

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

KATHRYN B. BROWN
PublisherDANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing EditorTIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

Founded October 16, 1875

OUR VIEW

Measure 101 a Band-Aid on a gaping wound

The one-issue ballot that arrived in your mailbox earlier this week, and the complicated question therein, is proof that something is rotten in the state of Oregon.

It's a confusing, complicated decision that asks a lot — too much, we'd argue — of voters. The voters' pamphlet (again, all that for just one question) includes arguments in favor and in opposition that are often too thick to penetrate.

In short, Oregonians are asked to decide the fate of a two-year, 0.7 percent tax on some hospitals that was approved by the Legislature in the last session. A 1.5 percent tax also extends to insurers, the Public Employees Benefits Board and coordinated care organizations.

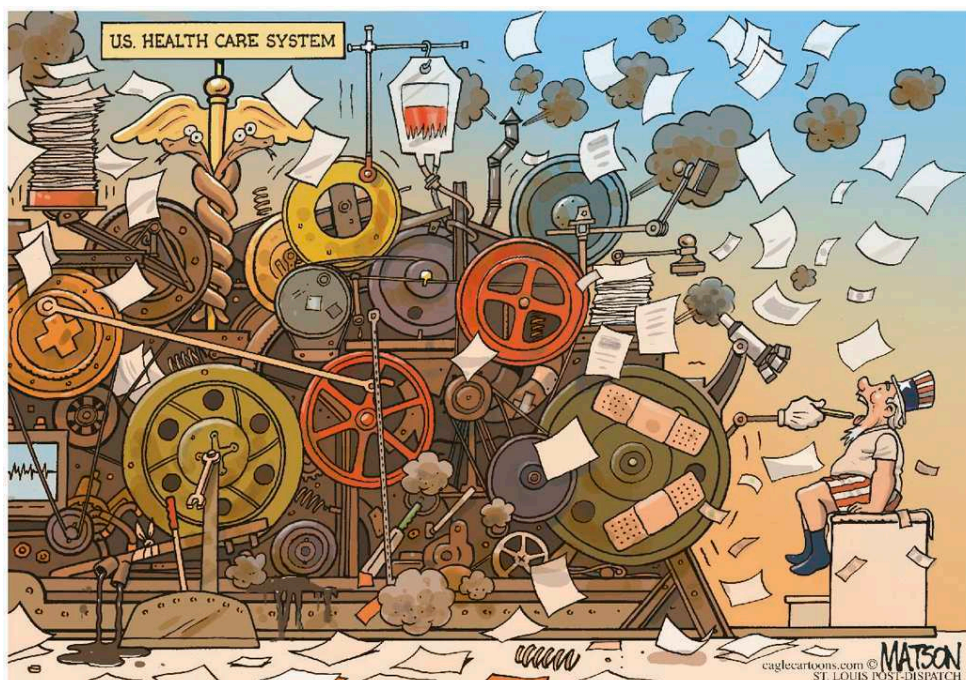
Voting "yes" keeps the taxes; voting "no" repeals them.

If the tax is repealed, the state would lose anywhere from \$210 million to \$330 million in revenue, in addition to \$630 million to more than \$1 billion in federal Medicaid matching funds. Proponents say as many as 350,000 low-income residents could lose health insurance, while opponents say the state could find other ways to cover them (though they haven't been able to clearly identify any).

There is a lot at stake, but voters have a right to feel like legislators — and initiative proponents — have put them in a vise.

One jaw of the vise is the fact that we know access to health care for people who cannot afford their own insurance comes at a cost. The cost is on those who can afford it — they pay a little extra to cover those who cannot.

Supporting the sick and suffering is



something that many believe is a moral and financial obligation. And the fiscal conservatives among us also understand that the obligation is lessened if we pay a little bit up front (in the form of insurance) instead of a lot more in the end (loss of societal production, emergency room visits, delayed care, and avoidable suffering and deaths).

Yet there is pressure from the other side of the vise, too.

Measure 101 isn't fair — not everyone in the state pays equally. People covered by self-insured medical plans through their employer (the *East Oregonian*, for one) and unions are exempt, among others. Small businesses, school districts, nonprofits and college students aren't. Shouldn't everyone bear the burden of supporting

the neediest in our society? The insurers and hospitals are likely to push their costs onto customers, many of whom count the high cost of health care as one of the biggest challenges in their lives.

Fiscal conservatives are also justified in feeling that the Legislature is holding the state's most vulnerable residents hostage in its thirst for ever-increasing taxes. Who is going to argue against medical coverage for sick kids? But why weren't deeper cuts made in other programs to offset this expense?

That's the pattern of the Legislature. As long as powerful interests — such as the public sector employee unions — carve out their pieces of the pie, solutions to complex problems such as health care will continue to be unevenly applied. And applied poorly,

like a two-year Band-Aid over an open wound.

And this is a Band-Aid — a temporary solution that does real good. It will make many Oregonians healthier and less financially stressed. But it does mask the deeper issues beneath.

Yet at the same time, we're not comfortable with complex legislation being picked apart by the initiative process. We live in a representative democracy, and we elected our representatives to run our state — to make laws, make sure the bills are paid and the right investments made.

The initiative process is an excellent way to decide on easily understood social issues like same-sex marriage or marijuana legalization. But complicated tax policy should not be nit-picked this way, and repealing these taxes would set a bad precedent. Business and the government both need stability in revenue and expenditure in order to make decisions and plan for the future — the rug cannot be pulled out from underneath either at a moment's notice.

We sent our legislators to Salem to do a job and this is the job they did. If we don't like it (and we don't), then we should vote them out. Until such time, voters should approve Measure 101.

In recent years, we've seen the number of insured Oregonians increase dramatically in the state. And with the help of coordinated care organizations, we've seen health outcomes improve, too. The opioid epidemic is lapping at these gains, however, and we cannot be complacent.

Assessing that situation, a Band-Aid is better than pushing a still recovering patient back into the street.

OTHER VIEWS

Department of injustice

After foraging through the dumpster of discarded ideas, the Trump administration has dragged out another fetid reject as part of its campaign to roll back modernity, common sense and the will of the people.

We know that Attorney General Jeff Sessions is a small, backward-looking man with even smaller,

more backward-looking ideas, but what was the thinking behind his new federal crackdown on legal marijuana? Punish the blue states? Create cannabis chaos in the large swath of the American West and the other states where voters have said they want police to spend their time on real crime?

Or is it just another betrayal of the fools who voted for a man aptly described from inside the White House in Michael Wolff's new book, as "less a person than a collection of terrible traits"? For one way to really tick off Trump's base is to start arresting them.

There comes a time in the evolution of social policy when law enforcement, science, medical authorities and the majority of the public reach a consensus about changing course. At this moment, criminalizing marijuana has never been more unpopular, nor a more unjust way to ensure that otherwise law-abiding people have to fear police.

TIMOTHY EGAN
Comment

It's not just that 71 percent of Americans oppose federal government efforts to stop marijuana sales, but an equally large majority thinks overall drug abuse should be treated as an addiction and mental health problem, rather than a criminal offense. The consensus crosses class lines and the racial divide, even if enforcement of drug

laws does not.

And yet, after the government spent more than \$1 trillion over the past four decades on the failed drug war, Trump now wants to double down on the most failed aspect of modern prohibition.

According to the most recent statistics, more than 1 million people a year are arrested for simple drug possession in the United States — and more than half a million of those arrests are for marijuana possession.

More people are arrested for pot possession than all the crimes that the FBI classifies as violent — one arrest every minute. This at a time when only 14 percent of the people think marijuana should be illegal. The voters have spoken on this, in the 29 states and the District of Columbia where marijuana use is legalized in some form.

I live in one of those states, Washington, a pioneer in prohibition rollback. What you hear most from people, confirmed

by studies, is that state-regulated pot retailing has turned out to be no big deal. Legalization did not significantly increase youth drug abuse, or increase impaired driving. But it's brought in nearly half a billion dollars in tax revenue just in Colorado.

It's neither a panacea nor an open door to abuse. It's just the obvious thing to do — a big duh, acknowledging the private right of a freedom-loving people.

The real problem, as any sentient public servant can tell you, is opioid abuse. Overdoses from prescription opioids have quadrupled since 1999 — as have sales. Almost 200,000 Americans have died since 1999 from taking a lethal dose of drugs pushed by the major pharmaceutical companies. Only the Civil War and World War II had higher fatalities.

And here's where it gets particularly crazy. Big Pharma, the one drug dealer the Justice Department should be throwing all its resources at, has been trying to limit marijuana legalization efforts. It doesn't want the competition from a natural palliative that is infinitely safer than the drugs sold from your neighborhood CVS, or alcohol for that matter.

Among the efforts: Insys Therapeutics, a company whose former executives have been charged with conspiracy to bribe doctors to prescribe more of their product, gave \$500,000 in 2016 to defeat Arizona pot legalization.

YOUR VIEWS

Local marijuana stores not falling for Sessions' threat

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has decided to rescind the Cole Memorandum. After hemming and hawing over the decision for nearly a year, he chooses to do it just days after California, a U.S. state with the sixth largest GDP on Earth, goes legal with recreational cannabis. A little late now pal. Many people have become concerned and the media has exploded with more speculation.

As a cannabis business owner, I do not find this alarming. The majority of Americans support full legalization of cannabis. Many congressmen have been actively lobbying for ending prohibition. Voters are saying yes to

both medical and recreational cannabis bills that are introduced for a vote. State officials are positioning themselves in defense of regulatory laws enacted in their states. This shows me that we are winning.

What this also shows me is that Attorney General Jeff Sessions no longer wants tax money paid to the federal government. Business taxes from thousands of cannabis businesses are being paid to the federal government — not to mention employment taxes for the tens of thousands of cannabis industry employees.

Sessions also no longer wants states to tax cannabis sales and generate their own revenue, thus reducing some of the need for federal assistance.

Sessions no longer wants the underemployed to have a new industry grow and create thousands of new job opportunities.

This shows me that he does not respect the people, nor states rights — the same as he doesn't respect civil rights, women's rights, gender equality, voters rights, personal liberties and most everything else.

Sessions no longer wishes to see a reduction in opiate use when our country is faced with a horrific opiate epidemic. Many cannabis users find relief that is adequate enough to reduce or even stop the use of opiates for pain management.

AG Jeff Sessions doesn't care about the thousands of children who are medical

cannabis patients, gaining relief from childhood conditions like cancer, epilepsy and autism, among others. He doesn't care about the families that have a substandard quality of life due to the medical costs of these afflictions and the societal ostracization from the stigma surrounding cannabis.

Decades of lies have been disproven, yet this man continues his intolerant and bigoted personal crusade against cannabis. He is obviously terrified of change. It is time for Sessions to be kind and embrace change, because change will continue whether he likes it or not.

At Kind Leaf it is business as usual.

Brandon Krenzler
Pendleton



In announcing the throwback to a discredited policy Thursday, Sessions described the effort as a "return to the rule of law." It's a return to insanity, and to creating more outlaws. From here on, federal prosecutors will have discretion to attack small-business owners selling a product deemed legal by their state. Weren't Republicans supposed to be champions of states' rights?

The Justice Department "has trampled on the will of the voters," said Sen. Cory Gardner of Colorado, a Republican in a state full of independent voters. Sessions had promised, before his confirmation, not to go after the legal marijuana industry, said Gardner. Trump did the same. "I think it's up to the states," Trump said during the presidential campaign. "I am a states person."

While Trump gorges himself on the twin health risks of junk food and Fox News alone in his bed at the White House, Sessions is now free to pursue an archaic moral crusade. He calls marijuana a "gateway drug," a substance that is only "slightly less awful" than heroin.

As arrests mount once again, as the black market bounces back, as vital police resources are wasted, Trump's new era of prohibition will have the same effect as that of the old Prohibition: to make criminals of nonviolent citizens, and cynics of the law.

Timothy Egan worked for 18 years as a writer for *The New York Times*, first as the *Pacific Northwest* correspondent, then as a national enterprise reporter.