

The elephants in the room

As the Oregon Legislature prepared to start work this week, its leaders were saying all the right things about working together, respecting rural Oregon and doing what was best for the state as a whole.

But, as the saying goes, “only time will tell.”

In the Oregon House, the Democratic and Republican leadership have a more collegial relationship than in the past. In the Senate, it seems prickly.

Democrats gained supermajorities in the House and Senate, which enables them to pass tax increases without needing any Republican votes — if all Democrats stick together, which is never a sure thing. Some legislative issues, such as potential changes in sentencing laws, have an even higher threshold for passage. In any case, Democrats cannot conduct business unless enough Republicans are present for a quorum.

Through the leadership of Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, the Senate has acted as a moderating influence on proposals emanating from the more liberal House. But the November elections swung the Senate to the left, and Courtney worries about how he will balance the expectations of progressive Democrats with the need to work collaboratively with Republicans.

“We cannot do this, Democrats, without Republicans. You gotta understand that,” Courtney said at the annual Associated Press Legislative Preview on Friday. “We cannot do this without Republicans. Without the elephants in the room — another way to put it — the donkeys can’t do it.”

The question is whether the 90 legislators, as well

as Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, will give more than lip service to that collaboration.

The early signs are positive. They almost always are at the start of a legislative session.

Legislators went through civility training last week. Equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans will serve on the joint legislative committee charged with improving the Oregon Capitol culture and overcoming the specter of sexual harassment. Courtney appointed non-urban and urban senators — Democrats Betsy Johnson of Scappoose and Elizabeth Steiner Hayward of Beaverton — to jointly serve as the Senate’s budget leaders. He has introduced Senate Bill 2, with Republican Sens. Bill Hansell of Athena and Cliff Bentz of Ontario, which could be a breakthrough in providing greater land-use flexibility in Eastern Oregon.

It might also be a good sign that legislators are still trying to write the carbon cap-and-invest legislation, which progressives demand and conservatives dislike. Some Democratic legislators had long ago insisted that the legislation, known as Clean Oregon Jobs, was ready. Republicans have strived to make it less onerous for businesses and consumers.

Most bills passed by the Legislature are routine and have bipartisan support. Few of those will make headlines. But many contentious proposals — from taxes to firearms — likely will pit business vs. labor, rural vs. urban and minority Republicans vs. majority Democrats.

Those are the bills that will test legislators’ commitment to collaboration, to civility — and to all of Oregon.



Federal hydropower delivers value

By Scott Corwin
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

Recently, some have asserted that purchasing power from the Bonneville Power Administration is an “outmoded” model that should be jettisoned in favor of other sources. In fact, BPA and its utility customers are evolving with the dynamic electricity industry, and it is the local utilities like Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative that are best able to determine the precise mix of power for future needs. With respect to the federal hydropower system, to paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of the demise of this flexible and renewable source of electricity have been greatly exaggerated.

BPA offers some of the cleanest and lowest-priced power in the country. But, in order to retain this enviable position, it will need to continue to address the challenge of increasing costs and reduced revenue. This is not an issue unique to BPA or even to the Northwest. Low natural gas prices, and an influx of other generation, have reduced market prices for selling surplus power. At the same time, an onslaught of regulatory costs, including fish and wildlife mitigation, physical security, cyber security and the need to maintain aging infrastructure have taken their toll.

Just as during a similar threat



Scott Corwin

from a dip in market prices in the 1990s, BPA and agencies that own the generation assets are implementing a strategy to strengthen financial health through cost and debt management. Part of this plan is to modernize to meet industry change and better provide competitive power and transmission services.

Some assertions about a failing federal power system appear to be motivated by long-held advocacy positions against dams. These arguments are misguided in their presumption that the needs of fish (impacted by many factors) should mean dismantling dams through which the fish already see 96 to 98 percent survival rates. There has even been fear mongering about sediment buildup, ignoring that the Army Corps of Engineers very effectively provides any needed dredging in the river.

These claims also tend to ignore the enormous value and unique aspects of power from BPA that is safe, reliable, flexible and 95 percent emission free. Including the market purchases that could contain coal or gas generation, BPA’s power still enjoys a level of 27 pounds of carbon for each megawatt hour of electricity, compared to the national

rate of 998 pounds. Studies showed that to replace just one-eighth of BPA’s power with highly efficient gas generation would increase CO2 emissions by over two million metric tons each year, the equivalent of adding more than 400,000 cars to the roads.

In addition, hydropower’s flexible capacity enables more use of generation from wind and solar. With large, cost-effective battery storage not yet available, intermittent renewable sources have the added operational need and cost of being integrated into the grid using other generation such as hydropower that can ramp up to meet immediate demand.

The regional power planning entity, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, stated, “the federal hydropower system has been, and continues to be, the foundation of the Northwest’s economy.” As BPA and its utility customers evolve to meet future needs, this valuable federal power system is a far cry from being outmoded.

Scott Corwin is the executive director of the Public Power Council, a nonprofit association that represents consumer-owned electric utilities in the Pacific Northwest with respect to power and transmission from the federal Columbia River Power System. Corwin has more than 20 years of experience in Northwest energy policy.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OTEC should provide electricity, not political patronage

To the Editor:
Oregon Trail Electric Consumer Cooperative is a nonprofit corporate utility incorporated in the state of Oregon as a consumer cooperative. Its purpose, as stated in the articles of incorporation, is to be a cooperative electric utility providing the essential public service of helping its members to have access to the electrical energy that is so necessary to their lives.

The purposes of the cooperative are stated specifically in the Articles of Incorporation:

1. To benefit primarily residential and small farm consumers of electric energy.
2. To generate, manufacture, purchase, acquire and accumulate electric energy for its members only and to transmit, distribute, furnish, sell and dispose of such electric energy to its members only, and to construct, purchase, lease as lessee and in any manner acquire, own, hold, maintain, operate, sell, dispose of, lease as lessor, exchange and mortgage plants, buildings, works, machinery, supplies, apparatus, equipment and electric transmission and distribution lines or systems, necessary, convenient or appropriate to accomplish any or all of the purposes of the cooperative. ...
3. To assist its members to wire their premises and install therein electrical and plumbing appliances, fixtures, machinery, supplies, appa-

ratus and equipment of any and all kinds and character, and, in connection therewith and for such purposes, to purchase, acquire, lease, sell, distribute, install and repair electrical and plumbing appliances, fixtures, machinery, supplies, apparatus and equipment of any and all kinds and character.”

Please notice that there is no reference to a philanthropic or charitable purpose that is unrelated to providing essential electrical energy to members. OTEC was formed to provide its members with the benefits of electrical energy, not to become a philanthropic foundation serving the special interests of nine directors. Charitable foundations adequately fulfill that function. When OTEC takes the membership’s money to give to individuals for purposes that are unrelated to the provision of essential electrical energy, such as monetary awards or trips to Washington, D.C., it begins to look more like political patronage, wherein favors are given in return for political support.

Christopher Christie
Baker City

No need for ‘conditional’ withdrawal

To the Editor:
I write in response to Mark Webb’s Sept. 19, 2018, letter to the editor titled “I (conditionally) offer to withdraw my legal challenges.”

Jan. 9, Judge Cramer issued his decision on Mr. Webb’s legal challenges, finding in favor of the county

for dismissal. I will discuss one of Mr. Webb’s issues, since he chose to call out myself, Judy Kerr and Jim Sproul in his letter. Mr. Webb alluded that Jim, Judy and I were “people who regularly peddle misinformation to manipulate county residents and local government that verges on criminal,” a statement taken from Mr. Powell’s previous letter to the editor about Mr. Webb.

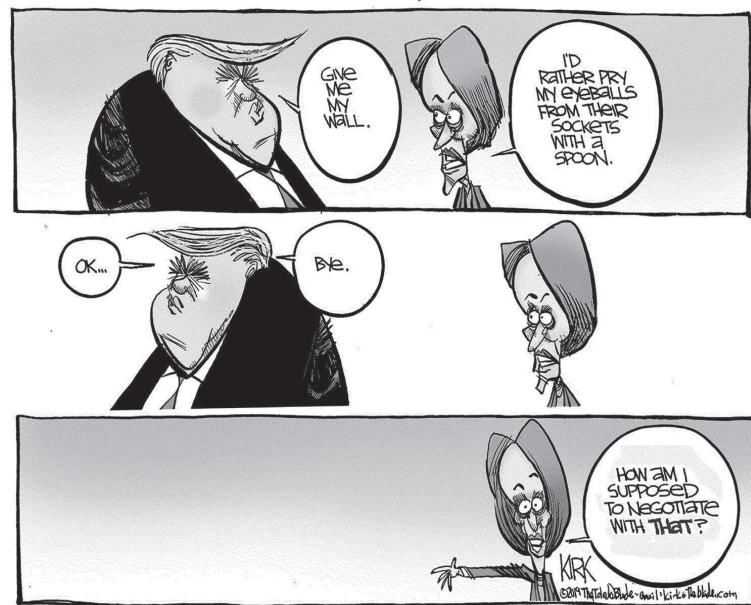
If Mr. Webb can show where I’ve “peddled misinformation,” I would be glad to own it. Judge Cramer’s decision speaks volumes to the veracity of Mr. Webb’s legal challenges and information he shares throughout the community when deciding Mr. Webb’s legal challenge — “(b) Failure to state ultimate facts sufficient to constitute a claim.”

So, I would ask, who is not presenting sufficient facts to the public?

I have not called into question the validity of road closure based on the County Ordinance 2013-1. I have called into question the closure of roads protected under RS 2477 as public rights of way.

Ordinance 2013-01 (known as the “roads ordinance”) is clear. The county called for entities planning to close roads to present and gain support by the county before extinguishing a public right of way. Mr. Webb takes issue with outside groups and individuals having a say in such things. By outside, I mean outside the Blue Mountains Forest Partners, but that’s what elected officials are there for, whether it’s to Mr. Webb’s liking or not. So, no need for a “conditional” withdrawal.

John D. George
Bates



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Blue Mountain
EAGLE
Published every
Wednesday by
EC MEDIA
group

Grant County’s Weekly Newspaper

Publisher.....Chris Rush, crush@eomediagroup.com
Editor & General Manager.....Sean Hart, editor@bmeagle.com
Reporter.....Richard Hanners, rick@bmeagle.com
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1 YEAR SUBSCRIPTION RATES
(including online access)
Grant County\$40
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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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