

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Independent voters can become a force

Earlier this week, the Independent Party of Oregon became the state's third major party — or the fourth, if you count the Pendleton Round-Up. Everyone around here knows that is Oregon's *original* major party.

But in the eyes of the state, the Independent joins just the other two — Democratic and Republican — and will now be able to participate in the taxpayer-financed May primary election. There are nearly 110,000 Oregon voters registered Independent, although it is unknown how many of those knew they were actually joining a party when they did so. If you don't want to be a member of any party, you have to register as unaffiliated, not Independent (note the capital I).

Still, the numbers are what they are. And they may be something more than just a mistake. More than 5 percent of Oregon voters are now registered as Independent — a large enough percentage that the big two parties have taken note. They wanted to rewrite the rules to keep the Independent party from ballots wherever possible and even issued a press release together to plead their case. Finally, bipartisanship!

Oregon has long been a progressive political state, and it just may be that the next step is turning away from our two party system.

There is even talk from Salem that the highly-respected Betsy Johnson might run for governor on the Independent ticket. If she did, Johnson would almost certainly offer the toughest competition for sitting Governor Kate Brown, a Democrat. Republicans are still searching for

someone to run for the position.

The Democratic Party has had a stranglehold on Oregon politics for more than a decade, and looks well-positioned to hold onto power for awhile. But if you look at other states where one-party rule has reigned for generations — Democrats in Illinois for example, or Republicans in Oklahoma — you realize that is not a good place to be. Competitive elections are key to fielding good candidates, and there have to be consequences — finding yourself out of a job

consequences — if you do that job poorly.

It's possible the Independent Party of Oregon can be of assistance to that end. They won't win seats in the Legislature right off, or fill any statewide offices, but can at least force Democrats and Republicans to consider their positions, if not downright pivot off them.

So who is this new player? The Independent Party of Oregon doesn't have a clear platform, doesn't get many votes in statewide elections and rarely fields candidates in smaller ones. It has been in existence for less than a decade. Party leaders told the Associated Press that in the past they have pushed consumer protection issues, campaign finance reform and increased transparency in government.

For Oregon to be a well-governed state, it is key that power, if not fully changing hands, there is at least the possibility of it. Republicans have failed to mount much of a challenge recently. Maybe the Independent Party can.

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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.

## OTHER VIEWS

# Banks need the ability to serve marijuana businesses

The Daily Astorian/EO Media Group

Key federal legislators from Oregon are making a renewed push to normalize banking services for the legal marijuana industry. This is a much-needed and overdue reform.

Oregon is in the process of joining other states including neighboring Washington in outright legalization of marijuana, with sales set to start Oct. 1. Medicinal marijuana has been legal here since 1998 and the Legislature legalized medical marijuana dispensaries during its 2013 session. Nationwide, many legitimate marijuana businesses continue to struggle with a lack of access to the normal channels for handling financial transactions.

Currently, marijuana businesses operating under state laws that have legalized medicinal or adult-use marijuana are mostly denied access to the banking system because financial institutions that provide them services can be prosecuted under federal law, according to Oregon U.S. Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden and U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, all Democrats. In Washington state, U.S. Sen. Patty Murray is also a supporter of reform.

Without the ability to access bank accounts, accept credit cards, or write checks, businesses must operate using large amounts of cash.

"There's a reason most of us don't walk around with thousands of dollars of cash stuffed in our backpacks. It's an invitation to crime and malfeasance," Merkley said. "But that's what we are forcing legal Oregon businesses to do because financial institutions are prohibited from providing services. That must change."

Marijuana businesses are heavily regulated and monitored at the state

level. This keeps drug cartels out of the legal industry, insures compliance with rules designed to keep marijuana away from underage residents, and helps avoid federal intervention in legalization.

But by denying these enterprises the ability to handle money in a modern and transparent way, federal law places them at greater risk of robbery, while essentially maintaining undesirable traits associated with the outlaw past. Legalization is a fact of life and is certain to spread to additional states. It's time to dispense with the remaining vestiges of the unlamented past that saw millions of lives disrupted or destroyed in a failed effort at prohibition.

The new law proposed by Oregon's federal lawmakers would prevent federal banking regulators from:

- Prohibiting, penalizing or discouraging a bank from providing financial services to a legitimate state-sanctioned and regulated marijuana business;

- Terminating or limiting a bank's federal deposit insurance solely because the financial institution is providing services to a state-sanctioned marijuana business;

- Recommending or incentivizing a financial institution to halt or downgrade providing any kind of banking services to these businesses; or

- Taking any action on a loan to an owner or operator of a marijuana-related business.

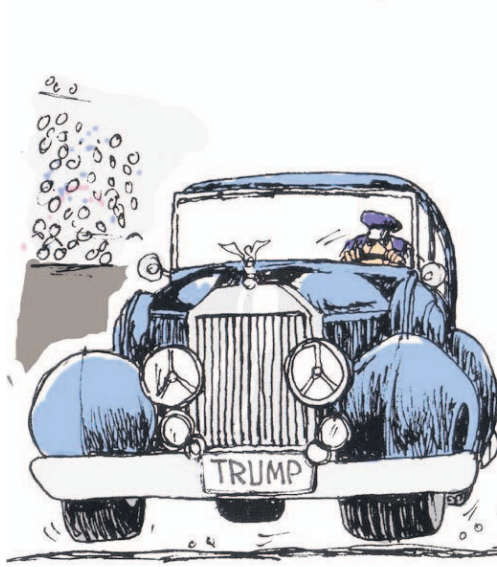
The bill also creates a safe harbor from criminal prosecution and liability and asset forfeiture for financial institutions and their officers and employees who provide financial services to legitimate, state-sanctioned marijuana businesses, while maintaining financial institutions' right to choose not to offer those services.

These moves all make sense and should be enacted as soon as possible.

## LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication. 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. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

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## OTHER VIEWS

# A tax to save lives

A smokeless tobacco product called snus, which a user puts between his gums and his upper lip, has a long history in Sweden. At the start of the last century, it was the most common way Swedes ingested nicotine. By the early 1950s, however, sales of snus had been overtaken by cigarettes, a trend that continued for two decades.

But in time, snus made a comeback, while cigarette use steadily declined. As of 2012, only 13 percent of adult Swedes smoked, less than half the European Union rate. Meanwhile, 19 to 21 percent of Swedish males use snus, which is now more prevalent than cigarettes. (Swedish women, for some reason, stuck with smokes.)

The result? Even though tobacco use in Sweden is comparable to its use in the rest of Europe, Sweden's preference for snus means that it "has Europe's lowest tobacco-attributable mortality among men," according to a paper in the latest issue of The New England Journal of Medicine. Indeed, a 2012 study by the World Health Organization found that tobacco caused 152 deaths per 100,000 men in Sweden, versus 467 deaths per 100,000 men in Europe.

It's hard to know exactly what caused snus to regain its popularity. There was no explicit government policy promoting it. David Sweanor, one of the authors of the paper, told me that Sweden's predominant tobacco company took it upon itself to market snus once the dangers of cigarettes had become irrefutable. (That company, Swedish Match, sells mainly snus today.) But another likely reason was a huge price differential between cigarettes and snus; at one point a pack of the former was taxed so heavily that it cost twice as much as a can of snus.

Sweanor, a tobacco policy expert at the University of Ottawa, and his co-authors, Kenneth Warner, a University of Michigan economist specializing in public health, and Frank J. Chaloupka, an economist focused on public health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, would label snus a "harm reduction" product. Although it contains tobacco and allows users to get their fix of addictive nicotine, snus poses far less risk than cigarettes, as the statistics amply show.

All three men are big believers in the virtue of harm reduction policies to reduce the illness and death caused by cigarettes. Thus the point of their paper: The tax policies that worked in Sweden — raise taxes on the killer product while lowering them on the harm reduction product — should be applied today to electronic cigarettes and other noncombustible nicotine delivery systems.

Regular readers will not be surprised



JOE NOCERA  
Comment

to learn that I think this is a terrific idea. Because it contains tobacco, snus has traces of nitrosamines, a cancer-causing agent found in tobacco. Electronic cigarettes, by contrast, contain no tobacco at all. Instead, they vaporize nicotine, which gets to the user's brain far quicker than, say, a nicotine patch, thus more closely replicating the nicotine hit delivered by a cigarette.

As Warner pointed out to me, nobody can say for sure how much safer e-cigarettes are because the products haven't been around long enough for long-term studies. But it is plain as day that they are far less risky than cigarettes. Countries use tax policy all the time to affect behavior. Using tax policy to move people from cigarettes to e-cigarettes would, to be blunt, save lives. The e-cigarette has the potential to be the greatest tobacco cessation device ever invented.

Yet, as the authors note, because most of the tobacco-control community believes that "all tobacco products are seriously deleterious to health, conventional wisdom ... has long been that all products should be taxed similarly."

Indeed, the World Health Organization has described "comparable" taxation on all tobacco products as a "best practice for tobacco taxation."

As irrational as this is, it is easy to understand where it stems from. Health claims about e-cigarettes remind anti-tobacco activists of the days when Big Tobacco marketed low-tar cigarettes as a "healthier" smoking choice. E-cigarettes come in many flavors, which could appeal to kids. Their marketing aims to make e-cigarettes look cool — just like Big Tobacco once did. Despite a complete lack of proof, the tobacco-control community fears that young people who use e-cigarettes will eventually gravitate to combustible cigarettes.

Which is all the more reason the authors' tax idea deserves consideration: It puts the emphasis on moving smokers to e-cigarettes, which is where it should be. "Studies have ... shown that changes in the relative price of tobacco products lead some tobacco users to switch to less expensive products," the authors write. A big tax differential is a way to take advantage of the lower risk of e-cigarettes without ever having to acknowledge it.

Not that I expect rationality to take hold any time soon. After all, you know how the European Union reacted to the Swedish snus experience, don't you?

It banned snus.

Joe Nocera is an Op-Ed columnist for The New York Times.

## YOUR VIEWS

### School-based health clinic exacerbates root problems

Recently I heard that a school-based health clinic is being planned for Hermiston High School. In discussions with friends, I could see a real live example of the "chicken and egg" question. Which comes first, parental neglect and indifference or the societal rush to feed, clothe and drug the child? Why has parental neglect seemed to increase?

Some teachers saw children come to school without having had breakfast. So a breakfast feeding program was installed and the problem was solved? Not really. The parental neglect continues.

The school-based health clinic is another example of a "solution" that may contribute to parental irresponsibility for their own child's health. Parents should be the primary educators and providers for their children. Surely, families will need society's assistance at times. However, why are the numbers of loser parents increasing?

Are we working too much for the "egg" and should start working for the "chicken" the parents? Parent the parents! Where is the program for that?

I am for stopping the cycle of alleviating every family situation with free handouts. Let's get in the parents' face and boldly ask, "What is going on, and why are you unable to care for your child?" What happened? Ask some good questions.

It seems to me that parental accountability and responsibility is at an all-time low. Our do-gooding rush to solve problems without going to the source of the problem is not working.

The doing-good plans that we dream up, such as school-based health clinics, smack

somewhat of those plans across the ocean 100 years ago: government will raise your children; parents need only to work in the factories.

Marge Rolan  
Hermiston

### House Republicans allowed Obama to wreck the country

On D-Day General Dwight Eisenhower did not tell his troops that we were going to defeat the National Socialists so that we could cooperate with them. The order Eisenhower gave was to rid the earth of Hitler, his band of murderous thugs, and everything that they stood for.

In the November elections America gave the Republicans a mandate to stop President Obama and the Democrats from wrecking this country, and we expect that this carnage be stopped and reversed.

Republicans now say that they want to cooperate with Obama so that he will move to the middle. Americans don't want to hear this nonsense because Obama is a leftist who hates our Constitution and deliberately circumvents it.

Much to our chagrin, GOP House Speaker Boehner and all but 67 House Republicans joined Obama and the Democrats to repeal Section 716 in the Omnibus spending bill. Section 716 was included to prevent government bailout of Wall Street trading losses in speculative credit swap derivatives. Obama knew the contempt voters have for Wall Street bailouts when he told bankers that he was the only thing between them and the pitchforks.

Robert A. Dahlquist  
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