

OPINION

the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

Support tax levies on May ballot

Property taxes are a critical source of revenue for local governments.

Whenever voters are asked to pay more, the burden falls on government to justify the reasons.

Our standard for weighing higher taxes is straightforward:

- Does the government’s board function effectively?
- Can they explain the need?

We believe two local option tax levies on the May 19 ballot have met the standard and are worthy of voter support.

County fairgrounds

Clatsop County wants voters to renew a five-year local option tax for operation and maintenance at the county fairgrounds. The tax rate would go up to 7 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, or about \$21 a year for a home valued at \$300,000.

The tax rate had been 7 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value until voters reduced it to 5 cents in 2016.

According to the county, the new tax rate would generate between



\$471,000 and \$530,000 a year. The money would help sustain free or low-cost use of the fairgrounds for youth, charitable and public interest projects, facility improvements, marketing to attract new rentals and growth of the county fair.

The local option tax is the largest source of revenue for the Fair Board, which also generates money from rental fees and events and receives a share of state lottery funds for the county fair.

In a financial blow, two of the most popular events at the fairgrounds — the Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival and the Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival — were canceled this year because of the coronavirus.

A few years ago, county bud-

get staff and county commissioners had to step in and corral poor spending practices and other management shortcomings at the fairgrounds. John Lewis, a former maintenance supervisor, took over as operations manager in 2018 and has appeared to provide greater stability.

The county fair and other events at the fairgrounds bring people together and serve important cultural roles in our community. But the space often feels stale and underused, missing a creative spark.

The Fair Board has discussed a potential bond in the future to help make the fairgrounds more inviting. The bar for a bond request, however, would be significantly higher than the local option tax.

Cannon Beach fire district

The Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District wants voters to pass a five-year local option tax to pay for a second commanding officer, building repairs and equipment replacement. The tax rate would

be 35 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value, or about \$141 a year for a home valued at \$400,000.

The fire district, which has stations in Cannon Beach and Arch Cape, estimates the new tax would bring in between \$403,000 and \$454,000 a year. The second commanding officer would be a training chief who would work to prepare volunteer firefighters to respond to calls and help the fire chief guide the district. A separate tax finances the fire chief.

A higher volume of calls, many driven by visitors, has placed a strain on firefighters. Clashes between fire chiefs and the fire district’s board over the past several years have also been disruptive.

Marc Reckmann, a former division chief who became fire chief earlier this year, has emerged as a vocal advocate for more resources and better communication.

Without a second commanding officer, too much pressure builds on the fire chief.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Gross injustice

I am writing about a gross injustice in both of the recently-enacted federal COVID-19 stimulus bills. These bills exclude stimulus payments to individuals who work and pay taxes under an IRS-issued Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN). In fact, this exclusion applies to the entire families of ITIN workers, even if their families are all American citizens.

Consider the following case: A female American citizen marries a male ITIN-holder, and over the course of seven years of marriage, they have three children. The wife and children are American citizens; the husband is not. The couple reports their income to the IRS and pay taxes each year, filing jointly.

In 2020, the husband, who works as a fish processor in Astoria, is laid off due to COVID-19. However, because the husband works under an ITIN, the entire family, which should have been eligible for at least \$2,700 in stimulus payment, is entitled to nothing. Where is the justice in that?

Both of our Oregon senators, and our representative in Congress, voted to pass these stimulus bills with that morally unconscionable exclusion. I repeat: Where is the justice in that?

ITIN workers underpin a significant part of the U.S. economy, and pay billions of dollars in taxes each year. Many of these workers across the country are the ones who ensure that our grocery stores are stocked with fresh meat and produce. Are they not entitled to simple respect? As a society, have we no honor?

Write your congressional delegation and express outrage.

BARRY PLOTKIN
Astoria

Clear vision

As a result of the stay-at-home orders we are under, it has been more difficult than usual to get to know the candidates running for office.

Jamie McLeod-Skinner, Democratic candidate for Oregon secretary of state, is offering a solution to this problem by holding virtual town halls with local officials around the state so that we can hear views around and see how committed to Oregon she is. See for yourself what this candidate believes by watching a few town halls at jamiefororegon.com/events

Jamie has done her research, and is incredibly focused on each of the five roles Oregon’s secretary of state must fill. She knows what is currently working well, and where improvements are needed. She has extensive and varied experience, from working as front-line staff to managing multimillion-dollar projects.

I have met this candidate, and am impressed by her intelligence and thoughtfulness. And, I like the fact that Jamie will bring a rural Oregon viewpoint to Salem. More geographical diversity in our state officeholders would be refreshing, perhaps even vital, to bringing opposing sides together.

We select our choices for the November election in the May primary. Our mail-in ballots will be arriving soon.

And please vote for McLeod-Skinner for secretary of state. She has a clear vision for moving Oregon forward.

CHERYL CONWAY
Astoria

Lucky to have him

Urge you to vote for Tom Balmer for the Oregon Supreme Court. Justice Balmer has the qualities we want in our judges. He is smart, even-tempered, objective, kind and humble. He has served Oregon exceptionally well since 2001, and we will be lucky to have him for another term.

PAULA BROWNHILL
Astoria

Not so

The governor of Oregon thinks she personally has the power to control the economy of Oregon and the lives of its people because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Not so. She does not have the authority she has asserted. The power to pass laws is in the Legislature, not the governor.

I am shocked that the governor has signed, without much murmur from anyone, an amazing list of executive order legislation. She ordered all hospitals and medical facilities to cancel all elective and nonemergency procedures. A procedure, being not just surgery, is almost anything a medical person does.

She has interrupted landlord-tenant laws, which may be appropriate someday, but the codes are written with care by the Legislature, not the governor.

She has closed some businesses, such as furniture stores and malls and restaurants, and not others. She has tried to control all of us by criminalizing outdoor contact, and making a long list of threatening demands for conforming personal behavior. No more holding hands.

The governor claims she can do all this because of statutory emergency authority from the Legislature. The virus is serious, but not a legal emergency. A flood and a fire are immediate emergencies. This is not.

Emergency means masses of people subject to immediate, profound consequences such as loss of life. Clatsop County probably has more car accidents than serious cases of the coronavirus.

We should all put our heads together and talk about what the governor and the Legislature and the people themselves can and should do about the virus.

ROGER B. LEY
Portland

We all need help

I have lost my job due to this coronavirus. I did not ask for this, and I did not ask to lose my job. I loved my job. I like working, but I can’t. I do maintenance in a motel. They, as a lot of other businesses,



got closed.

I lost my job, so I’m trying to provide for my family, pay my bills, buy food and pay rent, so I applied for unemployment to help out until I can go back to work at my job. It’s been over a month, and nothing from the Oregon Employment Department. They keep denying me because I get a small retirement pay.

This retirement pay is so small after bills, rent and food there is nothing left. In this time of crisis we all need help. I wish they would stop denying me of what I worked for. I call the numbers they say to call. No matter which one I call, I can never get anyone, no matter what.

VALIANT R. LEFFEL
Hammond

New perspective

The Supreme Court will probably take up abortion rights this year, and here is a new perspective on that issue. Anti-abortion sentiment has its basis in instinctive thought rather than intellectual thinking.

This instinct is called survival of the species, and it is present in all humans and most animals. Intellectual thinking recognizes that the earth’s resources can only support 2.5 billion people on a sustainable basis, according to two studies from Stanford and Cornell universities in the early 1980s. Increases in population beyond that point causes humans to over-extract resources, causing environmental damage and endangering animal and plant life.

At 7.8 billion, we are consuming tomorrow’s resources today. It also causes increased pollution, including carbon dioxide, beyond the capability of ecological processes to convert pollution. Any action that increases birth rates is detrimental to the survival of life on the planet. And you thought a pandemic wasn’t possible?

There are 225 million women in the world, mostly in poor countries, who cannot get access to contraception. The world’s population increases by 83 million a year. The Trump administration further worsened the picture by invoking the “gag rule,” which prohibits funding clinics with U.S. dollars that mention abortion as a service. As a result, the pregnancy rate, birth rate and abortion rate

increase in each affected country.

In the long run, the gag rule increases birth rates well above job creation rates in poor countries; then unemployment, poverty, despair and migration rise. Ironic moment: President Donald Trump is creating conditions that increase the future need to migrate from poor countries around the world.

DAVE FITCH
Astoria

Things to ponder

Some things to ponder during these days, as one stays home staying healthy:

Why are the staunchest advocates for continuing the shutdown of the nation’s economy the ones still cashing paychecks?

Why do radio public service announcements keep telling listeners basic health techniques most people learned in kindergarten?

Why does pizza delivered from the local parlor taste so much better during a crisis?

Was it a sly move for President Donald Trump to claim to be in charge of the country, knowing many governors would disagree, and be forced to go to work just to prove him wrong?

Given that the buses and the subways in New York City are major causes of the spread of COVID-19, is mass transit really an option in the new normal era?

With the rules and regulations associated with transportation of the nation’s children, what will public school buses look like in order to comply with newly to-be-developed social distancing statutes?

Should anyone be forced to go to work in the flu season ever again?

Why did the speaker of the House of Representatives, the person second in line for the presidency, during this worldwide pandemic of epic proportions, find it necessary to go on a late night comedy show and show off her \$24,000 refrigerator/freezer filled with \$13-a-pint ice cream?

Were the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts’ \$25 million, Harvard’s \$8 million and the Los Angeles Lakers’ \$4.6 million in federal aid really necessary?

MATT JANES
Jeffers Gardens