

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Stopping sex trafficking

The recent large-scale police sting at an apartment in Richland opened a lot of eyes and surprised a lot of people. It was one piece of the horrific sex trafficking underground brought into the daylight.

Following ads and messages placed by police operatives, 26 men were arrested after arriving at the apartment allegedly looking to have sex with children.

The details that have emerged are beyond alarming. These men, including two from Pendleton, were seemingly willing to victimize young boys and girls for their own gratification.

It's hard to read about, but can't be ignored. Sex trafficking isn't just a problem in the far corners of the globe. It affects us right here.

For the men arrested earlier this month, the sting was a ruse and no children were in danger. But children's bodies are bought and sold online every day.

Sites like Backpage.com have created marketplaces for prostitution and child sex trafficking. The site claims no responsibility for the ads that appear and works to remove illicit ones, but a recent report by *The Washington Post* revealed that contractors for the company sought out sex-related ads for the site.

And where there is demand, supply follows. In 2012, the International Labor Organization reported nearly 21 million trafficking victims worldwide, most of whom are sold for sexual exploitation. Because of the shadowy nature of the enterprise, precise accounting for the number of children being sold into sexual slavery is hard to pin down. But the U.S. Institute Against

Human Trafficking estimates at least 100,000 in the U.S. today.

Like all dark and shadowy problems, it can seem unsolvable. The sex trade has been with us since the beginning of recorded history.

But we're not in favor of giving up because things are difficult. We know the problem will persist, but there are real ways to limit its access to children.

Cracking down on online services that promote and sell prostitution is a good start. Free speech protections are an important discussion for net freedom, but soliciting illegal advertising

would certainly be shut down in a newspaper or television station, and should not be allowed to persist online.

Raising awareness is also important. State Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athena) sponsored and helped pass Senate Bill 375 this session, which allows flyers to hang in roadside restrooms in Oregon. Previously, no flyers were allowed in those spaces.

The signs would encourage victims of sex trafficking to call for help, and maybe even more importantly help the rest of us recognize the signs of trafficking that we might otherwise miss.

Those signs include marks of physical abuse, avoiding eye contact, checking into hotels with older males and not being allowed to speak in public.

It's our tendency to avoid dark corners, and the underground of sex trafficking is about the darkest place on earth. But it's important we realize it's there and look for ways to bring in sunlight.

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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

# Proposed tax referendum offers chance for Oregonians to grapple with health care financing

*The Bend Bulletin*

Among the budget-balancing efforts approved by the 2017 Oregon Legislature and signed by the governor is House Bill 2391, which raises some \$605 million to keep the Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid) whole while balancing the state budget.

The law, nearly universally panned by the Legislature's Republicans, closes the health care financial gap by raising taxes. Thus, most hospitals will pay a 0.7 percent tax on revenues, coordinated care organizations must cut their cost of doing business by 1.5 percent, and some people's premiums will be charged a 1.5 percent tax.

At least that's what the law says. In reality, hospital bills almost certainly will rise, as will health insurance premiums, as insurers and hospitals raise rates to cover the increased cost of doing business.

Three Republican lawmakers — Rep. Julie Parrish, West Linn; Rep. Cedric Hayden, Roseburg; and Rep. Sal Esquivel, Medford — hope to refer sections of the new law to voters, and the Legislature's Democrats have said that if they do, the referendum must be

in January.

In some ways, the early vote date is a blessing. If sections of the law are overturned, it will happen relatively early in the biennium. That, in turn, should give lawmakers time to come up with a more acceptable Plan B.

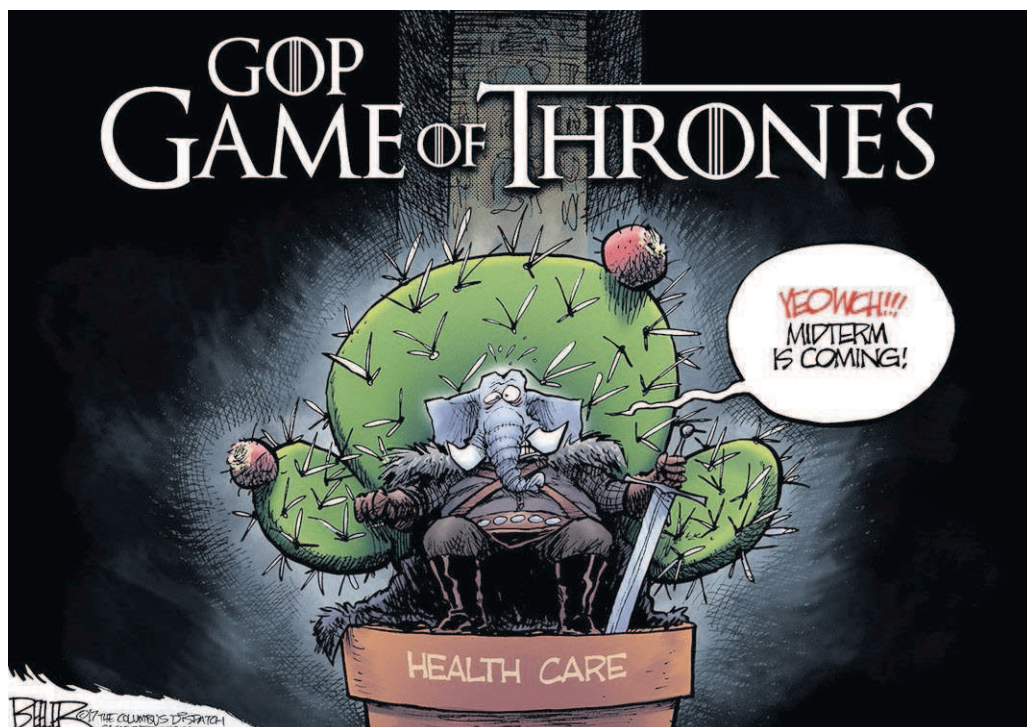
Whether you favor the proposed changes or believe lawmakers should find a better way, the discussion is worth having. Among the questions are these:

Does it make sense to tax revenues without considering the cost of creating them? Some Oregon hospitals, including those in the St. Charles system, have revenues that come dangerously close to being outstripped by expenses.

Is a tax on health insurance premiums, which are expensive and likely to get more so, the best way to finance health care? And what about CCOs? They are required to hold individual cost increases to a figure below the rate of medical inflation, according to testimony on HB 2391; this will reduce that increase further.

If you believe it's time to talk about Oregon's health care system and the way it is financed, the proposed referendum gives you the chance. All you have to do is sign a petition to put the law on the ballot.

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## OTHER VIEWS

# A summer project to nourish your political soul

Righteousness comes easily in these polarized times. We all have reasons for our opinions, and we tend to be surrounded by people who hold similar ones. The more we talk politics, the more confident we can become that we're right.

President Donald Trump, of course, has aggravated the situation. He is alarmingly different from any previous president, which makes his critics more committed to opposing him. His supporters, meanwhile, feel disrespected by every institution from the Republican Party to the mainstream media.

As a result, the Trump era is coarsening our discourse. Too often recently I have watched people I respect spiral from a political discussion into a nasty, personal argument.

So I have a suggestion. By all means, Trump's opponents should continue to fight — for health care, civil rights, the climate and truth itself. But there is also a quieter step that's worth taking no matter your views, for the sake of nourishing your political soul.

Pick an issue that you find complicated, and grapple with it.

Choose one on which you're legitimately torn or harbor secret doubts. Read up on it. Don't rush to explain away inconvenient evidence.

Then do something truly radical: Consider changing your mind, at least partially.

Doing so will remind you that democracy isn't simply about political force. It also depends on inquiry and open-mindedness. "The spirit of liberty," as Judge Learned Hand wrote, "is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right." Imagine what this country would be like now if people hadn't been willing to change their minds in the past.

Today's polarization — in which left and right are more cleanly sorted — pushes us to double down on all of our views, even the ones we doubt. Opinions, psychologist Steven Pinker told me, "have become loyalty badges for one's tribe."

In response, I've decided to devote part of my summer to thinking through vexing issues. I have steered clear of those where I find the evidence overwhelmingly on one side. I'm not agonizing over whether voter fraud is widespread, climate change is statistical noise or capitalism is dead. If I'm somehow wrong about one of these, I can revisit it later.

In the meantime, I've chosen three issues that feel trickier.

Immigration. America is the world's strongest country thanks in no small part to embracing ambitious, hard-working immigrants. But an anti-immigration backlash just helped elect a president, which calls for



DAVID LEONHARDT  
Comment

some reflection.

It's possible that the country would benefit from a different policy — one like Canada's, which admits more people based on skills and fewer based on family ties. That combination could lift economic growth and reduce inequality. It is worth consideration for the political left, center and right.

I recommend the immigration chapter in a new book by legal scholar Peter Schuck, "One Nation Undecided: Clear Thinking About Five Hard Issues That Divide Us." I'm also rereading research on the upward mobility of recent immigrants to see if it's less encouraging than I'd like.

Yes, the immigration debate is stained by racism and lies. But it also involves trade-offs.

Abortion. The trade-off in the abortion debate is agonizingly basic: A woman's right to control her body versus a fetus' right to live.

I'm trying to think about the uncomfortable parts of both sides.

Why do many abortion opponents have a change of heart when the decision involves themselves or someone they love? When the decision is no longer hypothetical, forcing a woman to give birth doesn't sound so good.

And why do some advocates of abortion on demand deny the creeping, technology-driven risk of eugenics? I don't want to live in a society in which fetuses deemed imperfect are routinely eliminated.

Education. There is no other issue I've spent more time debating with readers. To me, the evidence shows that charter schools and other reforms have brought important progress, especially for poor children. Many readers feel differently.

I'm confident we could each learn from the other, about what's working and what isn't, in charter schools, traditional schools and other areas.

Here's a deal for reform skeptics: Dig into a few of the studies, essays and evidence that have persuaded me. In return, email me with reading suggestions.

Whatever your position on these three issues, there is no shortage of others to consider: Tax reform. Trade. Minimum wage vs. tax credits vs. universal basic income. Obamacare vs. single payer.

As in the past, the only way the country is going to make progress on hard issues is if a substantial number of people change their minds. By questioning your own beliefs, you may discover a better answer.

Or if you are lucky enough to have all the right answers already, you will at least increase your empathy for the rest of us.

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

## YOUR VIEWS

### Reducing Medicaid payments would harm local children

The topic of healthcare reform in general is one we'll leave to the leadership in Washington D.C. to sort. However, we feel it's crucial to increase awareness of changes that would have severe impact on our schools right here in Eastern Oregon.

If approved, the act will cap Medicaid payments to Oregon and jeopardize healthcare access for vulnerable children. Our elected officials are proposing cutting hundreds of billions of dollars in Medicaid spending; such cuts could be detrimental to students with special education and health needs in our schools, and the ripple effect of lost funding could impact all students.

School districts across the nation receive about \$4 billion from Medicaid every year and much of the money helps to defer the cost of our special education programs. Locally, we use these funds to support physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology and nursing services to our medically fragile students. In addition, our regional Community Care Organization receives Medicaid reimbursements to provide mental health and nursing services. Providing such services

in the school environment allows students to receive quality care, relieves the burden of such care on families and helps us pool resources to provide services to students at a lower cost. Without the ability to bill Medicaid for these important student supports, districts are forced to locate outside providers to care for students and pay potentially higher costs without reimbursement, which means reductions in other areas for all students to offset the expenses.

The InterMountain ESD region serves approximately 29,000 students in 18 districts. We receive roughly \$340,000 in Medicaid funds from both fee for service and Medicaid service claiming. If our children lose access to the Medicaid dollars, our districts would have to offset the loss of this revenue by cutting other areas. We must do everything we can to make sure the Senate does not pass this bill. We must encourage our senators to fight against these devastating and unnecessary cuts to services that our low income and special needs kids rely upon. Our children are depending on us.

Mark Mulvihill,  
InterMountain ESD Superintendent  
Heidi Sipe,  
Umatilla School District Superintendent

## LETTERS POLICY

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