

PARENTS TALK BACK

Don’t shrug off politics

It’s easy to be cynical about politics. For one thing, there’s the corrosive influence of big money in choosing who governs us. The Citizens United decision opened the floodgates for limitless political spending, which has exploded in recent federal elections.

We see candidates spending the majority of their time fundraising and assume they are beholden to those interests once elected. Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump openly talks about attempting to buy influence through donating to politicians on both sides of the aisle throughout his career.

It’s not surprising that a recent Pew survey found that elected officials are seen as less honest and more selfish than ordinary Americans.

Money aside, many voters see little difference between the candidates, or dislike all of them.

Politicians are seen flip-flopping their positions, some within 24 hours. The most recent Republican debate featured plenty of name-calling and shouting. There have been screams, shouts and violence against protesters, even those silently watching, at Trump rallies.

How many parents would tolerate our children behaving this way?

Given all of the above, it’s not surprising that many parents limit their kids’ exposure to politics. When our children hear us complain about how crooked politicians are, or how corrupt the system is, they absorb the idea that it’s better to be disengaged from the political system.

It’s not. It’s better for our democracy to have informed and engaged citizens.

We just have to find a different point of entry.

The airwaves are dominated by a handful of high-profile races, but there’s democracy unfolding in the details. Census data shows there are more than 500,000 elected officials in America. Local races — from school boards to statehouses to city councils — impact our daily lives. Go meet some local candidates and find one whose values reflect your own — someone whose ambitions are guided by principles and a genuine desire to serve.

Teach your kids — and maybe remind yourself — that being a public servant can still be a noble endeavor.

As parents, our civic duty goes beyond showing up at the ballot box every few years. It includes raising a generation of citizens who believe they can have a voice and effect change.

In an election year filled with hateful rhetoric that could have completely alienated my children, they are instead excited about watching their aunt, my sister, run for district judge in Houston. They are learning how democracy works — warts and all.

We’ve watched her work 12- to 14-hour days, without breaks, for months — demonstrating the amount of sheer determination and drive it takes to sustain a campaign. We’ve seen her building coalitions, reaching out to many different groups, getting endorsements and yes, even raising money. My kids have seen that convincing others to support you takes believing in yourself first.

They are learning what it means to donate your time or money to a candidate you believe in, and how much effort it takes to get just one citizen registered to vote. They have learned that there are people who don’t vote because they can’t get time off of work on Election Day, or lack transportation, or simply don’t know where or how to do so.

Experiencing a local race from the inside took me back to my freshman year of college, when I was finally old enough to cast a ballot. It was a presidential election year, and I had the enthusiasm of a freshly minted voter.

Years of bitter partisan gridlock since then had nearly put that fire out.

But this year, on Super Tuesday, it was reignited by the spark of other citizens.

There was the man who had been eligible to vote for more than 30 years, casting his ballot for the first time. There were pictures of young Air Force ROTC cadets who were just old enough to vote. My brother-in-law posted pictures of a Vietnam veteran and his daughter at the polls, with the caption: “He wants you to know that you have no excuse for not getting out to vote. Many have sacrificed for the right to vote.”

There were the people who lined up around buildings and waited for hours for a chance to have their voices heard.

My mother told me that she had to pull over while driving home after voting for her daughter. Overcome by emotion, she broke down and cried.

In the ugliest election cycle of my adult life, there have been times when I’ve felt more discouraged about the political process than I could ever imagine. But remarkably, I’ve also felt incredibly hopeful and proud.

We infect our children with our attitude toward the political process. And if we want better leaders, we stand to benefit from encouraging our brightest and best to want to solve our nation’s challenges. The more hopeful and involved our children see us, the better future we are building for our country.

It’s one way to eventually get the government we deserve.

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AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

TAMPON TAX

Does being female in the U.S. carry unfair costs?

By COLLEEN LONG and JENNIFER PELTZ
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Margo Seibert and Natalie Brasington don’t think women should have to pay a “period tax,” and like a growing number of other women, they are publicly questioning whether being female in the U.S. carries unfair costs.

The pair are among five New York City women who filed a lawsuit last week arguing that it was unconstitutional for the state to levy sales tax on tampons and sanitary napkins while offering medical product exemptions to many other items used by both genders, like lip balm, foot powder and dandruff shampoo.

The case, they say, is about more than the few cents in tax levied on each pack.

Sick of the social taboo, and frustrated by a lack of access for some to a staple, these women and others are talking very publicly about menstruation and gaining political traction that would have been impossible a generation ago.

A national push to abolish sales tax on tampons is gathering steam, led by social media campaigns like #periodswithoutshame. At least seven states are now considering legislation. Illinois lawmakers were holding a hearing on the latest proposal Wednesday. Connecticut legislators discussed the issue Monday.

Cosmopolitan magazine launched an online petition, and even President Barack Obama has questioned why the items are taxed.

Brasington, a 31-year-old photographer, said the tax affects women disproportionately and is a genuine burden for poorer women.

“Being a woman is so expensive,” she said.

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, a vice president at the NYU School of Law’s Brennan Center for Justice, said she began writing articles and op-eds on “menstrual equity” when she discovered food pantries were desperate for sanitary napkins and tampons because poor women can’t afford



This Monday, March 7, 2016 photo shows attorney Zoe Salzman, left, and plaintiff Natalie Brasington, who have brought a class action lawsuit to end New York sales tax on feminine hygiene products, in New York.

AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews

their providers say there can be legitimate reasons — a more decorative product or more complicated haircut, for instance. And some have noted that women sometimes pay less: for life and auto insurance, for example.

Nationwide, 40 states tax feminine hygiene products, deeming them non-necessities or even “luxury items,” while making exceptions for products as similar as adult incontinence pads.

Currently, five U.S. states exempt tampons and other feminine hygiene products from their sales tax, which varies around the country from about 2.9 percent to as high as 7.5 percent. Another five states have no sales tax.

New York taxes tampons and sanitary napkins as tools “to control a normal bodily function and to maintain personal cleanliness.”

The 4 percent state sales tax on the products costs New York women millions of dollars a year; estimates range from about \$7

million to twice that, a minute fraction of the state’s \$142 billion budget.

Advocates say the cost, however small it may seem, is burdensome for poor women, who also can’t purchase the products with food stamps.

“Having one’s period is not a luxury,” state Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal, a Democrat who has proposed abolishing the tax. “Because of our biology, we bear this extra cost, and the state should not compound it.”

The state Department of Taxation and Finance declined to comment, citing the lawsuit. Two major manufacturers of feminine hygiene products, P&G, the maker of the Tampax brand, and Edgewell Personal Care Co., the maker of the Playtex brand, didn’t respond to inquiries this week about the tax issue.

Zoe Salzman, the attorney on the New York case, said they’d push to get a judge to rule the tax unlawful.

“If men had to use these products every month, they would already be tax-exempt,” she said.

Meanwhile, the legislative proposal has yet to get a hearing, though supporters are hopeful about its prospects, especially since Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo recently said the tax should be abolished.

That wasn’t the sense in Utah, where a legislative committee last month nixed a proposal to tax-exempt the items. While some members of the all-male committee supported the idea, others questioned where the state would draw the line on what to tax in the future.

Overseas, Canada removed taxes on the items last year, and British leaders, who have set the tax at the lowest possible level, have considered doing away with it altogether.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Veteran Union County lawman shot by own men in mixup

Lack of communication and a case of mistaken identity resulted in the shooting of a veteran Union County lawman in June of 1921 by his own men.

Officer J.H. McLachlin had received information that a Cadillac roadster carrying a quantity of whiskey would be moving from Pendleton through a canyon west of Hilgard in the Blue Mountains near La Grande. McLachlin, also a deputy federal agent, decided to lie in wait to capture the suspected bootleggers, and took



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

deputies received a tip that a holdup man was working in the same canyon. When they spotted an unidentified man on

up a post on the bank of the Grand Ronde River with his gun across his knees.

On the same day, La Grande officers and Union County sheriff’s deputies received a tip that a holdup man was working in the same canyon. When they spotted an unidentified man on

the river bank they called for him to put up his hands. When he ignored their request (likely he didn’t hear them), one of the officers fired a shot, hitting the man in the back.

Upon learning McLachlin’s identity, the officers scrambled to transport him to La Grande for medical attention. But before he left for the hospital, McLachlin urged sheriff’s deputies to take up his vigil for the whiskey shipment. And when a Cadillac bearing two “foreign-born” men rolled up later in the day, the deputies

were able to capture a cache of Canadian Club.

Known as “Old Mack” for his long service and prowess in catching criminals during his storied career, McLachlin was considered the Til Taylor of Union County, and assisted in the capture of Taylor’s killers in 1920.

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Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at [eovault.blogspot.com](#)

Homemade license plate lands New York woman in jail

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Authorities say putting a homemade, cardboard New York state license plate on a car has landed a woman in jail.

The Erie County sheriff’s office says a deputy pulled over a car Wednesday after noticing it didn’t have a front license plate.

Police say the vehicle’s rear plate was actually a piece of cardboard painted to resemble the yellow and blue version of the New York license plate. The bogus plate had three letters and four numbers, with the words “New York” written on top and “Empire State” on the bottom.

The charges against the 28-year-old woman from the town of Sardinia include possessing a forged instrument and operating a vehicle with a suspend registration.

DNA test shows Vietnam twins had different fathers

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — A scientist and state media say Vietnam has identified an extremely rare set of bi-paternal twins, or twins with different fathers.

Prof. Le Dinh Luong, president of the Genetic



Erie County Sheriff's Office via AP

This photo provided by the Erie County Sheriff's Office shows a homemade New York state license plate.

Association of Vietnam, says DNA testing at his Hanoi lab confirmed the twins have different fathers, the first such case that he knows of in Vietnam, with only seven such cases reported in the world.

Luong declined to give details because of confidentiality with his client.

Online newspaper *Dan Tri* reported that a 34-year-old man from northern Hoa Binh province had DNA testing after being pressured by his family because the twins did not look alike. One has thick wavy hair while the other has thin and straight hair.

To rule out a hospital mix-up, DNA testing of the mother showed that she was the mother of both children, the report said.

The twins, who are now two years old, were born the same day and have the same sex.

Luong said bi-paternal twins could happen if two eggs from the same mother were fertilized by sperm from two different men within one to seven days apart in an ovulation period.

Reagan airport says 1 person filed 6,500 noise complaints

WASHINGTON (AP) — Out of the 8,670 noise complaints Washington’s Reagan National Airport received last year, officials say a whopping 6,500 of them came from the same person.

The *Washington Post* reports that officials at the

Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority have said that one unidentified Washington resident was responsible for about three-quarters of last year’s noise complaints. That’s the equivalent of one person making about 18 calls every day of the year.

Would-be robber tries to stick up cab with cop behind him

READING, Pa. (AP) — Police say a would-be robber in Pennsylvania had some poor timing when he pulled a gun on his taxi driver with a sheriff’s deputy behind him.

The Berks County deputy approached the cab after it failed to move through a green light Monday in Reading.

Surveillance video from inside the cab, obtained by WFMZ-TV, shows the deputy’s cruiser pulling up behind the taxi. Shortly after that, the passenger aims a gun at the driver and demands money.

Deputy Terry Ely approaches the cab and asks if there’s a problem. Seeing the gun, Ely draws his firearm and orders the passenger out of the taxi.

The cab driver can be heard telling Ely “You’re a lifesaver.”

Eighteen-year-old Victor Martinez-Herrera was arrested. A lawyer for him wasn’t listed in online court documents.