

O EAST OREGONIAN

PINION

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OUR VIEW

Washington Legislature does Oregon businesses a favor

There was potential good news and bad news this week for some Oregon businesses.

While state legislators in Salem were approving a new business tax to benefit schools, Oregon businesses located near the border of our northern neighbor were given a gift from an unlikely source — the Washington state legislature.

First, the Oregon House voted to institute a half-a-percent tax on some of the state’s largest businesses in order to raise \$1 billion per year to fund K-12 school initiatives. There is bipartisan support for helping our ailing public schools with much-needed additional funding. However, there is partisan disagreement over how those funds should be raised. Democrats ignored objections and used their supermajority to push Bill 3427 the “Oregon Student Success Act” through.

It is misleading to say the tax would only impact the “richest” businesses in the state. The tax pack-

NOW MORE THAN EVER, OREGON’S LACK OF A STATEWIDE SALES TAX REMAINS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR ITS RETAIL BUSINESS COMMUNITY, ESPECIALLY THOSE NEAR THE BORDER, IN ATTRACTING OUT-OF-STATE CONSUMERS AND, HOPEFULLY, RETAINING LOCAL SHOPPERS.

age calls for a 0.57% tax on gross receipts for businesses with \$1 million or more in annual sales. That represents less than 10% of all businesses in Oregon. However, as many business owners know, annual gross sales of \$1 million do not necessarily translate into profit. A company with a very narrow expense-to-revenue margin, which includes a lot of agricultural businesses, could find themselves shouldering an increased tax burden whether they are profitable or not. The bill now moves to the Oregon Senate. We will continue to follow this important piece of legislation.

Meanwhile, Washington state lawmakers in Olympia did some Oregon

businesses a favor by passing Senate Bill 5997, which would end the practice of retailers there giving Oregonians tax-free purchases just by showing their Oregon ID. If signed into law, it will effectively end the level playing field Washington retail businesses could offer to consumers from Oregon, which has no statewide sales tax.

As this newspaper has reported, many Oregon consumers living close to the border in Hermiston and Milton-Freewater choose to do much of their shopping at big box stores in the Tri-Cities or Walla Walla. If the tax-free advantage is taken away July 1 as planned, this could potentially benefit local businesses in Ore-

gon who could recapture at least part of the retail leakage that is currently heading north.

While Washington lawmakers reasonably expect a revenue boost from the additional taxes raised on out-of-state shoppers, they could easily see that offset with lower sales volumes. A positive outcome would be more Oregon dollars being spent here in Oregon, supporting our local Oregon businesses.

It remains to be seen whether this will spur additional retail development in Umatilla County, but it certainly won’t hurt. Any consumer interested in helping our rural economy should remember that money spent here stays here, and regardless of the tax exemption should weigh that choice carefully.

Now more than ever, Oregon’s lack of a statewide sales tax remains a competitive advantage for its retail business community, especially those near the border, in attracting out-of-state consumers and, hopefully, retaining local shoppers.

OTHER VIEWS

Local solutions from local sources

Bend Bulletin

Oregon’s housing problems are statewide. They’re being felt in relatively small upper Willamette Valley communities and in Malheur County in far Eastern Oregon. Two bills in the Legislature take very different approaches to the problem, and lawmakers should give them a chance.

House Bill 2997 was sponsored by state Rep. Ron Noble, R-McMinnville, on behalf of the McMinnville Affordable Housing Task Force. If approved, it would allow the city to change its inclusionary zoning laws to require that 5% of dwellings in new housing developments be affordable to those whose income is 80% of the median family income in the county. It would increase workforce housing in the community.

The bill is carefully written to apply to McMinnville only.

House Bill 2456, sponsored by Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, would allow housing development on up to 200 acres within the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region, an area that includes land close to the Idaho border in Malheur County. Development could occur only on marginal farmland, on 2-acre parcels. While it is not targeted at any particular income group, expanding the stock of available housing, as this bill would allow, should help ease a housing crunch there. It could expand the county’s housing stock by as many as 100 homes.

Each one of the measures proposes things that under current land use regulations are not allowed in Oregon, but both would increase available housing in their communities. Too, the measures might not be desirable or workable in every city and county in Oregon, but supporters believe they’ll work in McMinnville and Malheur County.

Lawmakers should approve both measures. Giving local communities the power to come up with local solutions to their housing problems can help ensure those solutions will work.



OTHER VIEWS

The recurring nightmare

Charlotte Observer

Editor’s note: On Tuesday, two students were killed and four others injured at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte by a gunman.

It’s our turn, Charlotte, to live the nightmare.

It’s our turn to see the breaking news email about gunfire, to feel the notification buzz on our phone, to be jolted that our city is included in the next words we read.

It’s our turn to watch aerial footage of places we’ve walked, to watch video loops of cautious police leading students we might know.

It’s our turn to pray that we don’t know the victims or shooter, then to pray for those who do.

It’s our turn to see tweets from our public officials who are “shocked and saddened,” from our governor who is en route to the scene, from our members of Con-

gress who are “monitoring the situation.”

It’s our turn to have Gabby Giffords send her sorrow our way.

It’s our turn to type tweets or Facebook posts about students who went to class like every other student, about holding your child a little tighter tonight, and feel it a little more intimately this time.

It’s our turn to wonder what on earth we can do to change this, to wonder if better school security or mental health awareness or anything might stop this plague of gun violence.

It’s our turn to hope that this shooting might be that catalyst for change, perhaps even locally or with state lawmakers.

It’s our turn to realize that it won’t, that we’re no different than Red Lake or Santa Fe or so many others.

Except some things are different now.

It’s our turn to see that networks aren’t breaking in to programming to cover this school shooting, that Twitter isn’t putting snark on hold, that national newspapers aren’t going to put this tragedy on their

front pages.

It’s our turn to realize that if that notification on our phone was about gunfire in another city, we too might have mentally swiped it away.

It’s our turn to understand that it’s no longer big news when someone walks into a classroom and starts firing, that mass shootings happen with such regularity that they’ve become more like all the other shootings with all the other guns.

It’s our turn to also understand that “thoughts and prayers” from Republicans have worked, just not the way we want. They’ve worked as a stall and diversion, a way to say something without having to say anything, until the next shooting happens and everyone moves on.

Because everyone does move on now. And they will again, more quickly each time. This is the new nightmare — that we’ve become deadened to the worst in us because it no longer feels like the worst. It’s just who we are, and it’s our turn to live it.