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OUR VIEW

Vote ‘yes’ on Measure 101

Voters can be forgiven if they think Measure 101 is complex. They’re right. The arguments for and against have been mind-numbingly confusing. In short, they are being asked to weigh in on a temporary 0.7 percent tax on hospitals for two years that was approved by the state Legislature in the last session, as well as taxes on insurers, the Public Employees Benefits Board and coordinated care organizations. A “yes” vote keeps the taxes; a “no” vote repeals them.

Proponents arguing “yes” say the money is needed to avoid up to 350,000 low-income residents potentially losing health care. The state would lose from \$210 million up to \$330 million in revenue, according to projections, plus \$630 million to \$960 million or more in federal Medicaid matching funds.

Reality check

There’s a real risk that low-income patients could be dropped from Medicaid coverage if Oregon voters scrap the taxes. The assumption of opponents is that the Legislature would scramble to plug the hole in the upcoming session that begins in February. But that is by no means assured. In 2003, to help close a budget gap, Oregon — along with other states — eliminated its “medically needy” Medicaid program. Tens of thousands of people lost medical and prescription drug benefits. The state saw a sharp increase in visits to hospital emergency rooms by uninsured patients, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. We do not want to revisit that bit of history. We live in a country where, in most cases, sick people aren’t turned



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away from hospitals for inability to pay. We can’t imagine living in a society that denies medical care. Those emergency room visits are the most expensive services hospitals offer, and the costs are passed along to the rest of us. In 2013, the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act resulted in 385,000 more Oregonians gaining health care coverage. ‘A huge benefit’ About a quarter of Clatsop County’s residents rely on Medicaid for their health care, according to the Oregon Health Authority. Local advocates say that includes 4,900 children 18 and under. Many new patients in the county who had never received regular medical care are now able to pick up a phone and make an appointment with a doctor. The ability to see a doctor on a regular basis has made a big difference in

people’s lives. Those new patients include kids with serious conditions, like asthma. Many are homeless. “Every child deserves health care, just as every child deserves education,” Debbie Morrow, a member of the Warrenton-Hammond School Board, told The Daily Astorian’s editorial board. Columbia Memorial Hospital CEO Erik Thorsen said the 2013 Medicaid expansion reduced the hospital’s need for charity care writeoffs dramatically, by 50 percent. That savings has been used to expand medical services for everyone in the county. “It’s great for the patients, and it’s a huge benefit to us,” Thorsen said.

Our misgivings

Those urging us to vote “no” on

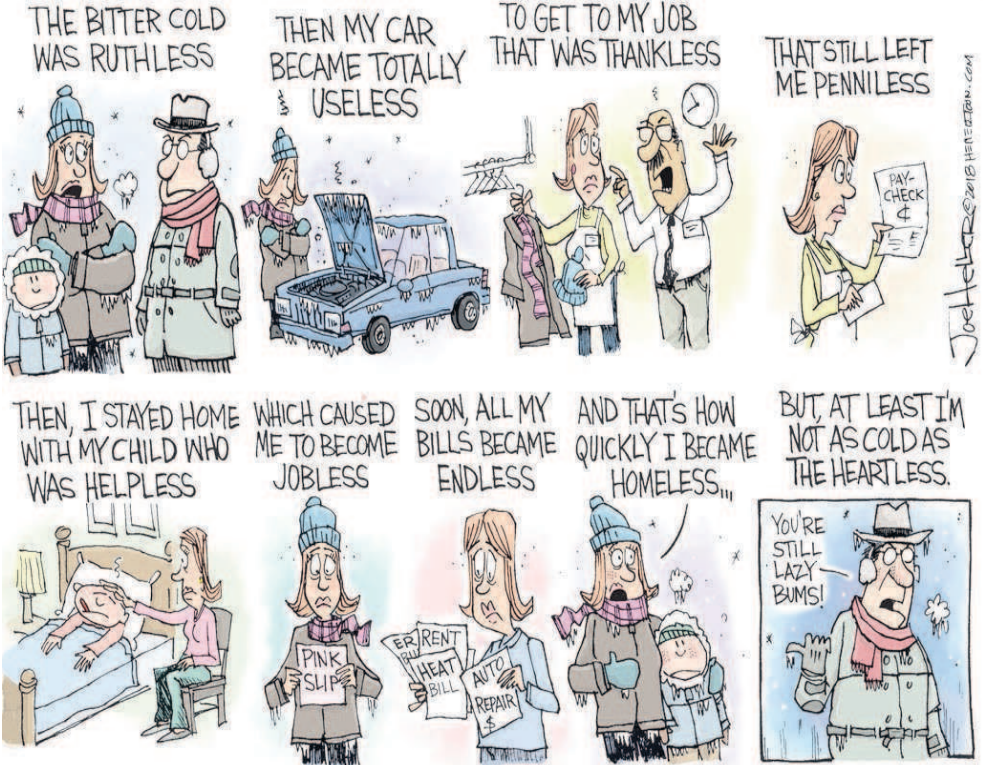
Measure 101 have a point, in that the tax isn’t fair. Not everyone in the state pays. People covered by self-insured medical plans through their employer (The Daily Astorian is self-insured) and unions are exempt, among others. Small businesses, school districts, nonprofits and college students aren’t. Shouldn’t everyone bear the burden of supporting the neediest in our society? Fiscal conservatives are also justified in feeling that the Legislature is holding the state’s most vulnerable residents hostage in its thirst for ever-increasing taxes. Who is going to argue against medical coverage for sick kids? Why weren’t deeper cuts made in other programs to offset this expense? That’s the pattern of the Legislature. As long as powerful interests — such as the public sector employee unions — carve out their pieces of the pie, solutions to complex problems such as health care will continue to be unevenly applied. That doesn’t make it right, but it’s the state we live in. Our endorsement Forty-eight other states and the District of Columbia levy tax assessments against health care providers to fund care for low-income patients. The strategy is popular because it generates matching federal dollars. In this case, Oregon health care providers agreed to tax themselves, and insurers may not raise rates more than 1.5 percent to cover the assessment. An impressive list of more than 160 organizations in Oregon have endorsed the plan, including the medical and education communities. Given that groundswell of support, both statewide and locally, we urge you to vote “yes” on Measure 101.

GUEST COLUMN

Thanks for all the fish

In 1994 I was appointed by Oregon’s first woman governor, Barbara Roberts, to complete the term of a disgraced, disbarred and convicted Clatsop County district attorney. I’ve had the honor since then to be elected six consecutive times. After 25 years as chief prosecutor, I’ve decided not to stand for what would be my seventh full term. Jan. 7, 2019, will be my last day as your district attorney. This decision wasn’t easy to make. I love the job. I work with a truly outstanding staff of lawyers, paralegals and victims’ advocates, all recognized throughout the state for their skills and experience. Office manager Lori Johnson has worked in the district attorney’s office even longer than I have. Fortunately, Lori is much younger than I am, as she is irreplaceable for the proper functioning of the office. Two of my former chief deputies now serve as judges on the Circuit Court bench — Cindee Matyas and Dawn McIntosh. In 2017, deputy David Goldthorpe left the office after being appointed district attorney of Malheur County. Given over a dozen county managers and likely twice that number of county commissioners, at times my relationship with management has been ... interesting. I’ve not always received the budgets I’ve requested, but I’ve always received the funding I needed to ensure I could attract good people to an office that is adequately staffed and appropriately compensated, in a renovated historic courthouse, in a stellar natural setting. I thank you all. I’ve met hundreds, perhaps thousands, of victims and witnesses and their families. Many have humbled me with their grace and eloquence, often in the face of horrific crimes. Even the so-called “nonviolent” crimes, like those involving fraud and drugs, can have enormous impacts that do great and lasting harm. It seems criminal to me that the term “criminal justice reform” has twisted so that it now means reducing jail and prison sentences, rather than truth in sentencing and

the rights of victims. I have been and will remain a strong advocate for those and other true reforms. I’ll continue also to advocate for laws against animal cruelty, for enforcement of driving while impaired laws, for reasonable and responsible funding for prosecutors and law enforcement. I’ll continue to expose the rampant and epidemic lies told by various media outlets, criminal defense organizations and billionaire philanthropist George Soros about prosecutorial misconduct. For most of us who prosecute for a career — not as a step to six- and seven-figure incomes defending white-collar defendants — the worst possible trial outcome is not an acquittal. Any of us worth our salt have lost cases where the defendant was clearly guilty. No, the worst nightmare of any prosecutor is convicting someone who is innocent of that offense. Those of us who are seen as cutting corners to win usually find ourselves unemployed, as we should. The office of district attorney offers a morally luxurious job. I answer to my conscience and the voters. My sole allegiance is not to a paying client, but to the truth. What I hope to be remembered for most is my zealous advocacy for victims and for an office that serves the county without, as early American oaths often required, “fear or favor or hope of reward.” My office has never prosecuted anyone because of a personal beef, or not prosecuted because of a personal relationship. Police officers, government officials, locally prominent citizens, neighbors, have all been through the system. We are, as John Adams said, a nation of laws, not of men. So, what next? I expect I’ll be far less cautious and guarded in my public comments on criminal justice than I have been while in office. I enjoy speaking to groups at universities and associations around the country. I particularly enjoy research and writing. I’m active on the board of directors of the National District Attorneys Association, and will continue crafting policy there. I hope to continue for another 24 summers my occasional three-line role as the cowardly sheriff in “Shanghaied in Astoria,” and go into a



third decade with a jazz show as the DA DJ on KMUN. Until then, until Jan. 8, 2019, I’ll do the job the voters have asked me to do. For the first several years as DA, I tried all the murder cases alone. I came to realize that including a deputy not only helped me and gave them experience, but I enjoyed mentoring. As my office grew from seven employees in 1994 to 20 today, more and more of the job has become administrative. Those 20 women and men do 95 percent of the daily work in the office, and will continue to do so well after I’m gone. Ron Brown has been chief deputy since 2004. He’s developed a particularly strong skill for prosecuting sexual assault cases, sadly much more common than you might think. He has deep compassion for victims. He has the respect and admiration of the office because of his toughness at trial and his deep commitment to victims. Ron will be filing for the post as my successor, and will be on the ballot in May. I urge you to support him. Many people showed me great kindness when I moved here as a largely unknown quantity. The late Hal Snow and his wife and partner, Jeanyse. Then vice chair of the

County Commission, Don Haskell, and his wife, Carol. Steve Forrester, then the editor and publisher of The Daily Astorian. The late Randy Bowe, and Debra Bowe, who found me a literal home and threw my first welcoming party. Judy Niland and friends at the Astor Street Opry Company. Former KMUN station manager Doug Sweet. I owe a special thanks to my greatest political ally, a force majeure, state Sen. Betsy Johnson, Oregon’s best friend of public safety. Cindy Price and I have made Astoria our home for 23 years. I’ve no intention of retiring elsewhere. Cindy wouldn’t leave Astoria even if I did have such ideas, so that’s that. I’ll still be meeting you at the post office, at the grocery store, at the butcher shop, at the restaurants. Despite the Douglas Adams reference in the title, I’m not leaving the planet, just the job I have loved. It is the greatest privilege in my life to stand in the well of the courtroom and represent the people of Oregon. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for allowing me the pleasures of this fascinating job. Joshua Marquis is the Clatsop County district attorney.