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## OUR VIEW

# Two men enter, one tax plan leaves

This is how to put Oregon schools and state government on a path to stable, sustainable funding: Stick Ontario Republican Cliff Bentz and Beaverton Democrat Mark Hass in a room and give them the task of developing a fair tax plan for the state.

That is the idea of Oregon House Republican Leader Mike McLane, who suggested he would accept whatever the two legislators came up with. He mentioned a few other Republican and Democratic lawmakers who could be added to the mix as well.

The point is that a new tax plan can only be achieved by people who are pragmatic and collaborative, who entertain new ideas and who put the good of the state above self-interests.

That didn't happen in the 2017 Legislature, despite the best attempts of Sen. Hass, Rep. Bentz and others. Labor was stinging from the defeat of the massive corporate tax hike contained in Measure 97 last fall, and constantly re-fought the battle in the Legislature. Business was divided on what to do next, instead of being conciliatory and collaborative after its victory over Measure 97.

If there is good news from the legislative session that ended July 7, it is that lawmakers finally were talking about realistic revenue reform. It also seems that lawmakers, especially in the state Senate, set a good example through bipartisan compromise on several contentious issues, including fair pay and predictable work schedules in the workplace.

Yet on revenue reform, the interest groups of business and labor could not achieve that same pragmatism. They stuck with their "all or nothing" approaches.

Most people agree that Oregon has an unstable tax system, especially for funding schools. Some consider a sales tax the answer, but political history shows little chance of one being enacted in our lifetimes.

Hass and others, especially Democrats, advocate a type of sales tax to be paid by businesses — a commercial activity tax modeled after one in Ohio. Senate Republicans stood firm against that tax this year, especially after

modeling showed three-fold tax increases for some businesses.

And PERS reform, which Republicans and the business community rightfully demanded in return for corporate tax increases, fell by the wayside.

Gov. Kate Brown is among those who say revenue reform will not happen until the 2019 Legislature.

That would be unfortunate, leaving the tax debate to another set of divisive ballot measures next fall.

Rep. McLane might have the

solution. Give the task to Bentz, Hass and a few other political pragmatists, since interest groups on either side have shown little ability to negotiate for the good of the state. We would suggest adding Bill Hansell, R-Athena, Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, and Sens. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, and Jackie Winters, R-Salem. All have shown the ability to work across party lines to solve complex issues.

Genuine tax reform should include these principles:

- A plan for ground-level examination of agency-by-agency spending, instead of building each budget based on what agencies and schools spent during the previous cycle. The concept of "roll forward" budgets should be eliminated in favor of "zero-based" budgeting that starts with where the dollars will do the most good.

- A holistic look at corporate, individual and other taxes and fees. Lawmakers and the public need an unbiased understanding of how much each sector pays for government, instead of relying on partisan-based studies.

- Appropriately matching expenses with revenue, while providing stability in both areas.

- Reform of the Public Employees Retirement System and of public employee health-care premiums — two of the highest costs for governments and schools. All options must be on the table, especially for PERS, so they can be finally settled in court instead of being an ongoing battle in each legislative session.

Such an approach would benefit public employees, public agencies and the public. That work must start now.



Sen. Mark Hass and Rep. Cliff Bentz



THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH  
ORIGINATION: COLUMBUS DISPATCH



## OTHER VIEWS

# Health reform that's real and conservative

The American health care system has two core problems. It's the world's most expensive, and it still leaves many people uninsured.

Congressional Republicans have not tried to solve either problem. They have instead offered a plan that cuts spending on the middle class and the poor, funnels the money into a tax cut for the affluent and masquerades as health policy.

One of the great shames of their approach is that a different one is available. Conservative health reform is not an oxymoron. Nor is bipartisan health reform. It's possible to combine conservative and liberal ideas to cover more people while holding down costs.

You can find a real-world case study in Rhode Island.

The state is obviously a small one, but it has a lot in common with the rest of the country. Its poverty rate is similar to the nation's, and its opioid crisis is even worse. It has a strongly Democratic metropolitan area (Providence), while Donald Trump won the state's western half.

The story of health reform here involves both Republican and Democratic officials. It involves praise from the conservative *Wall Street Journal* and the liberal Center for American Progress. Most important, the story involves cost savings, fewer uninsured and a rising quality of care.

I've been covering Washington long enough to understand that Trump and Mitch McConnell aren't going to abandon their health care plan simply because it's a bad one. They have too much invested (and they believe deeply in upward income redistribution).

But if Republican holdouts in the Senate continue to block the plan, the health policy debate is eventually going to start fresh. When it does, we could use some role models.

Rhode Island's efforts started almost a decade ago. The governor, a Republican named Don Carcieri, asked the Bush administration for more flexibility with Medicaid in exchange for holding down costs.

It was classic conservatism: reduce federal rules, give states more autonomy and let them keep some of the savings. Yet, unlike the Senate bill, Rhode Island's plan didn't slash Medicaid carelessly. It came with safeguards, like ensuring that everyone eligible for Medicaid would keep coverage.

Carcieri made substantial progress, but costs were still a problem when Gina Raimondo, a Democrat, became governor in 2015. Medicaid accounts for close to one-third of Rhode Island's budget. It crowds out spending on schools, roads and other job-creating investments. Unless she could get Medicaid spending under control, Raimondo

told me, she wouldn't be able to do much else.

Her strategy has been based on the most important — and, in a strange way, most promising — fact about American health care: Much of our spending doesn't make us healthier.

We go to the emergency room instead of a primary-care doctor. We choose invasive procedures over simpler, more effective ones. We house elderly people in nursing homes instead of offering more pleasant

home care.

Raimondo's administration has used the flexibility that Carcieri won — as well as Obamacare provisions — to move away from the high-cost approach. "I want to pay to get you healthier," she said, "not pay to have something done to you."

I recently tagged along on a nurse's home visit to a 74-year-old woman here named Annie Hall. Hall is a widow who suffers from Parkinson's and other conditions. She did not get up from her living room chair during the visit.

She likes living where she does: not in a nursing home or hospital, but in the apartment in a wooded area, just off Interstate 95, that she and her husband shared for years. "I don't want to go to the hospital," she said. "It's the worst place to go when you're sick."

Not so long ago, Hall would have been moved to a nursing home anyway, because that was the default. Today, she is able to stay home, thanks to the nurses from Integra Community Care Network, paid partly by Medicaid, who visit her every week and check up by phone. Hall calls the nurses "my family."

The shift toward home-based care is one reason cost growth has fallen here. In Medicaid, spending per enrollee dropped 6.5 percent last year and is now starting to save the state serious money.

Think about how conservative this approach is. It's based on local, not federal, decision-making. It allows people like Annie Hall to remain in their communities. It saves money for taxpayers. No wonder many Republicans like to point to Rhode Island.

Unfortunately, the Senate bill would cause the progress here to unravel, state officials told me. They would lose so much Medicaid funding that they would have to cut back on care — regardless of the effects — and deny insurance to people.

A handful of Republican senators are all that's keeping such damage from happening. I hope they understand they are not only protecting vulnerable Americans. They are also defending truly conservative ideas.

David Leonhardt is an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.



DAVID LEONHARDT  
Comment

**If Republican holdouts in the Senate continue to block the plan, the health policy debate is eventually going to start fresh.**

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

### Listen carefully, demand trust and truth

This Fourth of July I took time out for reflection. I was feeling patriotic, nostalgic, grateful and concerned. My thoughts went back to the June 21 editorial by Thomas Friedman, "We the People," in the *East Oregonian* and his concern for the "death of truth in America." Friedman quoted his friend and teacher, Dov Seidman, who said, "We are experiencing an assault on the foundation of our society and democracy — the twin pillars of truth and trust."

Truth and trust are terms that carry considerable weight in personal relationships as well as in national and international relations. We are all products of our personal experiences and I reflected back to my formative years growing up on a cattle ranch in southwest Montana. My mother's family are Republican and Dad's people are life-long Democrats. That led to robust political discussions! The ranch families and the people we knew bridged the entire political spectrum. Your word was your

bond and agreements were made with only a handshake. Integrity, truth, and trust were valued above all.

Being a reliable neighbor was more important than politics. You may not have agreed with statements made, but "active listening" and respect were usually in the conversation. People talked to each other. Candidates received our support if they had the "right stuff," such as astronaut and Republican Senator John Glenn from Ohio. Their voting records, character, experience and integrity were of foremost importance, not the party. If the truth or our trust was violated the call was to "throw the rascals out!"

Today, we can look back at American leaders that had the wisdom, courage and vision to unify our country. Leaders from different parties who strongly disagreed came together for the common good and continued to make the experiment for American Democracy function. As Senator Ted Kennedy would say, "Do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good."

There is, of course, concern for the subjectivity of truth. Perhaps a starting point is to look for points of agreement in our conversations and truly listen to each other.

Paul Davis  
Pendleton

### Explanation of 'no' vote on transportation package

In response to Mr. Tabor's letter to the editor, I would like to clarify some misleading statements that were written in the *East Oregonian* article.

First, I was asked to commit to a "yes" vote on an \$8.2 billion dollar transportation package, HB2017, while still in its developmental stage in order for my district to receive any funding on special projects. At that time, there was a 14-cent gas tax proposed, added fees on the sale of new and used cars, mileage tax, a proposed gravel tax, transit tax, bike sales tax, tolls, tax on employee payroll and more.

At the bill's inception, there was no commitment from the Demo-

cratic Party to reduce or eliminate the low carbon fuels tax that would potentially increase fuel costs to 20 cents per gallon. To his credit, Rep. Cliff Bentz later reached a compromise that was adopted that would cap the carbon tax at around 11 cents per gallon.

I don't feel it's good policy to commit to any bill that hasn't been completed. Voting without knowing the cost/benefits are is like Nancy Pelosi who said, "We have to vote for the bill to see what's in it."

I don't operate in that fashion. I don't function that way in business, and I don't think it's in the best interest of the taxpayers to function that way in the Legislature.

Representatives were asked to

provide needed projects in their districts. I reached out to Wallowa, Union and Umatilla County commissioners for projects in those counties, which I submitted. Contrary to the article in the *EO*, I was not contacted or lobbied by the mayor of Pendleton. By the time the transportation package was completed, the transportation group had leveraged and secured enough early "yes" votes to pass. Unwilling to commit early to an unfinished bill, District 58 projects were not given. Fourteen Republicans in the House (as well as six Democrats) and seven Republicans in the Senate voted no on the bill.

Greg Barreto  
Oregon State Representative, House District 58

## LETTERS POLICY

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