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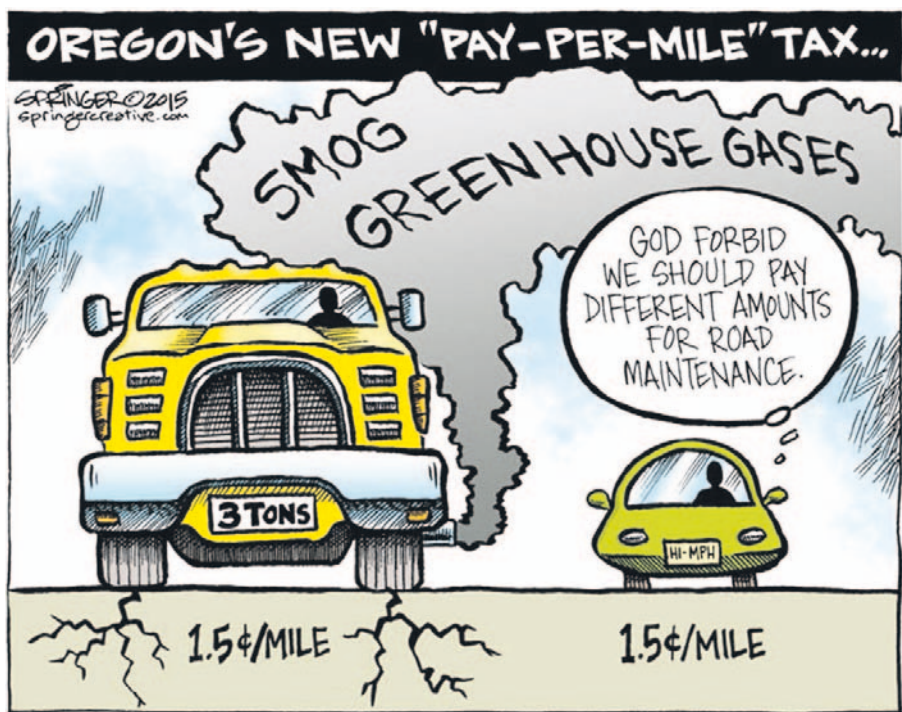
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OUR VIEW



Updating gas tax will keep our roads running

This Memorial Day weekend, when many Oregonians will hit the highway for a weekend adventure, it's a good time to think about how we pay for those roads.

With petroleum prices lower for the time being and more drivers buying hybrid and electric cars, Oregon is about to experiment with taxing vehicles based on the miles they are driven instead of on the fuel they consume.

This is an interesting and valid exercise, but one that raises a variety of issues that must be addressed.

The basic scheme is to replace fuel taxes paid at the pump with a flat 1.5 cent per mile charge for use of public roads in Oregon. Up to 5,000 volunteers will start testing the concept on July 1, using small digital devices to track their mileage. California, Washington and Indiana all are at earlier stages of considering the concept.

U.S. drivers, especially those who don't live in the Northeast where there are more toll highways, are pretty spoiled when it comes to transportation costs. Generally, our gasoline is taxed at far lower rates than is the case in the rest of the developed world. And we face far fewer toll roads. Drive through France, Mexico and scores of other places, and you will be reaching for your wallet every hour or so.

It's safe to say nobody relishes having to pay either taxes or tolls, but expensive public infrastructure like highways and bridges is one of the best examples of government providing something private citizens need but are unable to accomplish on our own. Considering the systemic changes underway in oil markets and automobiles, fuel taxes simply can't keep up. Only in recent years has technology come along that will

allow accurate monitoring of actual miles driven, giving a new option for transportation funding.

Civil liberties activists see the monitoring devices as a potential intrusion on privacy, in effect giving government a real-time picture of where all vehicles are moving at any given time. Oregon has responded by designing one option that uses global positioning satellite tracking and another option that relies on a simple odometer that counts passing miles. Any records that are collected are supposed to be carefully controlled and then destroyed after they have served their revenue purpose.

In any event, such privacy worries may be pointless in a nation where smart phones can already be tracked anywhere and cameras watch over many streets and highways.

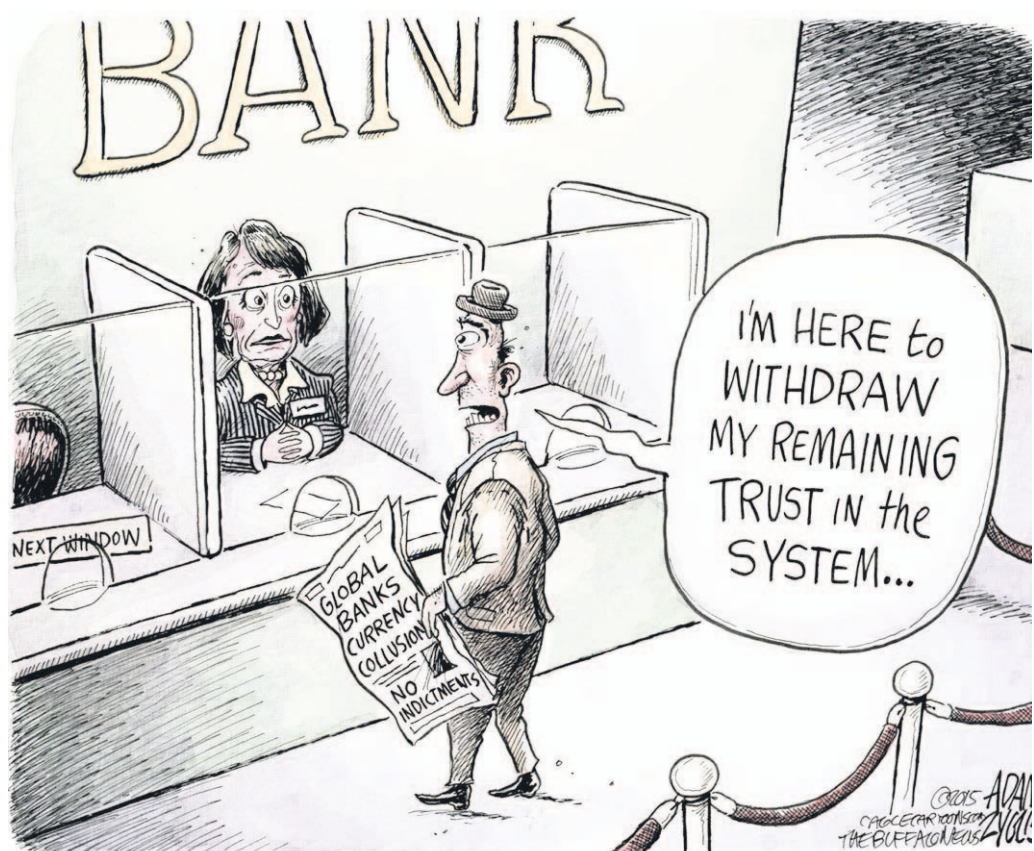
Another concern is expressed by owners and dealers of hybrid and electric cars, who fear they will lose the tax advantage they gained from buying less gasoline or diesel. But the fact is that they use the roads, too, and should be helping pay to maintain them.

As this trial of charging for highway use moves forward, it will bear watching to make certain that rural drivers — who are bound to have to travel greater distances to jobs, schools, healthcare and other necessities — are no more burdened than they already are by fuel taxes. Anything that might worsen the state's urban-rural divide must be avoided.

Oregonians are suspicious about any changes in the tax system. We do a better job than many states of keeping it fair. People will be justifiably wary of this mileage tax. But if it works, it might be a equitable way to match our highway use with what we pay.

Hybrid and electric cars use the roads too, and they should be helping to maintain them.

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



OTHER VIEWS

The power of hope is real

An awkward truth for bleeding hearts like myself is that there has never been much rigorous evidence that outside aid can sustainably lift people out of poverty.

Sure, evidence is overwhelming that aid can overcome disease, boost literacy and save lives. But raising incomes is trickier — and the evidence in that arena has been squishier.

Now that's changing. A vast randomized trial — the gold standard of evidence — involving 21,000 people in six countries suggests that a particular aid package called the graduation program (because it aims to graduate people from poverty) gives very poor families a significant boost that continues after the program ends. Indeed, it's an investment. In India, the economic return was a remarkable 433 percent.

The heart of this aid package? A cow. Or a few goats. Even bees.

Why would a cow have such an effect? This gets interesting: There's some indication that one mechanism is hope. Whether in America or India, families that are stressed and impoverished — trapped in cycles of poverty — can feel a hopelessness that becomes self-fulfilling. Give people reason to hope that they can achieve a better life, and that, too, can be self-fulfilling.

In the graduation program, recipients of livestock were inspired to work more hours, even in areas unrelated to the livestock. They took more odd jobs. Their savings rose. Their mental health improved.

"Poverty is not just poverty of money or income," noted Sir Fazle Abed, founder of a Bangladeshi aid group called BRAC that developed the graduation program. "We also see a poverty of self-esteem, hope, opportunity and freedom. People trapped in a cycle of destitution often don't realize their lives can be changed for the better through their own activities. Once they understand that, it's like a light gets turned on."

Esther Duflo, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a co-author of the study, believes that's right. "The mental health part is absolutely critical," she said. "Poverty causes stress and depression and lack of hope, and stress and depression and lack of hope, in turn, cause poverty."

Could hopelessness and stress create a "poverty trap" — abroad or here in the U.S. — in which people surrender to a kind of whirlpool of despair? Some economists and psychologists are finding evidence to support that theory, and experiments are underway to see if raising spirits can lift economic outcomes.

One study found that Ethiopians randomly assigned to watch an hourlong inspirational video ended up saving more and spending more on their children's education, compared



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

with participants randomly assigned to watch an hour of comedy television. The forward-leaning behaviors persisted in a six-month follow-up.

Researchers are now studying whether exposure to religion might have a similar effect, improving economic outcomes. If so, Marx had the wrong drug in mind: religion would not be an opiate of the masses but an amphetamine.

The graduation program is a bit similar to the model of the well-known group Heifer International, which I've written about before and provides "gifts of hope" such as heifers, goats and chickens to impoverished families.

"There was a lot of excitement — with just a hint of smugness! — at Heifer at the published results," said Pierre Ferrari, the president of Heifer. But the graduation model includes a couple of other elements.

The graduation program starts with a cow or other animals, as well as training on how to raise them. It includes months of food or cash support, partly to reduce the need to eat or sell the animal in a financial crisis.

There's a savings account (micro-lending has disappointed in randomized trials, but micro-savings works very well), health education and regular coaching to reinforce skills and build confidence.

The study, which was just published in the journal *Science*, found that the graduation model was enormously successful in India, Ethiopia, Ghana and Pakistan, and somewhat less effective in Peru and in Honduras (where some animals died). A follow-up found the effects still strong three years after the donation of the animals.

Dean Karlan, a Yale economist who is co-author of the study, said that aid groups focused on very similar approaches include Trickle Up, the Boma Project, Village Enterprise and Fonkoze. Karlan's students in a seminar on philanthropy were given a pool of money from a foundation and the challenge to donate it where it would do the most good; they spent the term reviewing the evidence and, in the end, voted to donate it to Trickle Up.

So bleeding hearts, rejoice! Much of the news about global poverty is depressing, but this is fabulous: a large-scale experiment showing, with rigorous evidence, what works to lift people out of the most extreme poverty. And it's exhilarating that one of the lessons may be so simple and human: the power of hope.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill, Oregon. He has been a columnist for The New York Times since 2001 and writes op-ed columns that appear twice a week. He won the Pulitzer Prize two times, in 1990 and 2006.

YOUR VIEWS

Council's nuisance ordinance should consider other smells

It was with great relief Thursday when I read in the *East Oregonian* that Pendleton's city council took the time to pass an amendment to the city's nuisance ordinance banning marijuana odor. Clearly, there has been no issue of greater importance facing the city. Now that this important work has been completed I hope that the council will move on to restricting the other offensive smell that plagues our community: farts.

While farting may be legal in Oregon, many (including myself) are offended by the flatulent stench. Too often, homeowners and businesses fail to contain farts to their property, forcing the rest of us to put up with the smell. Some habitual farters argue that they need to fart for medical reasons but that doesn't mean my kids should have to

smell their farts. The city council should stop looking the other way and pretending not to notice.

I'm not even going to talk about intensity of farts. After all, as Pendleton police Chief Stuart Roberts put it: "It's a very subjective standard in terms of whether people are offended by [smells] or not."

This issue greatly affects me as I have a roommate whose recreational farting has been negatively affecting my quality of life for several months now. He claims that he is taking steps to mitigate the odor after I contacted the authorities.

But unless our elected officials add farts to Pendleton's nuisance code, it's as if he who smelt it, dealt it. I call on our city council to set aside all other work and address this problem.

Peter Walters
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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