

OUR VIEW

New taxes make for scary switch

Nothing may scare Oregonians away faster from the state moving to a single-payer health plan than big, fat new taxes.

And the state's Task Force on Universal Health Care is talking about ... big, fat new taxes.

Just how big and fat? Billions.

A new state income tax. A new payroll tax on businesses.

And maybe even a new state sales tax.

The Legislature set up the task force to design a single-payer health care system. The government would create and run a system with promises of providing better care, coverage for all Oregonians and lower cost. Single payer means all the variety of benefits, policies and networks would go away and be replaced by government. Instead of paying health premiums or having an employer pay for coverage, taxes would be paid to the government.

People and employers are frustrated with rising health care costs. The new taxes may be less than what Oregonians effectively pay now. But there are no guarantees that single payer will be the cure everyone wanted. As imperfect as the health care system is, it is the devil Oregonians know. It is not some new devil with new taxes and change.

The state task force has a deadline of September to finalize its proposal. Then Oregonians will have something firmer they can covet or reject. The task force is meeting to get more into the numbers. Some big decisions might be made this week.

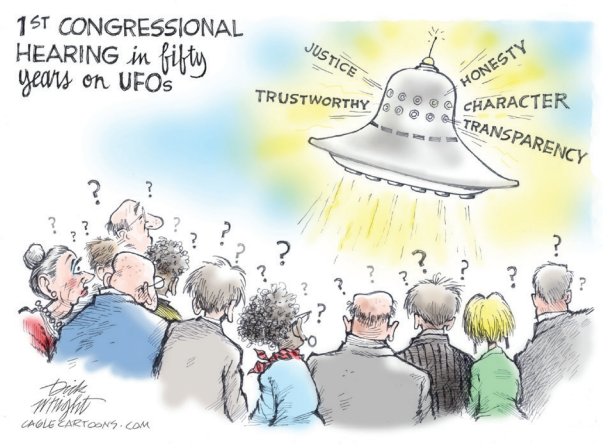
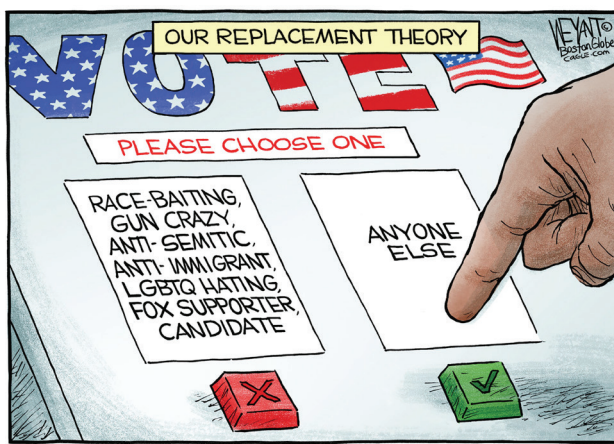
The task force needs to pick an assumption for how much the system will cost to run. The difference is in the billions. And the decision can lower or raise the proposed new taxes. A state consultant backed spending 6% on state administrative costs, so about \$3.5 billion in 2026 dollars. Some task force members believe the state can do it for less, perhaps 4%. But that 4% assumption is called "aspirational" in task force documents and is not supported by the state's actuarial analysis.

How should the new income tax on households work? Should there be a cap on the household contribution roughly in line with what the premium might be? Or should it be with no cap, so household contributions increase with income? With a cap, nobody would pay more than the projected cost of their coverage. Without a cap, it would work like a progressive tax and some households may pay several multiples of their projected coverage cost.

The task force needs to lay this out clearly for Oregonians. There is a good draft FAQ that answers many questions. There are many it doesn't, yet. Oregonians will need to know what they would pay in a new income tax. Oregonians will need to know what employers would be paying in a new payroll tax. And, is a new sales tax coming, too?

Give us the numbers. Justify them. Picking aspirational goals not supported by actuarial analysis may not help. Only with justified numbers can Oregonians decide whether it is good to essentially destroy private-sector health insurance jobs and increase government control for promises of better, cheaper care. Only then can Oregonians decide if they should leap from the devil they know and toward another who comes making promises.

You can tell the task force your thoughts by emailing jtfuhc.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov.



Dangers of stifling disagreeable ideas

ANNE MORRISON
THINKING OUT LOUD

The First Amendment was written to establish the right of all Americans to speak freely. It states: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."

For more than two centuries, at least in theory, the First Amendment has guaranteed the right of individuals and the press to speak openly and critically, even about controversial subjects, including the government, its policies or politicians. The ability of Americans to obtain information, to consider new ideas and to express unpopular opinions is so basic to democracy that traditionally the courts have placed only limited restrictions on freedom of expression. But today, conservatives and liberals alike undermine access to information and ideas they don't like. One thing both groups agree on is that Americans have the right to free speech — as long as it's speech their own group approves of.

It's a fundamental principle of conservatism that government intrusion into the daily lives of citizens should be as minimal as possible. But many conservatives clearly support government intervention when it allows them to prohibit teaching facts or philosophies they just don't like. In the past year, conservative politicians have banned more than 1,000 books from libraries and classrooms, and legislators have passed laws dictating what students may learn in schools and universities. They have prohibited teaching about ideas or theories that "promote a negative account of the founding and history

of the United States of America," or that suggest racism or sexism have contributed to social problems, or that might make a student feel "discomfort, guilt or anguish" because of their race or gender.

In Oregon, multiple Republican candidates have expressed enthusiasm for creating laws to control what students can and cannot be allowed to learn. As written, those laws could prevent students from being taught that Indian lands have been stolen in this country, or that massacres occurred here, that slavery or internment camps existed, or that people were once unable to vote because of their race or gender.

It's impossible for students to know how our nation has progressed if they must be protected from the trauma of learning where we started. And it's difficult to imagine how bland a school's curriculum will have to be, now that the primary goal of teaching is no longer to educate but instead to protect the delicate sensibilities of each classroom's most tender student.

But liberals are in no position to be righteous about restrictions of unpopular ideas. For decades, liberal activists have quashed perspectives that they consider unacceptable. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology withdrew its invitation to lecture on geophysics when students vehemently protested a professor because he openly criticized the premise of affirmative action. A Syracuse University professor withdrew her invitation to an Israeli filmmaker, fearing that his appearance might generate controversy, hurting her career. Activists at multiple schools have challenged appearances by former Secretaries of State Condoleezza Rice or Madeleine Albright, based on their own criticism of foreign policy deci-

sions. Liberal activists have repeatedly decided that when they disagree with someone's views, no one else should be allowed to hear those views either.

It's hardly a wonder that our country has trouble moving forward on social issues when discussion is quashed because so many people fear the consequences of using a wrong word, or making a statement that could inadvertently offend someone else.

In a strange way, the right and the left have united in the effort to prevent the expression of ideas deemed too dangerous to circulate or too sacred to challenge — they only disagree about which ideas are the dangerous ones. The actions and ideologies of both groups raise exactly the same issue: In a democracy such as America, what makes any group think they are entitled to dictate which ideas, theories or opinions other Americans are allowed to hear?

The issue is not about the content of books or lectures. The issue is the fact that the left, like the right, seeks to prohibit information or discussion about ideas that it considers disturbing or offensive.

The race to stifle disagreeable ideas has dire consequences. It imposes ideological conformity. It chills speech. It intimidates students from thinking critically or from openly challenging the ideas put before them. It encourages Americans across the political spectrum to refrain from talking honestly about important social issues that desperately need discussing.

And it forces contrary thinkers underground, where unchallenged ideas become truly dangerous.

■ Anne Morrison, a La Grande resident and retired attorney, has lived in Union County since 2000.

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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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