

Solid ideas for restructuring PERS

A new legislative report underscores that PERS could be headed for more trouble.

The report from the Legislative Fiscal Office reaffirms that the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System remains highly dependent on investment income for its financial stability. That is not a surprise. However, it should concern Oregon officials, especially in light of the current global economic swings.

Our federal leaders are not helping, with their trade disputes and partial government shutdown. Their lack of fiscal leadership and political cooperation adds to worries that the U.S. will fall into a recession. Where the nation goes economically, so goes Oregon.

The legislative report is based on a study last year from the Pew Charitable Trusts, which compared state pension plans for fiscal 2016. PERS had one of the worst ratios of operating cash flow.

On the other hand, PERS is one of the better-funded public pension plans. Cumulatively, state pension plans amassed a \$1.4 trillion deficit, because they generally are paying more in benefits than they receive in pension contributions. Poor investment returns also are factors, although PERS has done relatively well.

So PERS is not in danger of imminent insolvency, it is in better condition than many state funds but it is more subject to market volatility.

It should be of little comfort that PERS is not as bad off as other public pension funds. PERS' unfunded actuarial liability forces schools and local governments to cut current jobs and services to pay for pensions. The burden can fall disproportion-

ately on rural Oregon, as is detailed in the winter edition of *The Other Oregon*, a quarterly magazine from EO Media Group.

Rural Oregon also has proposed solutions. Mark Mulvihill, superintendent of the InterMountain Education Service District in Pendleton, has proposed changing state law to allow longtime public employees to collect both their pension and their salary for several years before retirement. Schools and government agencies would benefit from retaining good workers who were considering retiring, employees would have more money in the short term and they and their employer would contribute 6 percent of their salary toward paying down the employer's PERS liability.

The PERS burden is staggering, and it's growing exponentially. For Clatskanie and Ontario — cities on opposite sides of the state — the burden is roughly the equivalent of six times the city's annual payroll, according to 2017 figures from PERS.

That is why the Oregon Business Plan said in a report last month: "Fixing PERS is Job 1, and it's doable."

Among the plan's recommendations: Oregon should again require that public employees contribute 6 percent of their pay to their pension, similar to what most states do. Oregon could move to a defined-contribution system, like a 401(k), for future employees. The state also could give current employees a choice of staying with PERS or switching to a 401(k).

All are solid ideas. All are reasonable. Only one thing is missing so far — leadership from Gov. Kate Brown and the Legislature.



Prairie City FFA celebrates fall success

By Abby Winegar
For the Blue Mountain Eagle

As fall has come to an end, Prairie City FFA would like to update everyone with what has been going on. We have had an amazing fall. We have experienced some once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and made some amazing accomplishments, learning new things all the time.

We started with traveling all the way to Nashville, Tennessee, where we got to do a lot of sight-seeing and learned a lot about Music City. We then traveled to Kentucky where we went to Churchill Downs to tour the facilities and learn their culture, and we even were able to watch a movie about the history of horse races. We loaded back up into our rental rigs to head for Indianapolis. While we were in Indianapolis, we got to experience the sea of blue jackets.

As National Convention ended, we had to say goodbye to our new and old friends to come home to prepare for Ag Sales and Job Interview. We were proud to bring home first place overall at the Ag Sales Career Development Event, along with Shaelynn Bice placing first in job interview and Haley Pfefferkorn falling close behind in second place. Freshman member Marcus Judd received top individual in the advertising practicum.

We went on to prepare for our annual FFA auction. We want to make sure everyone knows how thankful we are for the support and funding we have received from this county. You helped make our auction go off without a hitch.

We now are going on to pre-



Contributed photo

Students who participated in the 2018 FFA Strawberry Mountain District Ag Sales and Job Interview, include, from left, top row, Carson McKay, Abby Pfefferkorn, Katie Hire, Hannah Wall, Damien Milesi, Marcus Judd and CJ Camarena; bottom row, Jessi Nolan, Shaelynn Bice, Haley Pfefferkorn and Lucas McKinley.

pare for Parliamentary Procedure and Public Speaking events. For Parliamentary Procedure, we will have one beginning team and one advanced team — the teams have yet to be decided. We are hoping to send both teams to state.

Parli Pro is a contest to practice running a formal meeting using Robert's Rules of Order; it also involves debate. One of the topics that they will debate is "Should Oregon FFA support requiring a commercial driver's license for hauling of agricultural products or livestock?" There are 20 topics. One will be drawn at random for them to debate. They will have three rounds on the floor where they will get a chance to put their skills to work, and they will have one round in chair where the chairman and secretary do most of the

work. Shaelynn and Haley are both working very hard researching various ag-related topics, such as should the USDA standard definition/requirements to label products for practices such as "grass-fed" and "naturally grown?"

Abby Winegar is writing a prepared public speaking paper on holistic management. Maddy Way is writing a paper that hits home to many 4-H and FFA members of our county. She is writing on the PRRS disease. And Abbey Pfefferkorn is also writing a topic for sophomore public speaking. Thank you, everyone, for riding along on this fun and amazing road we are on, and we hope that everyone had a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Abby Winegar is the Prairie City FFA reporter.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump 'tapped into the hate in America'

To the Editor:

I believe the main reason Trump is president is he tapped into the hate in America and exploited it with lots of help from Russia and faith-based Trump lovers. Here is a partial list of what I believe endears Trump to his voters. "Sad."

They believe everything he says. Everything else is fake news. When someone disagrees with Trump, Trump lovers just call them names, threaten them or, as Trump said, "knock the crap out of them ... I will pay for the legal fees." Makes them feel better, right?

When someone says something that is true and has facts to back it up and they don't like it, they make up their own facts. Makes them feel better, right?

When the media reports a story about Trump and has all those darn facts to back it up that they don't like, they just start screaming fake news. Makes them feel better, right?

Mueller investigation — forget about all the people indicted close to the Trump campaign and some going to jail — witch hunt, right?

Climate change — although 99 percent of scientists agree it is happening — fake news, right?

After several investigations by Congress, the FBI and others, the DOJ determined there was no evidence to charge Hillary Clinton

with a crime, but you still have the right to scream, "Lock her up" or "Hillary for prison." Although there is no logical reason to keep demonizing her, it's better for Fox News and others to point the finger at Hillary for prison than Trump for prison!

Let's not forget Stormy and Karen. Didn't happen, right?

Here we go. Putin's puppet in the White House might be heading for the big house, Russia on the march in the Black Sea. China laughing at tariffs. Voter fraud in North Carolina — oh, darn, it's the Republicans. Massive deficits. Stock market crashing. Some farmers will go under without a bailout. Government shutdown.

Thank you, Trump lovers!

I hope this letter doesn't offend anyone, but if it does, "Oh well."

Clifford Smith
Canyon City

Common sense

To the Editor:

Are you aware the term "common sense" is in the dictionary? It is, and it is defined by Webster as being sound, ordinary sense, good judgment. That's it. Short and to the point. Judgment may also be spelled "judgement." Anyway, you choose.

Common sense may not be so common anymore. This letter is written in reference to the article about gun restrictions on the front page of the Jan. 2 Blue Mountain Eagle. Common sense should tell

me to use good judgment when dealing with dangerous items in my own home. I certainly don't wish any accidental harm on any friends or family that may be living or visiting there. Sound, ordinary sense should tell me I am responsible for any dangerous or hazardous item of risk in my own home.

Now, that being said, let's say you have trouble sleeping due to pain from an old back injury. Because of the injury and resulting pain you use sleeping pills or pain medication obtained by prescription (legally) from your local drug store. These items are in your medicine cabinet in your home, and your doors and windows are locked.

Your local burglar doesn't care about your personal responsibility concerning items in your home. He or she doesn't care about responsibility at all. This person breaks into your locked, secured home and steals your legally prescribed medications and deals them illegally to someone on the street. The person on the street dies from an overdose. Now enter common sense. Who's responsible? You or the creep that broke into your home and stole your medications? Creep? Did I say creep? That may be politically incorrect. Excuse me for using my First Amendment. That may be verboten. Did I spell that right? Anyway, you choose.

Michael R. Christensen
John Day



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Grant County's Weekly Newspaper

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1 YEAR SUBSCRIPTION RATES (including online access)

Grant County\$40
Everywhere else in U.S.....\$51
Outside Continental U.S.....\$60

Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

Periodicals Postage Paid at John Day and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER send address changes to: Blue Mountain Eagle 195 N. Canyon Blvd. John Day, OR 97845-1187 USPS 226-340

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