

Our View



Dick Mason/The Observer, File

Vehicles roll through the Ladd Canyon work zone Thursday, Nov. 5, 2020, on Interstate 84 south of La Grande. Oregon is looking at how to make up declines in gas tax revenue as fuel efficiency increases and more people drive electric vehicles.

Oregon needs to carefully weigh giving a nudge to electric cars

In 1919, Oregon was the first state to charge a tax per gallon of gas. And the state could be one of the first to charge everyone by mile driven.

Oregon's gas tax is scheduled to climb from 36 cents a gallon up to 40 cents in 2024. But the state's gas tax revenue is almost certainly heading into a permanent swan dive. It won't be enough to keep up the state's roads and bridges. Vehicles are getting more and more miles to the gallon. And electric or other alternatives are going to slowly replace them.

The Oregon solution is pay as you go, not pay per gallon. You can sign up for it now. OReGO participants pay 1.8 cents a mile. They get fuel tax credits based on gas consumption. Very few Oregonians are enrolled — about 700 — because the immediate benefits are limited.

House Bill 2342 tries to hit the accelerator for OReGO. It imposes a mandatory per-mile road usage charge for registered owners and lessees of passenger vehicles of model year 2027 or later that have a rating of 30 miles per gallon or greater. It would begin on July 1, 2026.

That makes sense, in some ways. The question is: Does it provide the right incentives? What's the goal?

One goal is to ensure there is enough revenue to keep the state's roads and bridges repaired. This bill could help with that.

Another goal, for some, is to encourage Oregonians to drive more fuel efficient vehicles or more electric vehicles. Better for the environment.

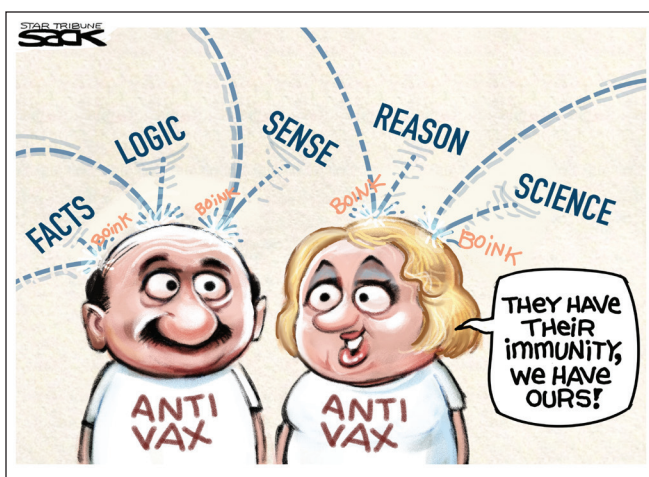
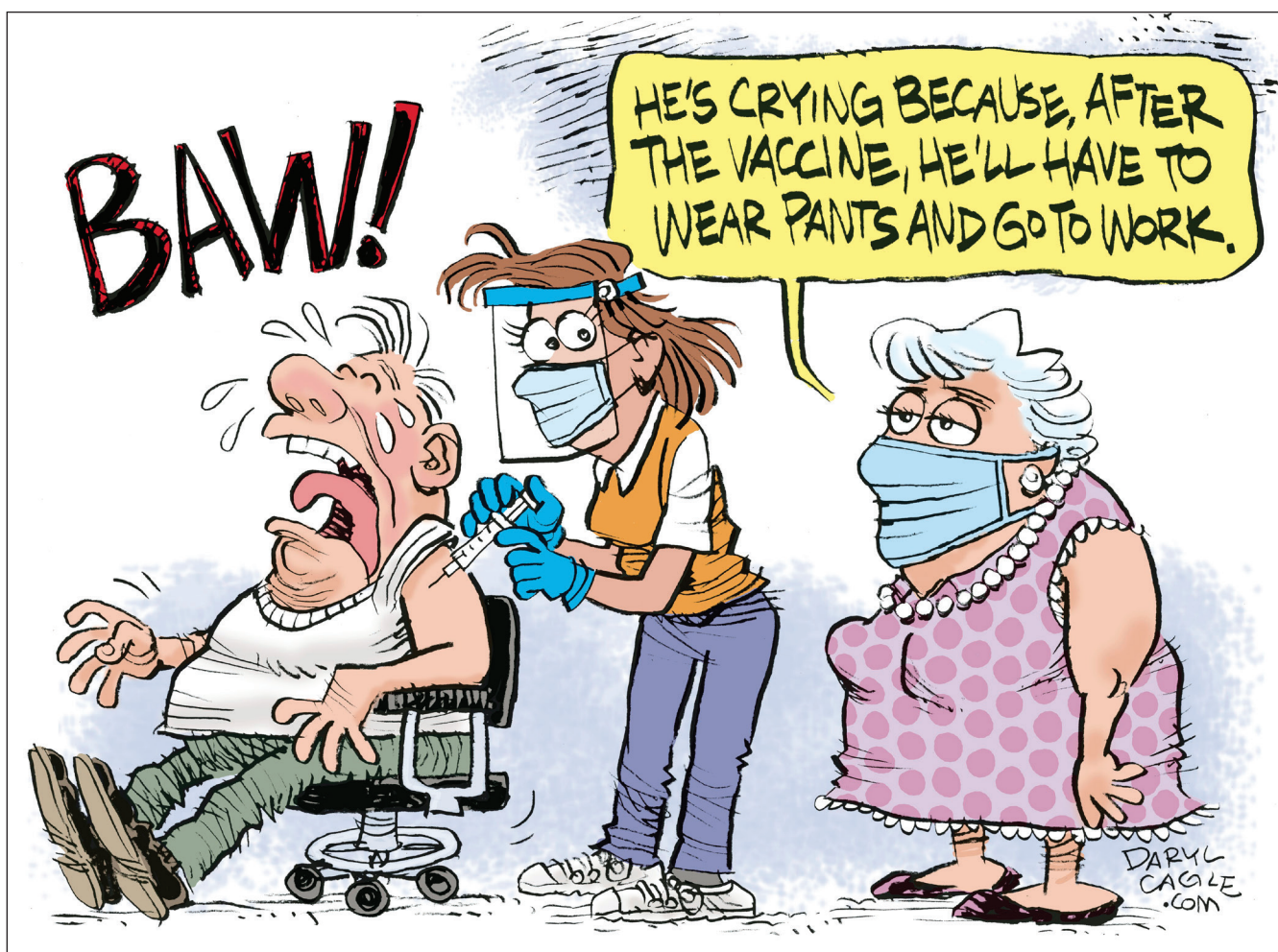
The gas tax already does it. This bill doesn't really do much. There would be an added elimination of title registration fees under the bill. But if the goal is to give Oregonians a nudge, this bill adds a perverse incentive — new charges on more fuel efficient vehicles.

Lawmakers in Salem could alter the bill so the pay as you go formula takes into account the fuel efficiency of the vehicle. That might encourage more Oregonians to go electric or pick a more fuel-efficient choice.

The complication is how that policy would effect lower-income Oregonians.

Want to buy an electric car? The long-term costs can have clear benefits. The upfront cost usually is more, and that can be what people focus on.

The gas tax never was progressive. Should Oregon look to do more with a nudge for electric cars? If the Legislature simply opts to provide incentives for electric cars, it could be leaving some Oregonians behind.



Letters

Recalling a seminal moment in American history

April 19, 1775. The gathering storm of growing tensions between colonial residents and the colonial government, which represented the British Crown, had come to a head. The reasons were taxation without representation and increasingly brutal oppression.

Through the night of April 18, 700 British soldiers marched toward Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. Their purpose was to seize the purported cache of arms and gunpowder belonging to the colonists. The colonists, also referred to as minutemen, being the well-armed militia, responded to the call for assistance in defense from the Brits. They refused the British command to “throw down your arms! Ye villains, ye rebels.” And then the resounding “shot heard around the world” officially started the struggle for our freedom and independence that we continue to this day.

April 19, 1775, stands as a statement of how far a citizen, a well-armed military, if you will, is willing to go to preserve our liberty. George

Washington stated this: “A free people ought not only be armed and disciplined but they should have sufficient arms and ammunition to maintain a status of independence from any who might attempt to abuse them which would include their own government.”

May God continue to bless America.

Bill Hanley
Baker City

What ever happened to 'flatten the curve'?

Surely most of us can remember when, nearly a year ago, lockdown measures hailed from on high and we all donned our masks, sheltered in place and submitted to the politicians' decisions to shut down our economy for the sake of not overwhelming the health care system. The message was clear: flattening the curve (decreasing the rate of spread of the virus) would help ensure that hospitals were not overwhelmed with patients; it was never intended to eradicate the virus or minimize the total number of deaths.

“Two weeks to flatten the curve”

has turned into 52. We still have huge portions of our economy shut down or hamstrung by burdensome regulations. Travel is restricted. There are limited sporting events. We also seem to have forgotten the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's own guidance that a COVID-19 “exposure” occurs after a patient has had “close contact” (within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more) with someone who has coronavirus.

Instead of acknowledging that we're all responsible citizens capable of assessing our own level of risk tolerance, we have sanctimonious ne'er-do-wells up at Fergi (and on our hiking trails) making snide comments and criticizing those who dare enjoy the great outdoors maskless. Bullies and politicians alike are happily taking advantage of this corona-crisis in order to gain power.

Perhaps instead of seeking to control others, we can focus our efforts toward taking care of ourselves and our own families, and trust that others will do the same.

Rebecca Patton
Enterprise

Write to us

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- The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We will not publish consumer complaints against businesses, personal attacks against private individuals or comments that can incite violence. We also discourage thank-you letters.
- Letters should be no longer than

350 words and must be signed and carry the author's name, address and phone number (for verification only). We will not publish anonymous letters.

- Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.
- Longer community comment columns, such as My Voice, must be no more than 700 words. Writers must provide a recent headshot and a one-sentence biography. Columns must refrain from complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Submissions must carry the author's name, address and phone number.
- Submission does not guarantee publication, which is at the discretion of the editor.

DEADLINE FOR MAY 18 ELECTIONS

The Observer does not run endorsements of more than 400 words. The Observer will institute a deadline for letters to the editor, so we can be fair with all the letters we receive and allow for responses before Election Day, if necessary. We run local letters of endorsement on a first-come, first-served basis. Please submit your endorsement letters to the editor by 5 p.m. Friday, May 7.

You can email them to letters@lagrandeobserver.com, or mail them to The Observer, c/o Phil Wright, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande OR 97850.

We will publish our last letters on Saturday, May 15. Any letters received after the deadline will not run. Election Day is May 18.

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