

# Pain in the 21st century to fix problems from 20th

The good news is Gov. Kate Brown finally has a plan for putting PERS on solid financial footing. The bad news is that it includes pushing SAIF off that solid ground, as well as taking most of Oregonians' tax "kicker" refund next year.

Brown says her proposal has something for anyone to like and to dislike. She is correct. The Oregon Education Association immediately screamed that she was trying to cut teachers' salaries. That is false. Brown wants public employees to accept a slight reduction in their future pensions so as to help pay the unfunded actuarial liability of the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System.

The governor calls her proposal "shared responsibility." Shared pain is more like it.

PERS' inadequate funding is not the fault of everyday Oregonians or of current public employees. No, the blame lies with the 20th century legislators and union leaders who disregarded

president — and other legislators were assured in 1982 that their bipartisan raid on SAIF was legal.

As now, state officials at the time said SAIF had far more reserves than necessary for future claims and thus could easily weather the Legislature's intrusion. Maybe. But SAIF's sales plummeted, sending it into a years-long tailspin. It turns out that companies don't like to do business with an insurer whose money can be taken on a whim by the Legislature. Meanwhile, SAIF's top officials were so angry — for good reason — that they quit and formed a competing, private workers' compensation carrier that took a significant share of SAIF's business.

As justification for a new raid on SAIF, the governor and her cohorts point out that Oregon has some of the lowest workers' compensation rates in the nation and the highest rate of dividends being paid back to employers.

Isn't that what we want — accident prevention being more effective, employ-

ers paying less for coverage and SAIF customers getting rebates on some of their premiums, plus interest earned? That sounds like a well-run program, unlike PERS.

A legitimate argument can be made for SAIF to work with school districts on lowering their workers' compensation premiums. However, school districts are not the only public agencies facing soaring PERS rates. Rural public employers, especially fire districts, are especially hard hit.

Meanwhile, Brown is dead-set against offering current and future public employees a defined contribution plan, like a 401(k), as a complete alternative to PERS' defined benefit. She is wrong. So, too, are the legislators whose solution is to merely extend PERS' debt over more years, holding down the yearly cost to employers but increasing the overall cost.

There is more to Brown's plan, including her idea of diverting estate and capital gains taxes to pay for PERS. Such taxes are absurdly high in Oregon, but at least this way they would go for a good purpose.

Still, the best that can be said about Brown's proposal is that it is a proposal — not necessarily a wise or innovative proposal.

THIS FIRE IS EXTINGUISHED



MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE USA...



## FARMER'S FATE

# Life is short, the world is wide

Shirts. Check.  
Jeans. Check.  
Underwear. Check.  
Snacks. Check.  
Books for the plane. Check.

A yo-yo, piano music, bubble bath and the family cat? Whoever says you can't take it all has obviously never seen a 3-year-old pack for a vacation. Looking pleased with himself, my toddler tries to zip up the luggage. I quickly take over, thanking him for such a great effort. He smiles — job completed — then runs off to see if he can help his older brother pack. I waited until his little blonde head was no longer in sight before pushing the cat out of the bag and emptying the majority of its contents.

The seventh rule of the Dalai Lama's Rules of Life says "Once a year, go somewhere you've never been before." I'm not Buddhist, but I love this piece of advice. So this year we bought tickets for Japan. I've always said we need to take vacations. We can always make more money. But we cannot always make memories.

With our bags finally packed, the sheep lambled out, good-byes said to all our pets and my father-in-law's American Express card tucked next to our passports (I've heard one should never leave home without it), we finally stepped into the airport where we voluntarily submit to being scanned, patted, searched and glared at for trying to smuggle mascara through our luggage without putting it into a clear plastic bag.

Finally settled into our seats, the kids snuggled up in the airline blankets, eye masks and slippers, and my husband and



Brianna Walker

I held hands as we breathed in the first scents of vacation. I know there are many people who don't believe in God, but at the first patch of rough turbulence, it seems everyone's hoping there is a higher power, and whenever we land safely, we always seem to offer him a little something. We did the temples. We did the shrines. Mt. Fuji, the suicide forest, ice caves and food. We ate a lot of food. And like

ing in the snow, taking pictures of monkeys that were relaxing in natural rock pools of warm water, sandwiched between two snowy mountain peaks — who were the real monkeys?

Traveling isn't always pretty (sometimes it's dirty train station floors), it isn't always comfortable (just check out the blisters on your feet), sometimes it even hurts (arm strain from carrying a sleeping 3-year-old for miles), but that's OK. The journey changes you. You can shake the dust from your shoes of each place you've been — but those dust fragments will

never leave your memory. Traveling also allows you to learn new things. While reading a book one morning, I came across a word I wasn't familiar with.

"Most women in Amsterdam in 1680 were proibido."

Lacking a dictionary, I asked my husband to look it up on his phone. "Proibido" — a Portuguese word for prohibited.

"I can't believe you didn't know that!" my husband

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all great travelers, we saw more than we remember, and we remember more than we saw!

Our kids enjoyed driving on the "wrong" side of the road, from the "wrong" side of the car and driving with "wrong" speeds (kilometers). As we filled up the gas tank one afternoon, my husband was muttering about how dumb kilometers were. I tried to convince him that since kilometers were shorter than miles, we were actually saving gas, and that we should always take our trips in kilometers. It didn't work.

We saw the snow monkeys sitting in hot tubs. They laughed and hissed at us — with good reason. As I looked around, I saw all manner of cold, frozen humans, stand-

ribbed.

"Ha," I laughed, "I suppose you are up on your Portuguese?"

"Not as much as I should be, considering I am Portuguese."

I was stunned. Traveling definitely lets you learn new things. Like how your husband of 14 years is half Portuguese and his grandfather was Basque!

But of all the books I've ever read, the best stories are always found between the pages of a passport: where your feet are dirty, your hair is messy and your eyes are sparkling with life. I don't know all the questions, but travel is definitely the answer!

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### John Day should spend money fixing potholes

To the Editor:

My compliments to Pete Hetta and Rusty Clark for express-

ing the thoughts of many of us in Grant County (in previous letters). The massive projects proposed by the city manager are unnecessary, too expensive and frivolous.

More important to all who

drive the streets of John Day are the potholes. Yes, the potholes in the streets getting deeper and dangerous. The money needs to be spent fixing potholes!

Harriet Crum  
John Day

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