

**GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD**

## Small steps could improve firearm laws

President Donald Trump last week has signaled that he is willing to consider changes in some of the nation's gun laws.

Does that sound familiar? It should: We wrote the very same sentence in an editorial that appeared in February 2018.

It's the start of the same pattern that we've seen play out, with minor exceptions, after every mass shooting in the United States. Politicians, including the president, call for bipartisan solutions. Then, the usual gridlock sets in and nothing happens.

Now, in the wake of the recent massacres in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio, Trump and some Republicans are saying that they might be willing to support so-called "red flag" laws, which allow authorities to obtain a special kind of protective order — known as an extreme risk protection order — to remove guns from people deemed dangerous. (The idea is similar to a 2017 Oregon law that allows police to temporarily confiscate firearms after a family member or law enforcement officer petitions a judge that the person is dangerous and should be kept away from guns.)

Democrats are skeptical. They say any red-flag legislation moving through the Senate must be accompanied by a pair of bills, already passed by the House, that would expand background checks. One of the bills would expand criminal background checks to would-be purchasers on the internet and at gun shows; the other would lengthen the waiting period for gun buyers flagged by the instant background check system to allow more time for the FBI to investigate. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has blocked the bills from being considered by the Senate.

But there might be some room emerging for compromise. On Wednesday, on his way to visit Dayton and El Paso, Trump told reporters that he was willing to consider expanding background checks for gun purchasers — even though, earlier this year, he threatened to veto the House bills.

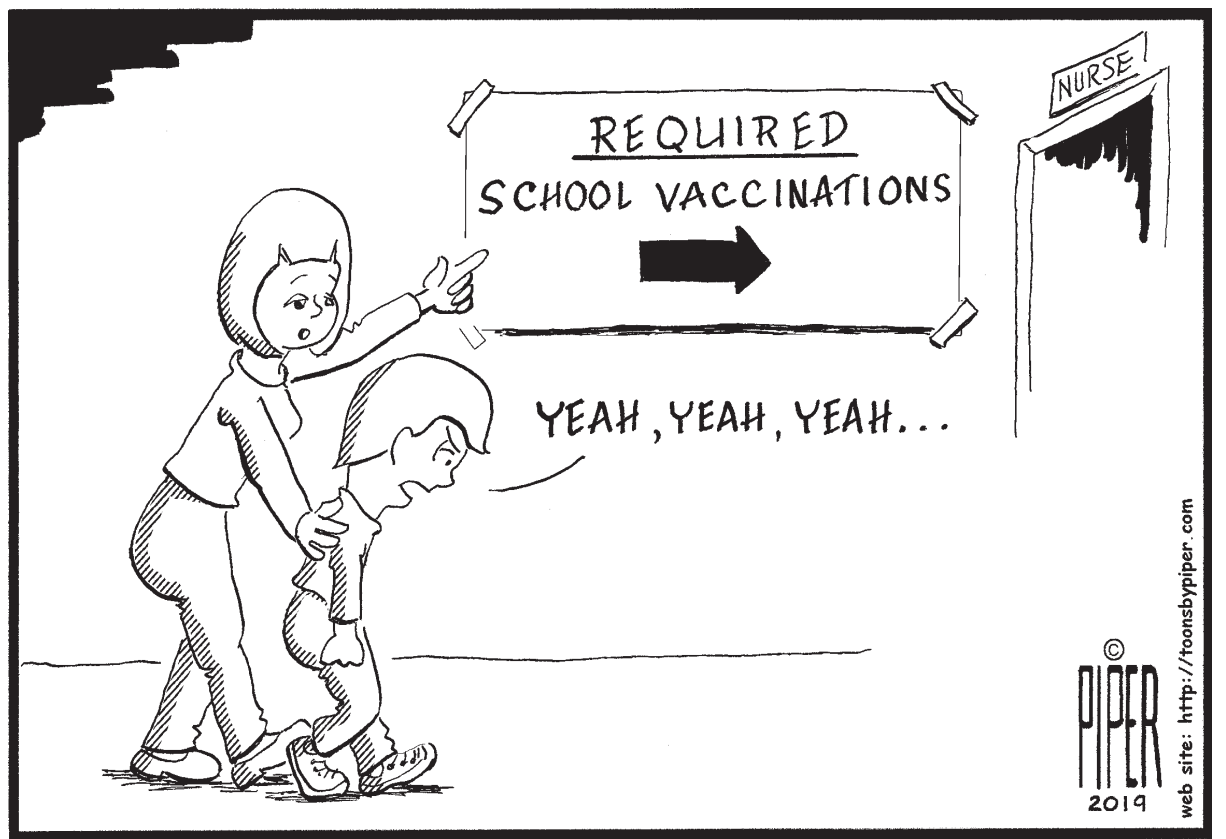
Of course, what Trump said yesterday could be completely different than what he says today; that, too, has become commonplace.

But there is support nationwide for stronger background checks. A 2017 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center found that more than 93% of people in households that owned guns favored universal checks.

And, to be fair, there has been some movement in Washington, D.C., on some of the issues we identified last February. For example, the Justice Department has issued a ruling that essentially bans bump stocks, the gun stocks that can allow semiautomatic weapons to somewhat mimic the firing action of fully automatic firearms. (Several lawsuits have been filed to challenge the ruling.)

In addition, the federal government has attempted to clarify the Dickey Amendment, the 1996 rider to a government spending bill mandating that "none of the funds made available for injury prevention and control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) may be used to advocate or promote gun control." For years, researchers have (with good reason) interpreted the amendment as a federal ban on research into gun violence. The predictable result is that we have very little research in this area. Last year, however, Congress approved language saying that the CDC could in fact conduct research into gun violence, but could not use any federal dollars to specifically advocate or promote gun control. It would be better, of course, to simply remove the amendment, but this is a small step in the right direction.

It could be that a combination of background checks and red-flag laws might not reduce the number of mass shootings in the United States — but these shootings, for all the attention they draw, only made up about 1.2% of all the gun deaths in the U.S. in 2016. Suicide by gun is much more common — and studies have shown that if you make suicide more difficult, suicide rates drop. Small changes in gun laws could make a big difference. And small changes are better than doing nothing.



## Tax-Aide can help Eastern Oregon communities

A small amount of community effort can bring sizable benefits to Oregonians at tax time. This year, for example, seven volunteers in the La Grande area helped 310 residents claim a total of \$285,000 in federal tax refunds.

The cost to local residents: not one penny. The cost to local volunteers: 10 weeks of volunteer service; a willingness to be trained by the AARP Foundation's Tax-Aide program, with support from the Internal Revenue Service and the Oregon Department of Revenue; and, primarily, a commitment to helping others.

Each year, Tax-Aide helps nearly 48,000 Oregonians throughout the state file their state and federal tax returns free of charge. But the program doesn't exist in many rural areas because Tax-Aide simply doesn't have enough volunteers. Existing services in La Grande and Enterprise are in jeopardy. More help is needed in both communities. Additionally, Tax-Aide would like to re-establish sites in Ontario and Baker City.

We need people who are willing to be trained as tax counselors. Also needed are volunteers to manage appointments or walk-in client flow; volunteers who have computer knowledge and skill to inventory and manage technology; others who can apply specialized training to electronic filing and tracking; and still others who can help publicize sites and help recruit volunteers. It takes a team to help a community.

Tax-Aide is also seeking possible sites in Baker City and Ontario. Hosts provide space for 11 weeks, usually one or two days a week.

They also provide chairs, tables and access to the internet. Tax-Aide uses church meeting halls, service club halls, libraries, community centers, etc.

Let's face it. All the talk about simplifying the task of filing taxes is an illusion. If anything, tax preparation has become more difficult in recent years with all of the changes in forms, schedules and new tax consequences. Online and do-it-yourself tax programs often only add to individual costs, frustrations and errors. It's no wonder many are confused during helping others.

The Tax-Aide program can provide free help to seniors and low-income families who struggle to complete their tax returns every year. It's personal, one-on-one tax counseling from friends and neighbors who are certified to help by AARP, IRS and DOR.

Tax-Aide volunteers come from all walks of life. Some have had extensive experience as tax preparers in the professional world. But most Tax-Aide volunteers have had no prior tax preparation experience. They have had successful careers as teachers, household managers, letter carriers, state employees, farmers, bookkeepers, clerks, foresters, lawyers, programmers, business and community leaders.

How can you learn more about becoming a Tax-Aide volunteer in Eastern Oregon? There are two ways. One way is to submit a volunteer interest application online with AARP. The address is <http://tinyurl.com/TAPVapplication>. The website provides a detailed form that will be sent directly to

### My Voice

Bob Bruce, 76, lives in Salem. He serves as the state coordinator for the AARP



Foundation's Oregon Tax-Aide program. He has been a Tax-Aide volunteer and counselor for 15

years and was the program's district coordinator in the Salem area before becoming state coordinator.

My Voice columns should be 500 to 750 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com).

AARP Oregon. A current Tax-Aide leader will respond personally to gather additional information and answer questions. A second way is to send an email inquiry directly to [salemtax-aid@q.com](mailto:salemtax-aid@q.com).

During the 2018 tax year, approximately 48,000 Oregonians got help filing their federal and state taxes from Tax-Aide volunteers across the state. They received some \$47 million in refunds and eligible credits — substantial returns from a program that merely requires a willingness to help others in communities across the state.

## CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

**President Donald Trump:** The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to [www.whitehouse.gov/contact](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact).

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