

OUR VIEW

# Being up-front about cost of universal health care

The plan for universal health care in Oregon may sound great. We wonder if people are being given enough information to judge it.

The task force building the plan offers a long list of selling points:

- Everybody in Oregon would have health care.
- The health care benefits would be more generous than most current plans.
- There would be more benefits available for behavioral health treatment.
- Everyone would have dental benefits.
- Health coverage would not be related to your job.

• People wouldn't have to pay when getting care. No copays. No deductibles. People would pay based on how much they make.

• The state board that runs it would have open public meetings and report to the governor and Legislature.

The state's universal health care task force is holding meetings with the public, through Zoom. You can learn more about those at [tinyurl.com/ORhealthmeetings](https://tinyurl.com/ORhealthmeetings).

In the background provided for these meetings, the possible benefits of the program are clearly spelled out. Some of the possible downsides, not so much.

For instance, this change means much of the private health care insurance industry in Oregon and any jobs associated with it would likely be wiped out. No need for them when the state is running the system. And the fact that it would be a transparent, government board running the system may not be such a plus if you don't like the prospect of the government taking over more of the private sector and attempting to manage it.

It would be nice not to have to worry about what treatment might cost when you go to the doctor or are wheeled into the emergency room. But what will people pay?

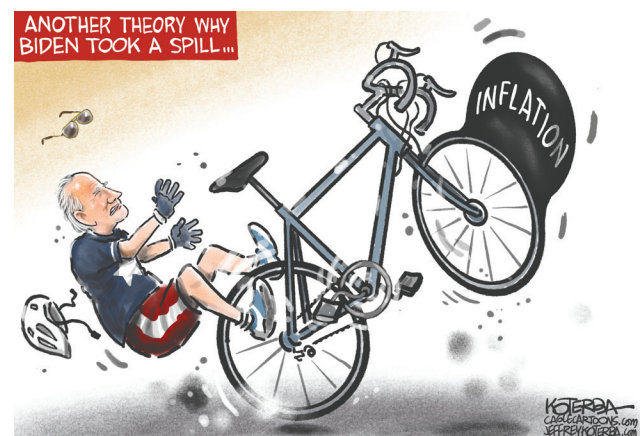
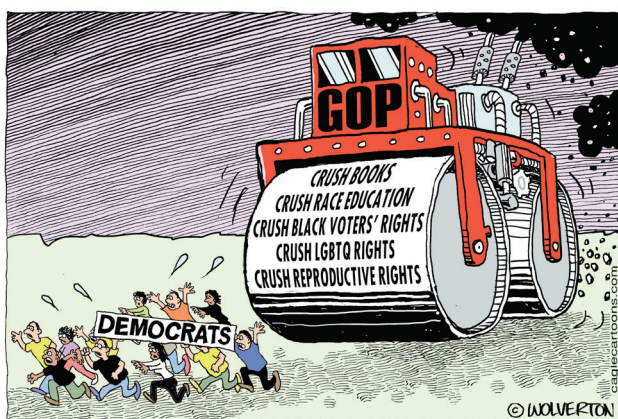
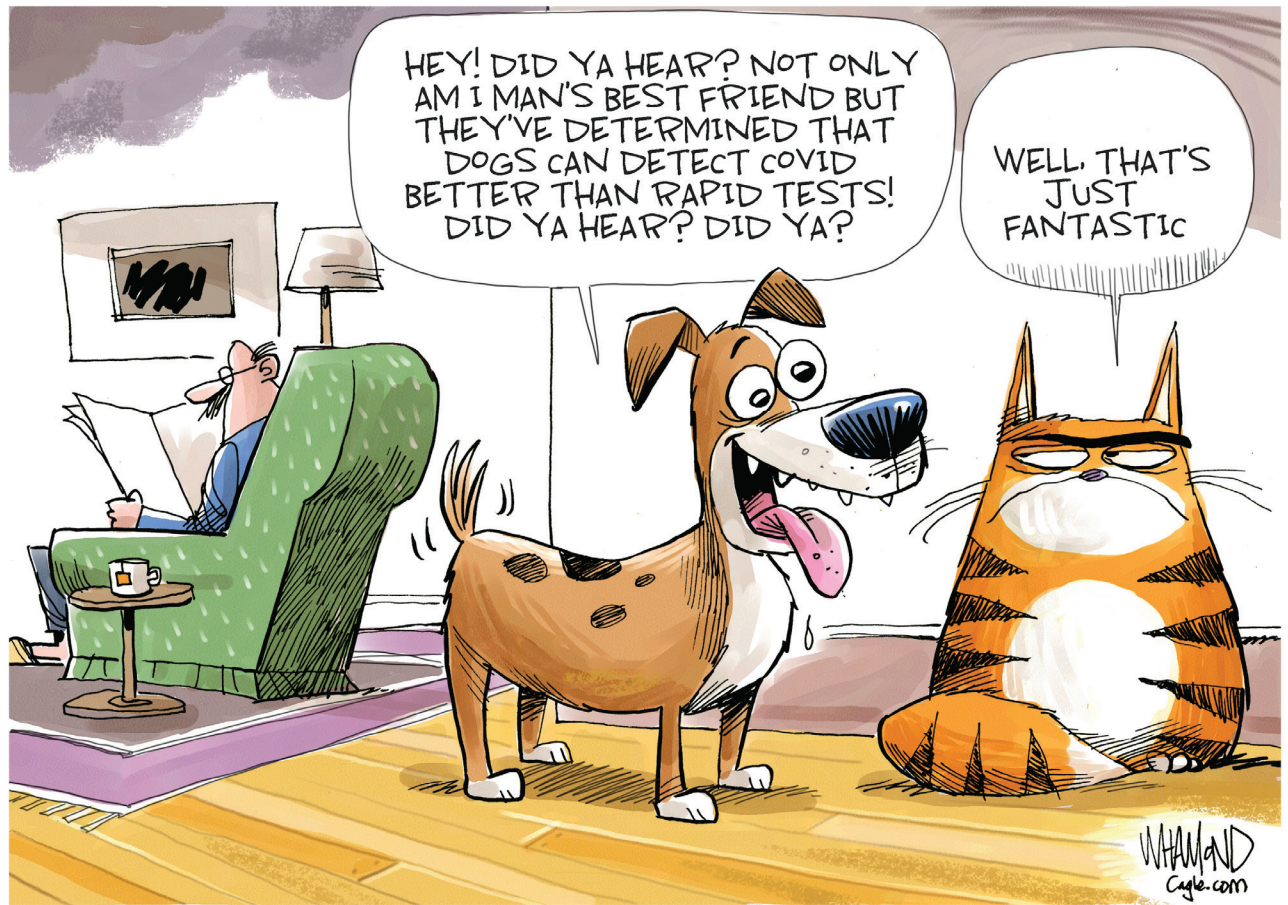
The rates of the new income taxes that families will pay are not in the background documents for the meetings. The rates of the payroll tax employers will pay are not there, either.

It's one thing to tell people that overall they would pay 13% less in premiums, deductibles and copays than they do now. It's one thing to tell employers that they would pay 11% less than they do now in premiums. They should be told up-front the expected rates for income and payroll taxes that those assumptions are based on.

At least according to some task force documents, households would pay income tax rates of up to 9.3% in addition to the income tax they already pay. There would be marginal rates based on the federal poverty level. The rates ramp up. For instance, households below 200% of the federal poverty level would pay zero. The line for a family of four to start paying would be just over \$55,000. A family of four would pay the highest marginal rate of 9.3% for income over \$110,000.

Employers would pay a payroll tax based on employee wages. Below \$160,000 a year an employer would pay a marginal rate of 7.25%, jumping up to 10.5% for income of \$160,000 or more.

A plan for universal health care in Oregon needs to be as frank with the costs as it is with the possible benefits.



# Oregonians deserve the truth about forest management, collaboratives



**MARK WEBB**  
OTHER VIEWS

In a recent opinion piece (“State’s forest collaborations are a sham,” June 2, The Observer), Rob Klavins, of Oregon Wild, cites five different restoration projects as evidence that collaborative efforts across Eastern Oregon are eroding environmental protections, decimating forests and silencing environmental dissent as “extractive interests” take over collaborative groups.

Klavins is not telling the truth about forests or collaborative groups.

Klavins claims the Walla-Whitman National Forest “invoked collaboration to get away with logging centuries-old trees in the Lostine ‘safety’ project” that resulted in “lawsuits and an increased fire risk.” But this project does exactly what years of scientific research in Eastern Oregon has shown to be effective in reducing fire risk: reduce stand density and shift species composition from fire-intolerant grand fir to fire-tolerant larch and ponderosa pine. Moreover, the harvest prescription retains all trees 21 inches in diameter and larger. The Walla-Whitman is not logging “centuries-old trees.”

This project did result in a lawsuit filed by Oregon Wild. But the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the lower court’s ruling that the Walla-Whitman developed the project in accordance with federal law and that its public and collaborative engagement process was open, inclusive and transparent.

Klavins claims the Walla-Whitman is now “doubling down with the Morgan Nesbit Project,

which would nearly clear-cut virgin forests from the edge of the Eagle Cap Wilderness into the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.” But this project is in the early stages of development and no decisions have been made about what management actions will occur in the Morgan Nesbit area.

Next, Klavins claims the Umatilla National Forest has “proposed logging over 27,000 acres of pristine forests and some of the biggest trees in Eastern Oregon on the Ellis Project.” Again, he misrepresents the facts. No decision has been made about what management actions will occur as part of this project. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement that analyzes five different alternatives has been released for public comment. But no alternative does what Klavins claims.

Klavins also claims the Umatilla is “with no environmental analysis ... developing Parkers Mill, which would allow more logging of roadless forests than has occurred across the lower 48 in the last two decades combined.” But the USFS cannot undertake any kind of action that will have environmental impacts unless it performs an environmental analysis. There is no environmental analysis for Parkers Mill because formal development of the project hasn’t started yet.

Next, Klavins claims the Big Mosquito Project on the Malheur National Forest was supposed “to thin small trees to protect old growth from fire.” But when “the logging equipment rolled in, the big old trees were considered a danger, splashed with blue paint, and cut down.” His tacit claim here is that loggers ignored unit prescriptions and treated “big old trees” as danger trees simply to log them.

His claim is misleading. The

unit he describes is a line-side unit for steep slope logging that uses a mechanical tower anchored by cables to nearby trees for stability as it pulls cut trees uphill to the landing. Anchor trees and trees near the landing are treated as work hazards and cut down per Oregon’s Occupational Safety & Health Administration regulations.

Apart from these trees, you won’t find “big old trees splashed with blue paint and cut down” inside Big Mosquito units. In fact, this project was designed to increase survivability of old-growth trees in the face of fire and drought by thinning young trees. The “big old trees” are still standing throughout this project area.

Finally, Klavins claims that “long-standing protections for big and old trees called ‘the (Eastside) Screens’ were eliminated” during the Trump administration. This is utterly false. The Eastside Screens were amended to better reflect current science and prioritize the protection of old trees, facilitate the recruitment of old and large fire-tolerant species like larch and ponderosa pine, and adaptively monitor this effort in the face of climate change.

All of Klavins’ claims are part of a larger pattern: ignore important details and misrepresent the facts as needed to support his view. Klavins cannot be trusted. Nor can Oregon Wild, his enabler.

Collaborative efforts across Eastern Oregon have enriched public engagement, improved environmental protections and enhanced forest health. They embody the best way forward for those who truly care about fire-adapted landscapes and rural communities in Eastern Oregon.

■ Mark Webb is the executive director of Blue Mountains Forest Partners.

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