

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Tax bill passes in the dead of night

In the wee hours of Saturday morning, Senate Republicans passed what could be one of the most important bills in recent history.

If it becomes law, it will revamp the national tax code, disrupt the national health care system, add trillions of dollars to the national debt and impact every pocketbook in America. So why did it pass just before 2 a.m., in the dark of night and with nary a public hearing?

Everybody knows that most 2 a.m. decisions are boneheaded, and something we regret in the morning light. So why are we passing important legislation at that hour?

It didn't have to happen like this.

There is plenty to like about the tax bill. Reducing the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 20 percent, a number in line with other first-world countries, is

long overdue and will help American companies compete in a global marketplace. Most lawyer-heavy corporations were finding ways around the paying the 35 percent rate anyway — many by parking billions of dollars in offshore tax shelters — so perhaps the lower rate will actually increase tax receipts.

Yet there is plenty wrong with the bill, too. The tax code was crying out for simplification, modernization and real reform — things the GOP bluffed at tackling. They came up short.

The final Senate bill (and the House bill, for that matter) is deeply unpopular with voters. That is the most obvious reason why it was squeezed through in the dead of night.

The Trump tax cuts had a 48 percent disapproval rate and just 32 percent approval through much of November, making it the least popular tax cut in recent history, according to FiveThirtyEight. Yet those numbers are remarkably similar to Trump's approval and disapproval ratings — and are probably more tied to the President himself than his tax bill because, again, nobody knew the details of the bill until the final hour.

Much of the disapproval rests on the fact that rich Republican donors and lobbyists seemed to get direct access to writing the bill, while middle-class voters (and elected

Democrats) were left out.

The tax bill includes a tax break for people who own private airplanes. There is also a tax break for parents whose children attend private school.

While those clearly help upper-income Americans, they also hurt poor and middle-class homes. Cuts to state and local tax deductions will reduce funding to public schools, where most middle-class and poor Americans are educated, while private school parents now save a few extra dollars.

There is no economic rationale for this kind of thing. Rich Americans donated to the Republican Party, and the Republican Party is giving them what they want. It's that simple.

We promised to keep you informed about the bill as it moved — at that we failed. How could

we not? Not even the senators who voted on the 479-page bill, which included hand-written notes in the margins, knew what was in it more than a few hours before it was approved.

That's problematic for democracy. But it's also problematic for the law itself.

In the rush to pass the bill, the Senate GOP accidentally nullified many corporate deductions, among those most important to their corporate donors.

*The Wall Street Journal* reported that a research credit was forgotten, which could cost corporations up to \$10.3 billion in tax write-offs.

That may get taken care of through reconciliation by the House and Senate, or by the hundreds of lobbyists who will sneak their wishes into the bill before it arrives at the president's desk for a signature.

The American tax system is far from being broken, and far from being fixed. Tax policy swings back and forth with the pendulum of partisan control, and Republicans had their chance to create a more fair, open taxation system that lowered rates for many Americans.

On that, the Grand Ol' Party fell short. And once they no longer hold the power in both houses of Congress and the White House, expect much of this tax plan to be rescinded.

Everybody knows that most 2 a.m. decisions are boneheaded, and something we regret in the morning light.

## OTHER VIEWS

# Welcome different religions as holidays approach

*The (Frankfort, Ky.) State Journal*

Commentators on both the left and the right have praised this newspaper's efforts to promote transparency in government — and with good reason. To paraphrase Kentuckian and former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, sunlight is the best disinfectant. With public scrutiny, policies, procedures and ideas grow stronger.

We find laughable the notion that public business should remain cloaked in secrecy for the public's own good — whether it's the drafting of public pension reform legislation or the selection of Frankfort's Capital Plaza developer. Yet, when it comes to religion, some who would praise us for this stance may fall prey to a fallacy similar to the idea that darkness is a better disinfectant than light.

In our predominantly Protestant community, the fear of exposure to denominations or religions different from our own is real — if rarely articulated in mixed company. That fear

is both misguided and troubling.

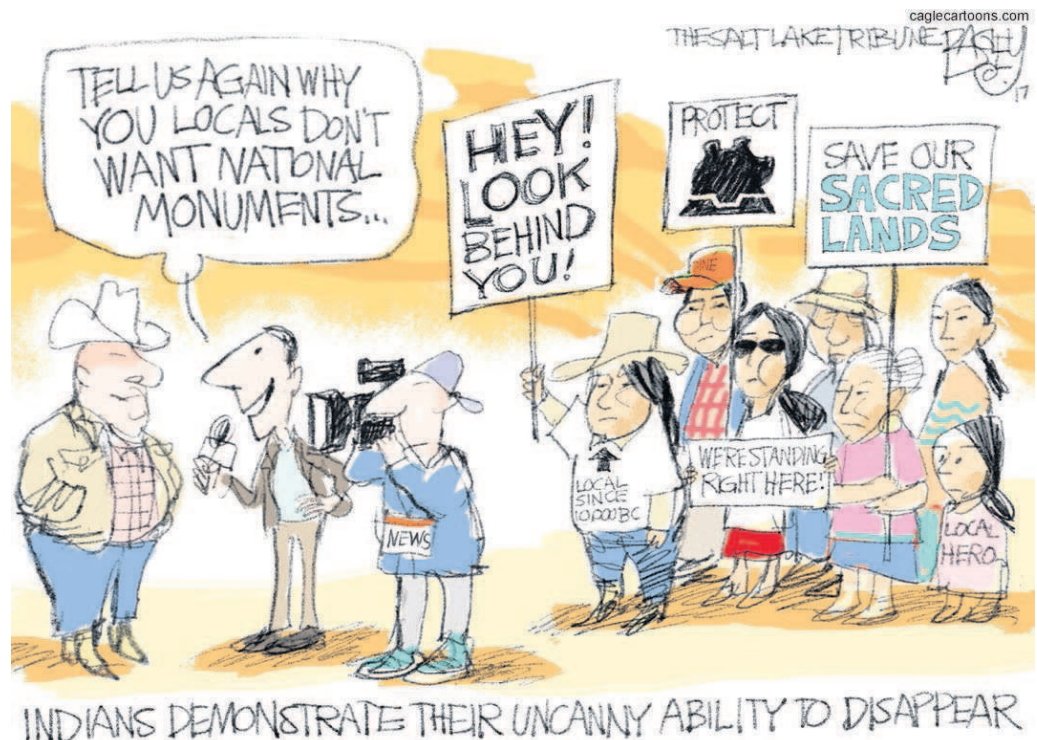
It is misguided because a person's beliefs — or non-beliefs as the case may be — mature only in the crucible of exposure to differing viewpoints. (You don't truly know what you believe until a debate has forced you to check your premises.)

It is troubling because in our relatively homogeneous community, this ignorance of others' beliefs can potentially lead us to dehumanize our fellow man whether we realize it or not.

This holiday season, don't just pay lip service to the importance of understanding other denominations or religions; live it.

Talk with a Catholic about his or her church's understanding of the Immaculate Conception and how that shapes Catholic views on the Virgin Mary. Brush off Maccabees and remember why it is that Jews celebrate Hanukkah. You might even be tempted to light a candle or spin a dreidel yourself.

Embrace it. Your own faith will only benefit from the experience.



INDIANS DEMONSTRATE THEIR UNCANNY ABILITY TO DISAPPEAR

## OTHER VIEWS

# Donald Trump could really use a friend

Show me a person who has no true friendships and I'll show you someone with little if any talent for generosity, which is a muscle built through interactions with those who have no biological or legal claim to you but lean on you nonetheless.

Show me a person who has no true friendships and I'll show you someone who can't see the world through another's eyes. A novel or movie gets you only so far down the road to empathy; to go the distance, you need more intimate, immediate experience of hurts and aspirations not your own. You need friends.

Show me a person who has no true friendships and I'll show you someone with no adequately moderating influences on his whims, no sufficient cushion for his moods. I'll show you a full-blown narcissist or full-throttle paranoiac or some combination of both.

I'll show you the president of the United States.

On Tuesday, two of his campaign aides, Corey Lewandowski and David Bossie, published a book about their time with him, "Let Trump Be Trump." It's a cunning volume, adulatory on the surface but with just enough grime underneath to promote sales.

Racing through it, I had three main thoughts. One, Trump needs fiber. (McDonald's isn't so much his guilty pleasure as his daily trough.) Two, Trump needs friends. Three, so much of Trump can be explained through the absence of them. His rages and rampages are fruits of his friendlessness.

In the book he doesn't have people he communes and commiserates with in any raw, real way. He has people he yells at and people he sucks labor and favors from. He has minions, Lewandowski and Bossie among them.

They gush about the pleasure savored by Trump's dinner companions: "He would regale them with stories from his amazing life." "Friends" are his rapt audience when there's no other audience around.

And they're replaceable. Trump bluntly told Lewandowski that someone else could easily be put in his job. Soon enough someone was.

Lewandowski and Bossie crow of having observed the man up close, but Trump, cold and monarchic, exists across a moat of his own making.

I've been struck by this before.

In October, *The Washington Post* published a fascinating profile of Thomas Barrack, a billionaire real estate investor described as "one of President Trump's oldest friends." The profile's author, Michael Kranish, wrote that Barrack often wonders how he has lasted 30 years with such a tempestuous, egomaniacal man.

His conclusion? "I've never needed anything from him," Barrack told Kranish. "I was always subservient to him." That's obviously how Trump prefers the people around him. On bended knee. In full genuflection.

The Trump biographer Michael D'Antonio told me, "He has hangers-on and he has employees and he has other dependents, but I don't think he has friends." He's too twitchily suspicious. Too vain. And so that twitchiness and vanity go unchecked.

They metastasize.

"He had no friends in his military academy who stuck," D'Antonio said. "He had no friends in college who stuck. He was a USFL owner, and all the other owners wound up hating him."

I ran D'Antonio's assessment by Mike Tollin, who produced and directed a documentary about the USFL, a short-lived competitor to the NFL. He told me that Trump "showed no interest in, and seemed largely incapable of, genuine friendship."

I asked Tollin what a person unschooled in friendship might also be unpracticed at. "Compassion?" he responded. "Compromise? Those are things you learn from friendship."

Chris Christie was supposedly a friend of Trump's. I think I can end this paragraph here.

The real estate tycoon Richard LeFrak is ostensibly friendly with Trump. He told *The Times*' Alan Feuer in early 2016, "If we're both in Florida, Donald might call and say, 'Come have dinner at Mar-a-Lago.'" But if LeFrak suggested that Trump instead come to his place? "He probably won't do it."

For Trump, "friendship" isn't a two-way street. It's a cul-de-sac. You can spin round and round there, in the shadow of his castle, or you can take your vehicle somewhere else.

Is he all that much different with his kids? When Ivanka and the crew sat with CNN's Anderson Cooper last year to give testimonials about Trump's presence and parenting back in the day, they repeatedly (and perhaps inadvertently) noted that for quality time with him, they went to his office, his construction sites. They met him on his terms and terrain.

Everyone does, and that's anathema to decency and good governance. He gathers and discards allies at will. He acts to sate his own needs, unworried about the impact on others. For him they don't fully exist. There's no space for them, because he has never forced himself to carve it out.

"I think of it as an absolute void," D'Antonio said. It's no way to live, and it's no way to lead.

Frank Bruni joined the *New York Times* in 1995.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Walden's support for tax bill cost him support of local voter

Through no fault of my own, I have been dealing with a chronic health condition these past 10 years.

My annual medical expenses have typically approached \$10,000, with a few years nearly hitting \$15,000 — and that is with good health and prescription drug insurance.

Knowing now that Greg Walden, our

Oregon representative to the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., voted for legislation that eliminates my ability to try and recover some of my medical expenses through my taxes has me ripping the "Walden for Sportsmen" bumper sticker off my pickup.

Does anyone have a "Walden for Healthy Sportsmen Only" bumper sticker?

**Rich Zita Pendleton**

