Give geeks, not meek, chance to run country

■ **OUR OPINION:** Funny DeFazio deserves credit for trying to help military families, not golfers

He's five-foot-something, has a cheesy little grin, and will probably make a serious bid for Mark Hatfield's Senate seat later this year.

During the primary election, Lane County residents first gawked in disbelief, then probably fell off their couches laughing at a TV campaign ad featuring Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., driving around in a '60s-something Dodge Dart geekmobile to show he was "different" from other Democratic candidates.

It was a particularly baffling and hilarious political campaign ad.

But make no mistake, despite his newly found niche as "The People's Nerd," DeFazio is all business.

DeFazio recently led three other representatives against a Pentagon plan that would allow a third 18-hole golf course to be built at Andrews Air Force Base, Md.

DeFazio's group sent a letter of protest to Defense Secretary William Perry outlining their complaint that the $5.1 million would be better spent on day care programs for military families.

Incredible! A politician with common sense?

We could use more like him.

CBS, former executive take on tobacco corp.

■ **OUR OPINION:** Tobacco industry attempts to muzzle the truth but fails to quiet "60 Minutes"

Truth, it seems, always comes with a price.

In a move that put over the airwaves what had already been put in print by the *Wall Street Journal*, CBS finally broadcast its controversial tobacco industry interview with good guy Jeffrey Wigand.

It appears that the bad guys (in this case, Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp.) were not content in bullying the First Amendment and CBS' *60 Minutes* with threats of legal action — now Wigand himself is the object of intense harassment.

Actually, his life has been threatened.

No matter what happens (and we sincerely hope Mr. Wigand takes every precaution to protect himself and his family), the tobacco industry has lost another battle in the war against the public's right to know about the harms of smoking and the freedom of the press to tell them about it.

While the entire fiasco is centered around the proven addictive nature of nicotine and an alleged broken confidentiality agreement between Wigand and B&W, the protracted lies of a powerful industry are at the core of the issue.

It's fortunate that one man and one network were brave enough to tell the truth.

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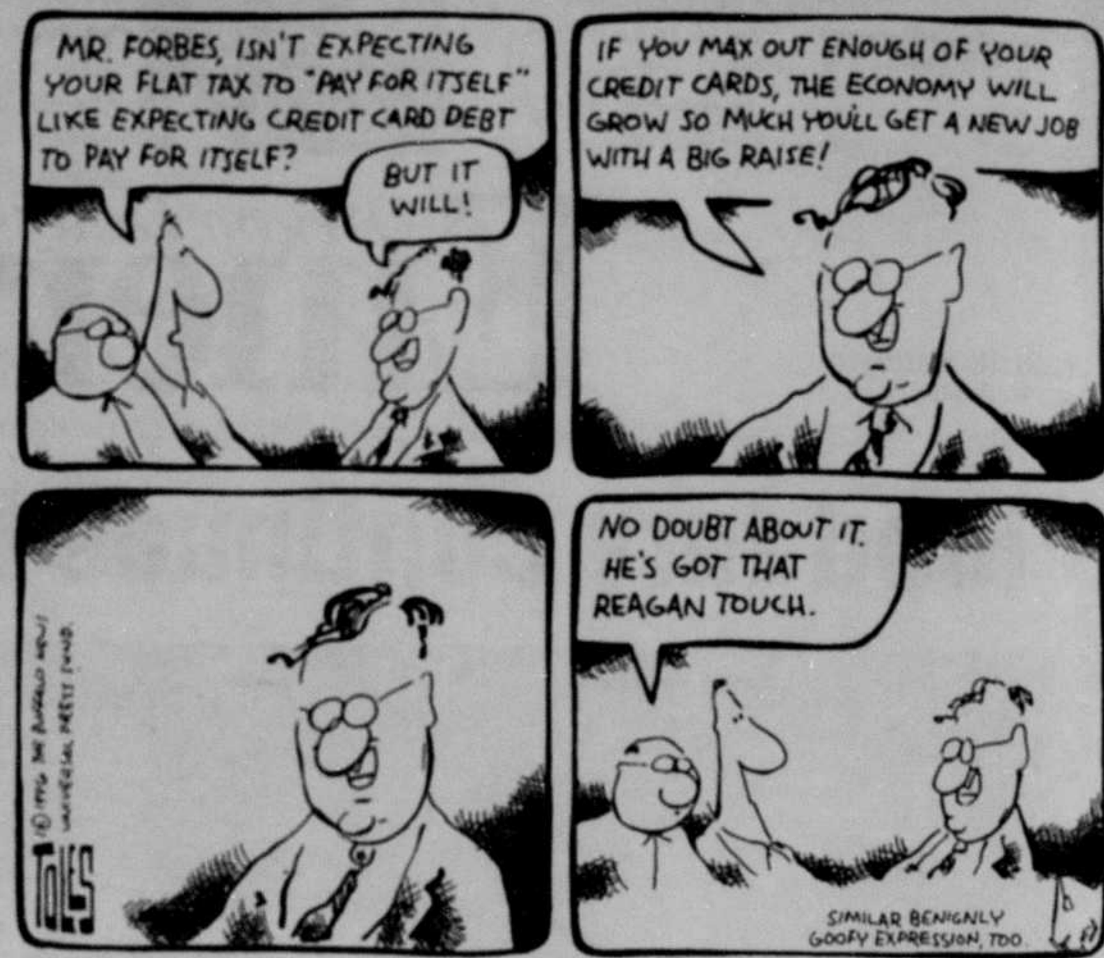

Families fare better with Forbes' flat tax

The mainstream media, which have done their best to paint the Republican party as a group of extremist zealots, are having a hard time explaining the fact that the fastest-rising GOP presidential candidate is a pro-choice, pro-gay rights moderate.

For those who have had to struggle to make tax payments, however, it is no mystery.

The success of Malcolm (Steve) Forbes Jr. is based on his support of the flat tax, because for most Americans, the current federal taxation scheme is an issue of grave concern.

OPINION

Primo Fontana

As Allan Sloan, *Newsweek's* Wall Street editor, wrote recently: "The current tax code is an incredible mess ... The IRS has hundreds of different forms, and even tax professionals disagree about what some of them mean." This feeling is far from uncommon, and hence, the popularity of a simple flat tax.

The flat tax, under the Forbes plan, would be 17 percent on all wage income (i.e. no taxes on interest, dividends or capital gains) after a deduction of $26,200 for a couple filing jointly plus $5,300 per dependent (those who make less than their deduction would pay no taxes). That's all. No more itemizing, no more deductions, no more mess of paperwork. One tax for all Americans.

But it's not that simple.

When Jerry Brown trotted this idea out in 1992, liberals hailed him as a genius. Forbes is not receiving the same warm welcome. The demagoguery and hysteria surrounding this issue has reached a level that would make even a Wyden campaign worker blush.

Because the common myths being spread about the flat tax are just that, myths, they should be dispelled.

> "*Because the common myths being spread about the flat tax are just that, myths, they should be dispelled.*"

The first and most widely spread rumor is that the flat tax is regressive. Regressive taxes lower the tax rate as a person's income increases. But the flat tax is not regressive.

To demonstrate this, we need only examine three families with two children each — one with a yearly income of $40,000, one with $75,000, and another with $300,000 — and compare their taxes under the Forbes plan.

Let's say that the family with $40,000 has $38,500 in wage income and $1,500 from investments. Their taxable income would be $1,700, and their tax bill would be $289, or .7225 percent of their gross income.

Now, the family with $75,000 makes $68,000 in wages and $7,000 in investments. Their taxable income would be $31,200, and their tax bill would be $5,304, or 7.072 percent of their gross income.

As for the high income family with $300,000, let's say their wage income is $250,000 and their investment income is $50,000. Their taxable income would be $213,200, and their tax cost would be $36,244, or 12.08 percent of their gross income.

So, even if we allow for non-taxable investment income to increase along with gross income (as it does in reality), this flat tax is still progressive; the richer family pays a higher percentage.

Except for the rare examples of people who live mainly on investment income, this will be true. Claims to the contrary, which seem to be the norm, ring hollow after consideration of the numbers.

Flat tax opponents also say that under the plan, costs will increase for the middle class. This claim is so blatantly untrue that I hate to justify it by mentioning it. But in the interest of truth, the myth must be dismissed.

Let's go back to the family of four. Any such family with a wage income of under $36,800 will not pay any federal taxes. Thus, many families in low and lower-middle classes will automatically pay less.

Also, in a recent article on the subject, *Time* took three families — one middle, one upper-middle and one upper class — and found that all received a tax cut. The middle-class family, with a $46,000 combined-wage income, received a tax cut of 56 percent. Once again, any claim to the contrary is false.

The final hysterical argument against this tax scheme is also the weakest. Some say it should not be implemented because after the tax cuts, less money will go to the government. Ironically, this is a positive aspect of the plan, not a negative one.

Washington, D.C. is the profligate son of this nation, a wasteful squanderer of resources. Like a good parent, we must discipline the child and cut his allowance, so he can learn to spend wisely.

If 17 percent of post-deduction wages is not enough to assist the poor, defend the nation, uphold justice, fund education and account for market externalities (the only things the federal government should be doing), then this country is in even greater trouble we imagine.

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