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OUR VIEW

Would you rather?

To maintain our transportation system, government can increase knowledge of our driving habits or increase our taxes

Vehicles are driving farther with less gasoline.

That’s a good thing for the planet, but a bad thing for the country’s roads.

Most of our road maintenance is paid for with state and federal gas taxes. With more efficient vehicles, we are doing more driving and less filling up. That means roads are being degraded at the same rate but the coffers are not filling as fast as they used to.

So the Oregon Department of Transportation wants to fix that, and one solution that may have some legs is a pay-as-you-drive road tax of 1.5 cents per mile. Your car’s mileage will be collected by a GPS odometer and your tax will be calculated by a government-tasked third party. The system will be tested this summer by 5,000 volunteer Oregonians to help eliminate bugs and identify potential problems. They will pay that 1.5 cent per mile fee, but will be refunded 30 cents for every gallon of gasoline they buy.

The benefit of that system is fairness; the more you use the roads the more you pay for them. If you drove less than the average Oregonian, your taxes could go down and the occasional fill up would be cheaper than it is now.

But there are plenty of cons, too. First, there is a nuisance of another tax system. Then there is the privacy worry (GPS monitoring every rotation of your wheels) and the fact that rural Oregon would shoulder a larger tax burden than our urban counterparts.

That’s simply because we drive more and have fewer options for reducing our driving. In Portland you have a plethora of transportation offerings: bus and train, streetcar, bicycle or your own two feet. Over here, the distances are such that if we don’t have a car and a clear road, we aren’t making it to work or

school or a doctor’s appointment.

We are also getting less for those taxes, mind you. Portlanders pay more, but they also have the opportunity to catch the MAX at Pioneer Square every few minutes. Our higher a la carte tax just gets our potholes filled and our roads surfaced every few years.

You could argue that the simplest and most efficient way to fund our roads is an old trick: our current gas tax, which Oregon pioneered nearly a century ago. It just needs a boost to keep up with increasingly fuel efficient vehicles, while still encouraging people to think about fuel efficiency.

But that might be short term thinking. Technology is changing our gas consumption rates (for the better, we have to say again!) so quickly it may make the gas tax obsolete. Electric cars are becoming more common. Bicycles are back *en vogue* in big cities. Trains are hauling a higher percentage of cross-country freight than they have since we built the interstate highway system.

And besides, no one likes the words “tax increase.”

But do we hate that phrase more than “government knowledge of my car’s GPS coordinates at all times?”

We will soon have to decide if we’d rather our taxes be more fair or more intrusive. Surely we already have the technology to tie sales tax percentages to income levels. Would a low income person pay less tax on a loaf of bread in exchange for the cashier knowing their family income?

Technology is going to have a bigger effect on our politics than we would have imagined just a few short years ago — for conservatives and libertarians especially. And it’s going to have a bigger effect on our budgets, too — for people of all political persuasions.

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Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

YOUR VIEWS

Integrity missing from Blue Mtns. forest plan

Integrity: “An adherence to moral principles, honesty.” Where has that gone, and why can’t we find it in the discussion on the motorized access restrictions to the Blue Mountains?

Some work in shades of gray, elected to positions they feel they need to protect to continue their paychecks and their positions of power.

Some work in backdoor deals to protect their business venture to access resources they need to keep themselves afloat.

Some work in “partnership” with groups that strive to see general motorized use removed from the forest under some moral calling of protectionist dogma that inflates their egos and swells their pocketbooks with lawyer fees.

When companies begin to ask “why does the public need to be there” and civil servants tell businesses that “any interference or preventing the Forest performing road closures will jeopardize timber outputs on the Forest,” we see the lack of integrity from both elected

officials and civil servants alike. For the record, the counties do not “lose their seat at the table” if they refuse to sign the MOU accepting cooperating agency status with the Forest Service.

This narrative has been passed around by county officials far too long. What it does require is elected officials doing their jobs and being held personally accountable for their actions, instead of giving themselves political cover when they sell our access down the river.

One county has shown personal integrity to protect its residents to see a forest plan revision developed that protects the quality of life for all their residents, not just the few influential companies that benefit from the “go along to get along” mentality, and that is Baker County.

Integrity isn’t about doing what is easy, or personally advantageous. Integrity is standing behind the words you say and doing what is right. That seems to be sorely missing from a great deal of elected officials and civil servants nowadays.

John D. George
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LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

OTHER VIEWS



ISIS heads to Rome

The Italians got this one right. Last week, *The Washington Post’s* Adam Taylor helpfully collected tweets that Italians put out after a murderous video issued by the Islamic State, or ISIS, warned: “Today we are south of Rome,” one militant said. “We will conquer Rome with Allah’s permission.”

As the hashtag #We_Are_Coming_O_Rome made the rounds in Italy, Rome residents rose to the challenge.

Their tweets, Taylor noted, included: “#We_Are_Coming_O_Rome ahahah Be careful on the highway-Ring Road: there’s too much traffic, you would remain trapped!”

“#We_Are_Coming_O_Rome hey just a tip: don’t come in train, it’s every time late!”

“#We_Are_Coming_O_Rome You’re too late, Italy is already been destroyed by their governments.”

And “#We_Are_Coming_O_Rome We are ready to meet you! We have nice Colosseum plot for sale, Accept Credit Cards Securely, bargain price.”

ISIS’ murderous ways aren’t a joke, but the Italians’ mocking of ISIS is rather appropriate. While we agonizingly debate ISIS’ relationship to Islam, we’ve forgotten a simple truth about many of the people attracted to such groups. It is the truth uttered by Ruslan Tsarni on CNN after his two nephews, Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, were accused of the Boston Marathon bombing. They were just two “losers,” he said, who resented those who did better than them and dressed it up in ideology. “Anything else, anything else to do with religion, with Islam, is a fraud, is a fake.”

There’s a lot of truth in that. ISIS is made up of three loose factions, and we need to understand all three before we get deeper into another war in Iraq and Syria. One faction comprises the foreign volunteers. Some are hardened jihadis, but many are just losers, misfits, adventure seekers and young men who’ve never held power, a job or a girl’s hand and joined ISIS to get all three. I doubt many are serious students of Islam or that offering them a more moderate version would keep them home. If ISIS starts losing, and can’t offer jobs, power or sex, this group will shrink.

ISIS’ second faction, its backbone, is made up of former Sunni Baathist army officers and local Iraqi Sunnis and tribes, who give ISIS passive support. Although Iraqi Sunnis constitute a third of Iraq’s population, they’ve ruled Iraq for generations and simply can’t accept the fact that the Shiite majority is now in charge. Also, for many Sunni villagers under ISIS’ control, ISIS is just less bad than the brutalization and discrimination they received from Iraq’s previous Shiite-led government. Google “Iraqi Shiite militias and power drills” and you’ll see that ISIS didn’t invent torture in Iraq.

The U.S. keeps repeating the same mistake in the Middle East: overestimating



THOMAS
FRIEDMAN
Comment

the power of religious ideology and underappreciating the impact of misgovernance. Sarah Chayes, who long worked in Afghanistan and has written an important book — “Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security” — about how government corruption helped turn Afghans away from us and from the pro-U.S. Afghan regime, argues that “nothing feeds extremism more than the in-your-face corruption and injustice” that some of America’s

closet Middle East allies administer daily to their people.

The third ISIS faction is composed of the true ideologues, led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. They have their own apocalyptic version of Islam. But it would not be resonating were it not for the fact that “both religion and politics

ISIS is a product of decades of failed governance in the Arab world and Pakistan and centuries of calcification of Arab Islam.

have been hijacked” in the Arab world and Pakistan, creating a “toxic mix,” says Nader Mousavizadeh, who co-leads the global consulting firm Macro Advisory Partners. The Arab peoples have been mostly ruled by radicals or reactionaries. And without the prospect of a legitimate politics “that genuinely responds to popular grievances,” no amount of top-down attempts to engender moderate Islam will succeed, he added.

Islam has no Vatican to decree whose Islam

is authentic, so it emerges differently in different contexts. There is a moderate Islam that emerged in decent political, social and economic contexts — see Indian Islam, Indonesian Islam and Malaysian Islam — and never stood in the way of their progress. And there are puritanical, anti-pluralistic, anti-modern education, anti-women Islams that emerged from the more tribalized corners of the Arab world, Nigeria and Pakistan, helping hold these places back.

That’s why ISIS is not just an Islam problem and not just a “root causes” problem. ISIS is a product of decades of failed governance in the Arab world and Pakistan and centuries of a calcification of Arab Islam. They feed off each other. Those who claim it’s just one or the other are dead wrong.

So, to defeat ISIS and not see another emerge, you need to: wipe out its leadership; enlist Muslims to discredit the very real, popular, extremist versions of Islam coming out of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan; stem the injustice, corruption, sectarianism and state failure now rampant in the Arab world and Pakistan; and carve out for Iraqi Sunnis their own autonomous region of Iraq and a share of its oil wealth, just like the Kurds have. I know: sounds impossible. But this problem is very deep. This is the only route to a more moderate Arab Islam — as well as to fewer young men and women looking for dignity in all the wrong places.

Thomas L. Friedman won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, his third Pulitzer for *The New York Times*. He became the paper’s foreign-affairs Op-Ed columnist in 1995.

