. There is widespread agreement that Oregon must reinvest in its roads and bridges, and make its public transit systems more effective. But the majority Democrats should heed Republicans' desire for flexibility in the state's low-carbon fuel standards for vehicles — a flawed program that Democrats rammed through the 2015 Legislature.

Those are real issues. The sooner that legislators can get past the acrimony and obstructionism, the sooner they can make progress on those real issues.



FARMER'S FATE The flat-out truth

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Brianna Walker

I don't have all my ducks in a row. I don't even have them all in the same pond. I'm not even sure they are all ducks — there may be some flying squirrels in there. But I thought I had the basics figured out: The sun rises in the east, farming almost pays the bills and gravity holds us onto this spinning ball we call Earth. That is, until last week.

“Do you believe the earth is a globe?” was the start of the conversation.

“Um ... yes ... why?” I answered, curious as to what kind of joke was about to be played on me.

“Just wondering,” the lady replied. “It's possible it's flat.”

I nearly choked on my orange juice. “Oh, yes, flat ... I thought we disproved that back in 1492?”

I was then presented with a list of 200 “proofs” that Earth is not the spinning globe most people believe it to be. It's actually the biggest conspiracy ever to be pulled off.

Sometimes the best thing you can do is just sit back, keep your mouth shut and just let the crazy unfold.

“If the Earth is round,” she continued, “why are horizons always flat?” I was then presented with a number of anomalies. Have you ever wondered why planes don't fly over Antarctica? It would be a direct route to many places — if the world was round. But it isn't. There is no such thing as the South Pole. And so the conspiracy begins ...

Now, back to the curvature of the horizon. It is perfectly flat — therefore, the Earth must be flat. Don't bother responding about the large surface area of the Earth or the International Space Station sending back photographs of the Earth; you should be able to see the curvature if it existed, and any photographs sent by NASA have been faked. They know this to be true because the clouds have words in them, and there is a cartoon dog visible in the NASA photos of Pluto. This is a conspiracy theory that swallows other conspiracy theories whole. Gravity is a hoax. Space travel is a hoax. The sun and moon aren't what we have been told either. Some even believe the moon is just a projected hologram.

You may think the obvious question here is: What would be the motivation behind a hoax on such a global ... er, I mean world scale?

“It just makes more sense,” she kept answering. “Makes more sense as to why airplanes can fly without having to account for the curvature ... Makes more sense for the moon to be a translucent disk having it's own light ... Makes more sense as to why we can see things 140 miles away without them going off the horizon backward.”

I just kept thinking Galileo would be turning over (I mean orbiting) in his grave about now. I had never thought, in my life, I would be defending my position on a moving solar system, or that

Earth was spherical. I kept waiting for someone to pop out and say, “You're on Candid Camera!” But no one popped up. Later that day, I had to turn to the internet — and discovered that there is a whole society of people out there that believe the Earth is flat. The more I read, the more surprised I was to learn that the flat Earth community has supporters all around the globe — OK, so maybe that pun fell flat! (Haha.)

After reading a few of their websites, I was even more shocked. These people posit that we are living on a cluster of continents, the oceans surround us and a rock or ice wall (protected by NASA) keeps us from falling off. Any arguments using physics or science will be met with, “If you believe that hoax.”

People have the right to their opinion to be sure. It's not like I have viewed Earth from space with my own eyes. But if the world isn't round and it doesn't spin, we wouldn't be able to take another trip around the sun. Moon pops wouldn't taste the same, and Star Trek would be total fiction. Oh, what an unbearable thought! I think I'll just put an out-of-order sticker on my head and call it a day — not to be confused with a revolution of the sun. On the plus side, there would be no need to worry about global warming! Maybe the man in the moon could toss down some of his green cheese, because after a day like this I may need something to go along with the wine!

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

‘Political correctness’

To the Editor:

American slavery was rationalized using convictions of racial inferiority. Southern defeat did not free Southerners from need of such rationalizations, and the fear of the victimizer becoming victimized expressed itself in mechanisms like the KKK. In 2000, William Lind shed light on the origins of a now 70-year-old Leftist “agenda,” which imagined minorities, women and gays aligned against white males in a “Long Walk Through the Institutions” (including marriage) to destroy the middle class and bring on a communist revolution.

American introspection that began with Archie Bunker soon moved to the Neanderthal “Tim the Tool Man” and Homer Simpson who, like black slaves, were dehumanized to justify “political correctness.” By 2016, John Kasich could run for president, bragging that he had set up a \$500,000 “grant fund” for any woman or minority IT start-up that would come to Ohio. Or as they say in liberal land, “No white male need apply.”

Trump's election threatens to emancipate “uppity” white males, Christians and stay-at-home moms from the stereotypes of inferiority the church of “political correctness” has placed upon them, and the Left now fears victimization from people they have been berating, when that is not what Trump was selling.

I say, before you ascribe sainthood to Congressman John Lewis for fighting for his own rights (which would come to include a place at the front of the Affirmative Action line), you might want to acknowledge all those maligned “deplorables” who stood up for him against their own race in the '60s and then moved to the back of the line trying to right that old wrong.

Tucker Carlson mentioned some liberal blogger whose white male plumber spoke with a Southern accent, causing the blogger to wonder if the plumber had voted for Trump, and that possibility made him uncomfortable, even afraid. He blogged that his life

would never be the same.

What the liberal was describing was what we call “bigotry” and “prejudice.” Without a Green-back-wielding, Lincoln-style leader, there can be no Reconstruction, no reconciliation that will not be thwarted by “carpetbaggers” (The Money Masters).

Russ Denton
Prairie City

Bring the Hammonds home

To the Editor:

The Hammonds should be home with their families.

Seventy-four-year-old Dwight and son Stephen were and are respected ranchers in the Burns area. They are presently serving a five-year mandatory sentence for arson on federal land. They were labeled terrorists in order to justify this grossly disproportionate sentence for the destruction (burning) of approximately 130 acres of BLM pasture.

They stood trial once and served their time. The DOJ came back in federal appeals court and won, reinstating the 5-year sentence. Double jeopardy is mentioned often as I have read the articles reporting the trial and happenings that led to the final outcome, which to me is a gross miscarriage of justice.

A mandatory five-year sentence is to discourage terrorists and arsonists who disregard the law. Was this a witch hunt used to send a message to good solid Americans that dissent? Could be — maybe yes.

The Hammonds have been described in such terms as respected, great neighbor, salt of the earth ag folks. If this father and son fit the profile of arsonist or terrorist, we are all in trouble. “Remember this is not about me; this is about our country,” were Dwight Hammond's parting comments as he was taken from home and family a year ago.

For goodness sake, someone has the leverage to get these men out of prison. Unfortunately for the Hammonds, I think they were caught up in what I refer to as “a virus sweep.” Easily labeled as such if you have issues with the

BLM and their land-management policies. I'm infuriated to see the pardons and commutations being dished out at this time, drug dealers and terrorists. None seem to be forthcoming for Dwight and Stephen.

Bring the Hammonds home.

Wanda Ballard
Baker City

Walden should change course to protect constituents' health

To the Editor:

I have written an open letter to Congressman Greg Walden, whose reported praise of the president's new executive order to relax penalties and reduce enforcement of the Affordable Care Act's provisions is ill-advised at best. In the Gorge, including his home town of Hood River, thousands may lose essential access to health insurance coverage, hence to needed care, if the ACA's fundamentals are removed or collapse.

Districtwide, many tens of thousands of people are at risk in this way. Moreover, Congressman Walden's reported support of reversing Medicaid expansion, Children's Health Insurance and other programs vital to the health of his constituents and neighbors, if true, would be a tragedy and embarrassment to our district.

For some reason, Mr. Walden has ignored repeated requests for response from some of his constituents on these matters recently, including myself.

I hope he will now reply to me in a substantive and personal manner that I may share with others whom he officially represents here in the Second district. Most of all, I hope that he will use his leadership to change course and protect the health and wellbeing of those whom he represents, rather than push ahead to fulfill ill-formed campaign promises by a presidential candidate who has demonstrated no understanding of health care history, policy or health economics.

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