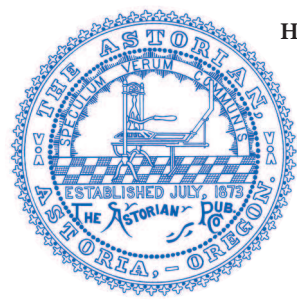


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HEIDI WRIGHT, *Interim Publisher*

JIM VAN NOSTRAND, *Editor*

JEREMY FELDMAN, *Circulation Manager*

DEBRA BLOOM, *Business Manager*

JOHN D. BRUIJN, *Production Manager*

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OUR VIEW

GOP tax plans could hurt Oregon college students

The Republican tax plans making their way through Congress would hurt Oregon college students, especially ones who attend private, nonprofit schools.

The U.S. House and Senate have different versions of their tax plans, which must be negotiated into a final edition if Congress is to pass tax reform this year.

In contrast with the 1986 tax reforms that President Ronald Reagan signed into law, only the majority Republicans are writing the tax bills this time. The 1986 reforms, in which Oregon Sen. Bob Packwood was influential, involved a bipartisan group of Republicans and Democrats. Congress overwhelmingly passed the legislation after months of discussion and negotiation.

The current House Republican plan would eliminate the income tax deduction for student loan interest, which would affect graduates and their families who itemize their tax deductions.

It also would make graduate students pay income taxes on the tuition waivers they receive in return for working as teaching or research assistants. The American Chemical Society and other organizations have spoken against taxing these tuition waivers, predicting the tax would have a chilling effect on students pursuing graduate degrees, especially in science, technology, engineering and math. Graduate school tuition can be quite expensive, so paying taxes on the value of the waivers would make master's or doctoral degrees unaffordable for many students.

The current House and Senate tax plans also would add a 1.4 percent tax on investment income at private schools whose endowments are worth at least \$250,000 per full-time student.

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, only three private, nonprofit colleges in Oregon currently would be subject to the excise tax — Lewis and Clark College and Reed College, both in Portland, and Willamette University in Salem. However, the tax would set a worrisome precedent that eventually could touch smaller university endowments or could expand to other nonprofits.

Endowments subsidize the financial aid that enable many students to attend a private school at an out-of-pocket cost no greater than for a public university. Eighteen private, nonprofit schools are members of the Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges & Universities. Alliance leaders told state legislators during public hearings this month that 93 percent of their beginning full-time students receive institutional grants, and 28 percent of students graduate with bachelor's degrees but no debt.

Together, those 18 colleges and universities produce 20 percent of Oregon's college graduates; 25 percent of all degrees in science, technology, engineering, math and health; 38 percent of education degrees; and half of the master's and doctoral degrees.

Post-high school education is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Students need a broad range of options, including public and private universities, community colleges, trade schools and apprenticeships. The Republican tax plans cut away at that diversity of opportunity.

WHERE TO WRITE

• **U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D):** 439 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515. Phone: 202-225-0855. Fax: 202-225-9497. District office: 12725 SW Millikan Way, Suite 220, Beaverton, OR 97005. Phone: 503-469-6010. Fax: 503-326-5066. Web: bonamici.house.gov/

• **U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D):** 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. Web: www.merkley.senate.gov

• **U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D):** 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510. Phone: 202-224-5244. Web: www.wyden.senate.gov

• **State Rep. Brad Witt (D):** State Capitol, 900 Court Street N.E., H-373, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1431. Web: www.leg.state.or.us/witt/ Email: rep.bradwitt@state.or.us

• **State Rep. Deborah Boone**

(D): 900 Court St. N.E., H-481, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1432. Email: rep.deborah.boone@state.or.us District office: P.O. Box 928, Cannon Beach, OR 97110. Phone: 503-986-1432. Web: www.leg.state.or.us/boone/

• **State Sen. Betsy Johnson (D):** State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., S-314, Salem, OR 97301. Telephone: 503-986-1716. Email: sen.betsy.johnson@state.or.us Web: www.betsyjohnson.com District Office: P.O. Box R, Scappoose, OR 97056. Phone: 503-543-4046. Fax: 503-543-5296. Astoria office phone: 503-338-1280.

• **Port of Astoria:** Executive Director, 10 Pier 1 Suite 508, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-741-3300. Email: admin@portofastoria.com

• **Clatsop County Board of Commissioners:** c/o County Manager, 800 Exchange St., Suite 410, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-325-1000.



"I WAS CHOKED, MOBBED, STOMPED, ELBOWED AND SHOVED... BUT, NO, I WASN'T GROPED."



AP Photo/Jeff Roberson

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg takes a selfie with a group of entrepreneurs and innovators in St. Louis.

How evil is tech?

By DAVID BROOKS
New York Times News Service

Not long ago, tech was the coolest industry. Everybody wanted to work at Google, Facebook and Apple. But over the past year the mood has shifted.

Some now believe tech is like the tobacco industry — corporations that make billions of dollars peddling a destructive addiction. Some believe it is like the NFL — something millions of people love, but which everybody knows leaves a trail of human wreckage in its wake.

Surely the people in tech — who generally want to make the world a better place — don't want to go down this road. It will be interesting to see if they can take the actions necessary to prevent their companies from becoming social pariahs.

There are three main critiques of big tech.

The first is that it is destroying the young. Social media promises an end to loneliness but actually produces an increase in solitude and an intense awareness of social exclusion. Texting and other technologies give you more control over your social interactions but also lead to thinner interactions and less real engagement with the world.

As Jean Twenge has demonstrated in book and essay, since the spread of the smartphone, teens are much less likely to hang out with friends, they are less likely to date, they are less likely to work.

Eighth-graders who spend 10 or more hours a week on social media are 56 percent more likely to say they are unhappy than those who spend less time. Eighth-graders who are heavy users of social media increase their risk of depression by 27 percent. Teens who spend three or more hours a day on electronic devices are 35 percent more likely to have a risk factor for suicide, like making a plan for how to do it. Girls, especially hard hit, have experienced a 50 percent rise in depressive symptoms.

The second critique of the tech

industry is that it is causing this addiction on purpose, to make money. Tech companies understand what causes dopamine surges in the brain and they lace their products with "hijacking techniques" that lure us in and create "compulsion loops."

Snapchat has Snapstreak, which rewards friends who snap each other every day, thus encouraging addictive behavior. News feeds are structured as "bottomless bowls" so that one page view leads down to another and another and so on forever. Most social media sites create irregularly timed rewards; you have to check your device compulsively because you never know when a burst of social affirmation from a Facebook like may come.

Imagine if instead of claiming to offer us the best things in life, tech merely saw itself as providing efficiency devices.

The third critique is that Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook are near monopolies that use their market power to invade the private lives of their users and impose unfair conditions on content creators and smaller competitors. The political assault on this front is gaining steam. The left is attacking tech companies because they are mammoth corporations; the right is attacking them because they are culturally progressive. Tech will have few defenders on the national scene.

Obviously, the smart play would be for the tech industry to get out in

front and clean up its own pollution. There are activists like Tristan Harris of Time Well Spent, who is trying to move the tech world in the right directions. There are even some good engineering responses. I use an app called Moment to track and control my phone usage.

The big breakthrough will come when tech executives clearly acknowledge the central truth: Their technologies are extremely useful for the tasks and pleasures that require shallower forms of consciousness, but they often crowd out and destroy the deeper forms of consciousness people need to thrive.

Online is a place for human contact but not intimacy. Online is a place for information but not reflection. It gives you the first stereotypical thought about a person or a situation, but it's hard to carve out time and space for the third, 15th and 43rd thought.

Online is a place for exploration but discourages cohesion. It grabs control of your attention and scatters it across a vast range of diverting things. But we are happiest when we have brought our lives to a point, when we have focused attention and will on one thing, wholeheartedly with all our might.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that we take a break from the distractions of the world not as a rest to give us more strength to dive back in, but as the climax of living. "The seventh day is a palace in time which we build. It is made of soul, joy and reticence," he said. By cutting off work and technology we enter a different state of consciousness, a different dimension of time and a different atmosphere, a "mine where the spirit's precious metal can be found."

Imagine if instead of claiming to offer us the best things in life, tech merely saw itself as providing efficiency devices. Its innovations can save us time on lower-level tasks so we can get offline and there we can get the best things in life.

Imagine if tech pitched itself that way. That would be an amazing show of realism and, especially, humility, which these days is the ultimate and most disruptive technology.