

Public pay initiative could cut both ways

A proposed ballot measure for 2020 would force Oregonians to have a serious discussion about the role of public employees.

A self-described government watchdog group called Priority Oregon wants public employees throughout the state to have similar pay and benefits to what private employees receive. On Tuesday, the business-oriented group filed the initial paperwork for its proposed constitutional amendment that would mandate “Equal Pay for Equal Work.”

Priority Oregon, which does not disclose its funders, has been a sharp critic of Democratic Gov. Kate Brown and Democratic legislative proposals.

The assumption is that public-employee compensation would decrease, freeing tax dollars for other uses. But the ballot measure could cut both ways.

The proposal raises a fundamental question: Should public and private employees be equally compensated? If so, the governor, city managers and school superintendents — even legislators — could argue for hefty pay raises when compared with private-sector equivalents. CEOs and boards of directors make far more in the corporate world. Government IT professionals, and certainly many lawyers and doctors, could make more.

The larger issue is that an unwritten social contract has governed public compensation for generations. The private sector involves greater risk of success or failure, and thus the potential financial

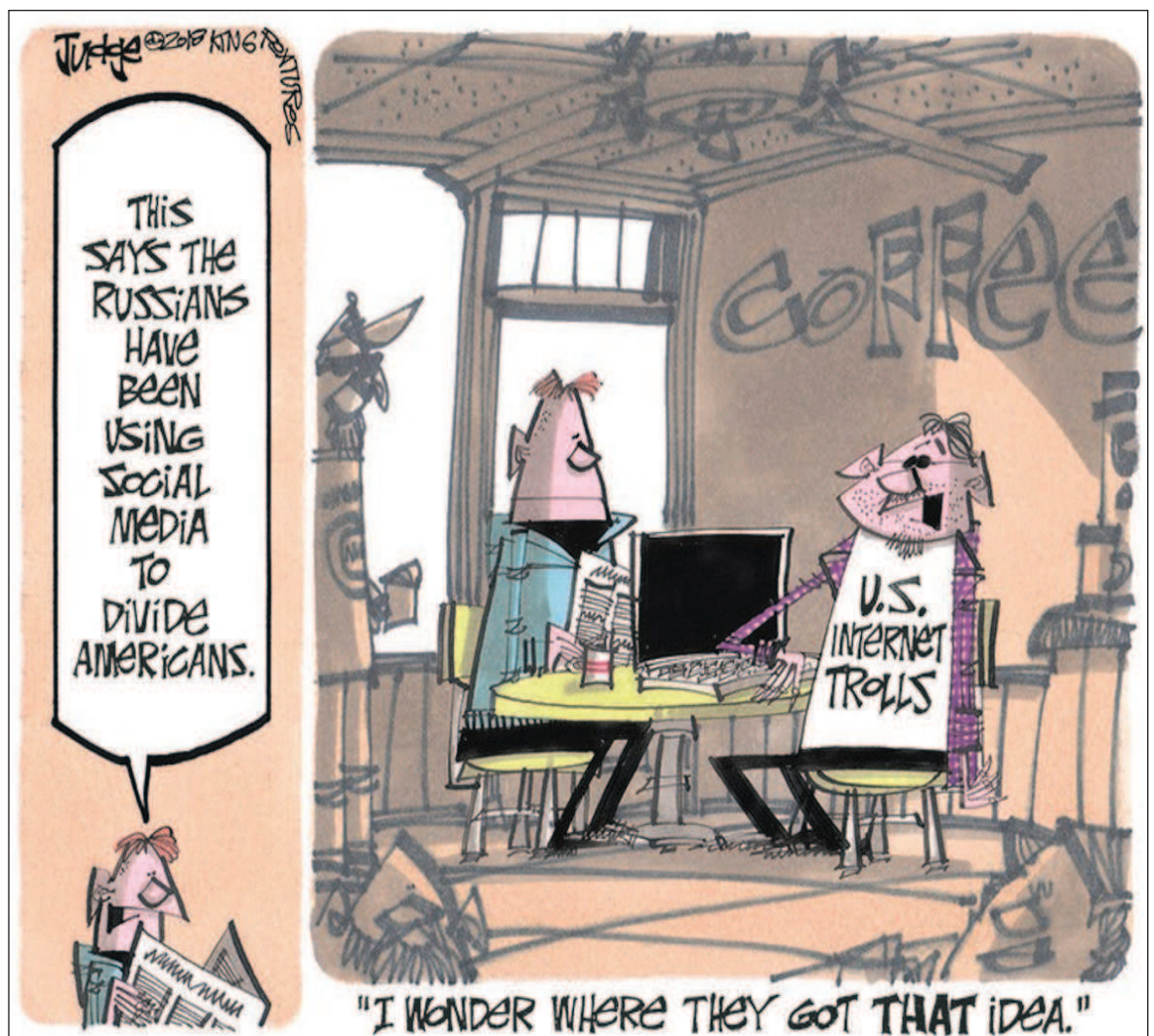
rewards are greater. In contrast, public employees generally have experienced greater job security, although that is lessening. In exchange for that security, they have received lower salaries but good benefits. If that social contract is to be changed, society’s expectations must change as well.

Priority Oregon contends that Oregon public employees generally have much better pensions, more paid time off and lower health-care premiums than most private-sector employees. That is accurate.

Salary is a different matter. Scads of statistical studies have been conducted, but all they have proved is the difficulty of comparing public and private pay for “similar” jobs. In conducting those analyses, numerous assumptions are made about what constitutes a comparable job as far as duties, working conditions and qualifications. That explains why practically any group can find a salary study to support its particular viewpoint.

For decades, Oregon has struggled, and failed, to find definitive answers. It would be expecting a lot of future legislatures to “Establish criteria to guide public employers’ determinations of when an employee’s job is like or comparable to the job of an individual in Oregon who is not employed by a public employer,” as required by the proposed ballot measure.

The proposal is a long way from reaching the 2020 ballot, if it does. But it raises intriguing questions.



FARMER’S FATE

Racing through VBS

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Brianna Walker

To be sure of hitting the target, shoot first, and wherever you hit, call it the target. That has seemed to be my mantra this last week. I love vacation Bible school.

My husband and I have been VBS leaders for nine years now, and we usually love it. Creating the program, designing the craft, finding tangible daily demonstrations — the only thing that would make it better would be if they scheduled it in the winter!

Sometimes I think VBS actually stands for “very busy season.” Jotting down ideas from the swather cab, lining up helpers from the semi truck, organizing the demonstrations from the tractor, it was finally planned out — or perhaps I should say the bull’s-eye was set up, but we weren’t going to be too hasty about calling it the target yet.

Our theme was “Racing from Egypt to Canaan,” exploring the many “pit stops” the Israelites had along the way. To help set the scene, we used a semi-load of straw bales to create Mount Sinai and the walls of Jericho.

For the Red Sea, we made a straw pool lined with black plastic — I couldn’t decide if Moses would have been proud or appalled.

With our background completed, it was time to focus on the stage area. Bringing the racing theme to the forefront, we set up racing slicks, checkered flags, a side by side, four-wheelers and dirtbikes — both in adult and youth sizes. To complete our program, the kids’ craft would be to build a soap box car.

T minus five days, the bull’s-eye was set up, the gun leveled — but just before the trigger was squeezed, our music crew had a family emergency and canceled.

Days of frantic scrambling paid off, and now our sights were

readjusted to the new target. The scope was double-checked — just to be sure. A deep breath in, the trigger finger tightened — and our first nighttime demonstration bailed — just hours before the program was to start.

My husband scrolled diligently through his phone trying to find a Plan B or Plan C or even Plan O. But at 5:55 and a few seconds, our program starting at 6, we just closed our eyes and pulled the trigger — the target being whatever we hit.

With no racing device to show the expecting kids, we did what any farmer would do: We brought out floor jacks, impact drivers and tire irons and let the kids pretend they were in “the pits” changing tires. All except the really little kids, who just took rides up and down on the jacks.

As the week progressed, our target seemed to readjust daily. Horse rides turned into horse-powered ATV rides, and group leaders changed faces as people either got sick or headed off to attend weddings.

Partway through the week, a cousin from central Oregon brought her five kids to come, stay and attend the craziness. We discovered real quick how different a family of four is, versus a family of seven.

First off, I don’t have enough dishes. Secondly, I should buy more plastic cups and less glass ones. And, third, when you have a large family, meals are much more of a production.

I’m no Julia Child in the kitchen — yet I’ve never felt as bumming as Mrs. Doubtfire. We’ll eat throughout the day as hunger strikes. Although, if I was completely honest, I must say that I usually think about food after

someone’s stomach begins growling. Our house functions best as a do-it-yourself bed and breakfast. I discovered, though, that a family of seven requires a bit more planning. It seemed that, no sooner had the last breakfast dish been washed and put away, that my cousin was planning lunch and then supper — although I am sure there must have been time in between.

My cousin is a great planner when it comes to meals. I, on the other hand, will look in the cupboards, pull out some random ingredients and food is served. All I really need is cheese or black pepper — that’s practically like duct tape and baler twine in my kitchen. They can fix anything. My cousin gave me a couple of looks, that my self-consciousness took to mean “what kind of grandmother will you make if you don’t enjoy cooking?”

As VBS wore on, we sang songs, built our soap box cars, got to climb in race cars, pretend to be horses as we ran through the barrels and watch motocross racers. On Sunday, our VBS finale, we set up a track to race the cars we had worked all week to build. There were tunnels, hair-pin curves and corners lined with tires.

I felt that we had shot a pretty decent target after all — even if it wasn’t what we had been aiming for in the original sight. Just then, a friend steps up and pats my shoulder.

“I don’t know how you come up with these ideas — it’s amazing.”

My cousin’s face flashed before my eyes, looking at me with despair at my lack of meal planning skill.

I smiled at my friend, “Well, I will be the grandmother that provides crafts and activities, but asks her grandkids to bring the food!”

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

‘A win for justice’ To the Editor:

I support Rep. Greg Walden for his efforts and success in which he lobbied the White House for the pardon of Dwight and Steven Hammond. The Oregon Cattlemen’s Association and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke also supported the Hammonds. It seems that the Obama ad-

ministration was overzealous in going after the Hammonds.

The Hammonds are not terrorists; they’re ranchers. They know how to take care of the land because it’s their livelihood. That administration obviously did not understand ranching or even the West for that matter.

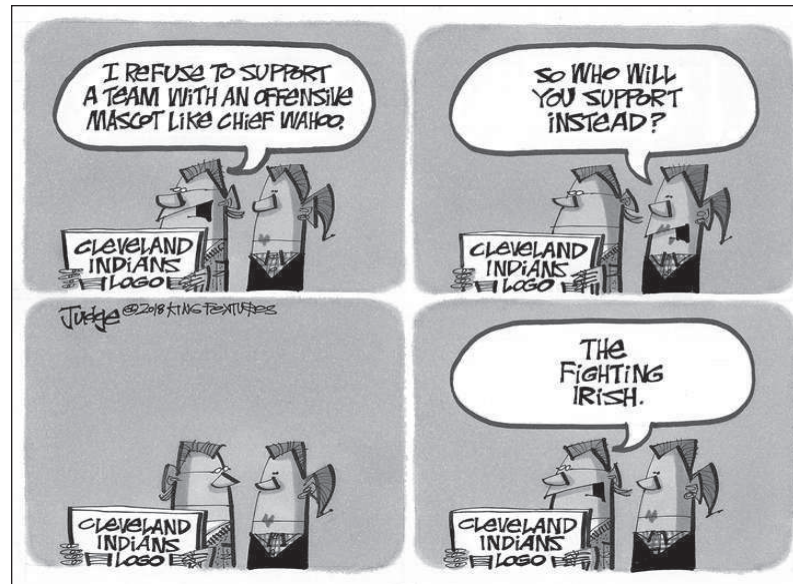
The Trump administration knows and appreciates ranching

communities and what they can provide.

I also agree with what Greg Walden said about President Trump’s decision for the pardon. He said the decision was “a win for justice, and an acknowledgment of our unique way of life in the high desert, rural West.”

Patty Trost
Unity

Letters policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for Blue Mountain Eagle readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters will be asked to be contained to 350 words. No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. No thank-you letters. Submissions to this page become property of the Eagle. The Eagle reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content. Letters must be original and signed by the writer. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. We must limit all contributors to one letter per person per month. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. Send letters to editor@bmeagle.com, or Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845; or fax to 541-575-1244.



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- **Gov. Kate Brown, D** — 254 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111. Fax: 503-378-6827. Website: www.governor.state.or.us/governor.html.
- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
- **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.
- **Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** — 900 Court St. NE, S-301, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1730. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/Bentz. Email: Sen.CliffBentz@oregonlegislature.gov.



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