

Our View



Pendleton Whisky/Contributed Photo

Alcohol drinkers could be contributing \$746 million in new taxes every year in Oregon to raise money for mental health.

# Buying alcohol could be good for Oregon's mental health

Raise your glass for mental health. Alcohol drinkers could be contributing \$746 million in new taxes every year to raise money for mental health.

The Oregon Health Authority had proposed a similar tax in its plans, but Gov. Kate Brown declined to include it in her budget. The nonprofit Oregon Recovers has teamed up with legislators to work up a tax bill anyway. Is it what Oregon needs?

Suggesting higher taxes on alcohol might not make you popular at parties, but it makes sense on some levels. Higher taxes can reduce consumption and raise money. As the price goes up, some problems might go down. The state can also raise taxes without creating a whole new bureaucracy because the bureaucracy is already there. The concept under consideration would take the money raised and use it to help Oregonians with mental health problems.

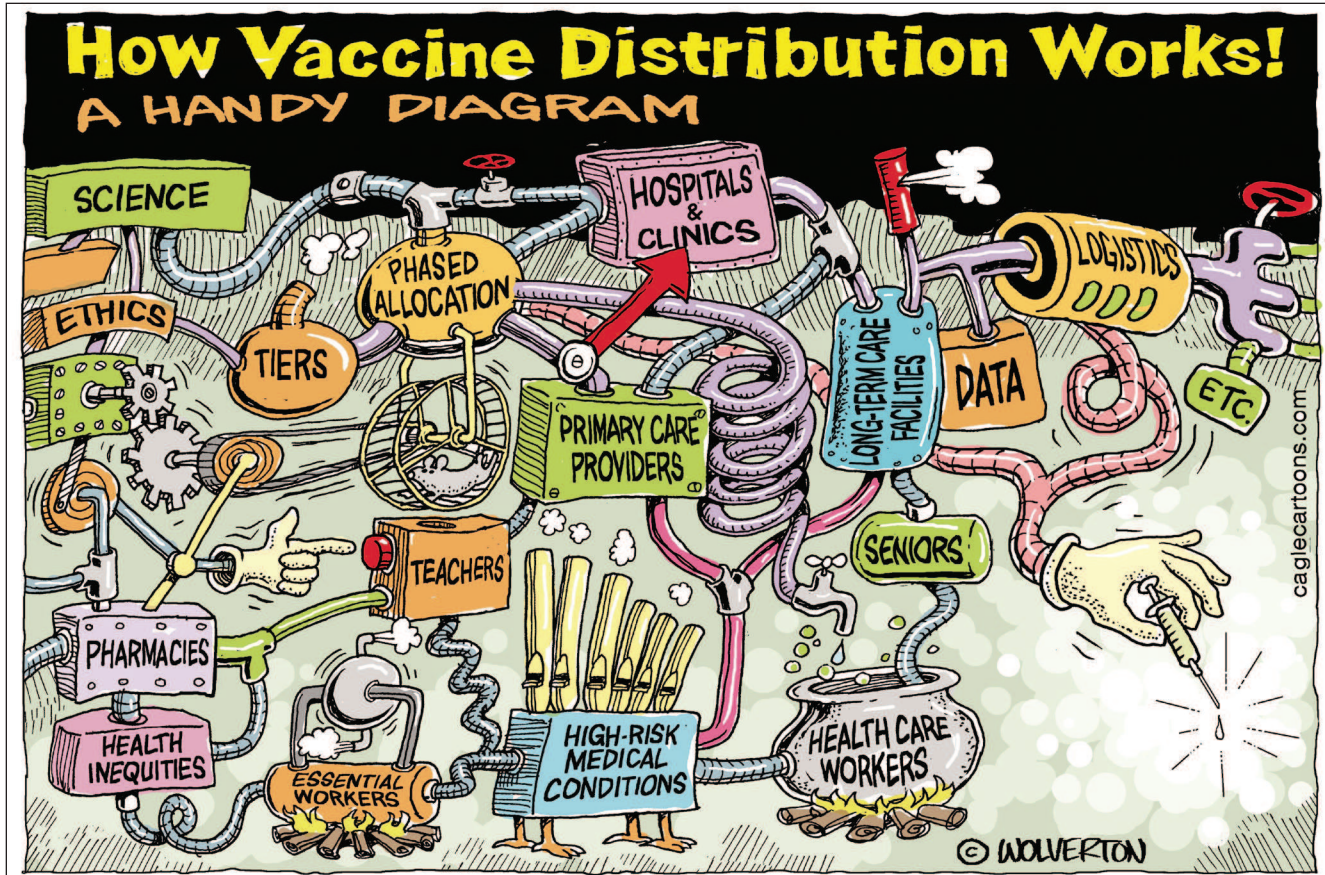
And there is a need. Relatively speaking, the state of Oregon has one of the highest rates of need for mental health care and the lowest rates of access, according to Mental Health America, a nonprofit dedicated to mental health.

We haven't seen the exact proposal, but according to the Willamette Week, it would "compel the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to raise prices 20%" on hard alcohol. The rest of the money would be raised by increasing taxes on beer and wine. It's not clear what that would mean to prices for a six-pack or a bottle of wine.

Are Oregon's taxes on alcohol too high or too low now? The Tax Foundation regularly puts out maps that show relative rates among the states. Beer taxes in Oregon in 2020 were about 8 cents a gallon, giving it one of the lowest rates in the country, 45th. Wine taxes were about 67 cents a gallon, making it 31st in the country. And Oregon was No. 2 in taxes for distilled spirits at \$21.95 a gallon, though that takes into consideration an implied rate because the state of Oregon controls hard liquor sales.

Of course, higher taxes could mean lower sales, and that could mean jobs. Oregon has some 900 wineries, 400 breweries, 100 cideries and 73 distributors. You can't walk far around some communities without bumping into a brewer or distiller. And many of those businesses have been slammed by the pandemic.

No matter how you feel about this tax proposal, you can let your legislator know.



My Voice

## Finding a common ground and moving forward



ANDREW CUTLER  
EOMG

A nation bitterly divided stood by on Jan. 20 as Joe Biden was sworn in as the next president of the United States. And while the pageantry was typical of the aura of what is usually a day of renewal, it occurred under the watchful eye of more than 20,000 National Guard soldiers.

Few of us now need to wonder why so many Guardsmen were on hand. Security at the inauguration was at an all-time high because of the riot that erupted a few weeks ago and ignited a mob that overran the U.S. Capitol.

Division is nothing new to America's brand of politics, but recent events show the discord is deepening and swallowing up the logical and pragmatic element to our national nature. Pick any political subject and there is an almost instant national dissonance. The battle lines are quickly drawn and everyone — it seems —

comes down on one side or the other.

There is no longer an adult politician or pundit in the American political room. No Sam Rayburn to work quietly in the background to make deals that helped not just Republicans or Democrats, but all Americans.

Instead, we've somehow all been shanghaied onto a fast-moving train of half-truths, distortions and conspiracy theories. We don't, on the national level, work to find a compromise. We work to smash the enemy. And the enemy is the other political party.

We can bemoan the fact that our national soul is in the process of being abducted, but in the end it is up to all of us to try to change the trajectory of what has become a red-hot cannonball slicing through the night sky. That will, in the end, be the real challenge. Because Americans have been fed — for more than 30 years — a diet of fear, dogma and dissension by on-air personalities of both parties.

The national news splashed across our television screens at night in no way resembles what we all saw 30 or

40 years ago. Pundits, not newsmen and women, have the microphone now, and they use their platforms not to unite but to divide. At the end of it all is the voter. He or she is bombarded daily with slanted information that leads to more misinformation and, eventually, to a mob.

As an editor of a small-town newspaper I don't profess to have all the answers. Heck, I don't even profess to have half the answers. All I know is that I am increasingly troubled by the path this great nation is on.

Only voters — you and I — can fix this developing division. Not through shouts and slogans, not through the peddling of falsehoods, but by finding a common ground and working forward. We all know the problem. There is no secret to our discontent. Yet, we must look not toward blame, but to finding a solution.

*Andrew Cutler is a former editor of The Observer and is the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing The Observer, Wallowa County Chieftain and four more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.*

Letters

### Don't use broad brush to paint Jan. 6 Capitol protest

I just wanted to express my opinion about the Associated Press article "Capitol attack reflects U.S. extremist evolution over decades," which The Observer ran on Tuesday, Jan. 26.

I felt that it put many Trump supporters into a negative light. Thousands gathered at the Capitol with hope and love in their hearts for an amazing president with a dream to "Make American Great Again." Many of these people were teachers, business owners, lawyers, doctors, even families with their children. They were all American citizens and patriots who love their country.

Yes, a very small percentage of them did raid the Capitol, which was not right. Any violence is unacceptable and should be dealt with to the full extent of the law. However, the other people who did not do these things should not be victimized for exercising their First Amendment right to peacefully assemble.

Antifa and Black Lives Matter protests trashed cities for months with the full support of the liberal media. The riots have killed at least 29 people, including many brave police officers, caused millions of dollars in damages, including public

buildings and statues, and have destroyed parts of many great American cities across our country. Why was this not call "insurrection" and "domestic terrorism"? Why are these people not being taken to jail and prosecuted?

There is definitely a very evident bias in this country. If we are to unify, we need to be fair in our judgments and criticisms of people. Especially in regard to the Capitol raid. There were good people at that rally with good intentions to peacefully protest. Let's not let a very small few of the minority destroy the message of the vast majority.

Lilly Roe  
Island City

### Ditch the anger, improve ourselves

Since when has the art of being human turned into being a negative leftist attribute? When has the need for finger pointing for what our leader has done turn into finger pointing at each other?

So many of us have started this silly and hateful nonsense following suit and becoming sheep following the hate spewed upon us by those that are meant to lead us. From tweets ordered online by those wolves dressed in our own sheep-

skin, we take to arms looking like those jackasses that hide behind their sheep and the internet with a crooked "crown."

So many of us seem to think it is OK to treat women as meat since the 45th president presided over us; treat children not from our country as ants to squash or animals to cage while shipping their parents back; treat men as just mindless soldiers unable to think for themselves while raping the economy and reaping the benefits for themselves and their families as if they had no dignity for the human race or economy in the USA; lie to the general public about what was really happening about the COVID-19 pandemic; rip off the public about a border wall and who would actually pay.

Meanwhile, every single one of us will be paying for years if not decades for the injustices done to us over the last four years, just like previous presidents have done regardless of political party. Instead of fueled anger and rage fed to you by a nonpolitical 45th president, why not raise your hometown, home state, your roots up by bringing back that feeling of supporting each other and making our economy and lifestyle better for ourselves and each other?

Jeanmarie Warren  
Elgin

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# THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801  
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

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POSTMASTER Send address changes to: The Observer, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

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