

OUR VIEW

Measure 108 should be passed by voters

Oregon Measure 108, on the Nov. 3 ballot, would increase the tax on cigarettes by \$2 per pack, up to \$3.33 per pack. It also increases taxes on cigars, and establishes a new tax on e-cigarettes and vaping products that are essentially nicotine delivery systems. This tax revenue would fund health care and mental health care for low-income families, and public health programs aimed at preventing the use of tobacco and nicotine, and helping users quit.

If passed, it would go into effect on Jan. 1, 2021. This would bring in an estimated \$160 million in new revenue for Oregon per year.

While we are in favor of this, there are a couple of things we don't like about Measure 108.

We don't like the enormous amounts of money that were poured into the "Yes for a Healthy Future" campaign. Many of Oregon's large hospital systems gave \$500,000 each, and one gave \$3.29 million. Total campaign donations to pass this measure total over \$12.5 million.

But our concern here is mostly about the need for campaign finance reform (which is addressed by Measure 107). Clearly these hospital and health care systems have a lot to gain if fewer people use tobacco and nicotine, and if more people have health insurance, so it makes sense that they would be willing to spend big money to pass this measure.

We also don't like the fact that raising the per-pack tax to \$3.33 would make Oregon's cigarette prices considerably higher than in our three neighboring states. Those per-pack taxes are: Washington: \$3.03, California: \$2.87 and Idaho: \$0.57.

Smokers and vapers who live near a state border might decide it's worth the time and gas to drive across the state line to stock up. And when people cross a border to shop for one item, they are likely to buy other items as well on that trip. So much for shopping local.

There is also a concern that high cigarette taxes will create a black market, with product being smuggled in from states with lower taxes. This will be of particular concern to Malheur County, sharing a border with Idaho.

Right now, 31 states have higher cigarette taxes than Oregon. The passage of Measure 108 would mean only five states would have higher rates.

We do like making the users of addictive and unhealthy products (tobacco and nicotine in this case) pay for addiction treatment and health care costs that result from their use.

We also are in favor of anything that dissuades young people from smoking or vaping, and keeps them from getting addicted to nicotine.

We don't buy the argument that taxes like this "punish Oregon's most vulnerable." Ultimately, when costs of cigarettes and other nicotine delivery products go up, smoking rates go down. And that protects the vulnerable.

We recommend a "yes" vote on Measure 108.



A set of environmental grievances



BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

I wish to register a complaint. Since 2016, a steady stream of federal actions has been threatening the future of our nation's environment. It is hard to see these assaults clearly when they are hidden in the fog of outrageous statements and actions from the White House, but yet, there they are. So I am filing a complaint, nailing it on the metaphorical door of the opinion page, if you will, and ask that we consider the following truths.

Clean air is important

As the recent extended period of smoke air reminded us, we need clean air to survive and to have thriving children and ecosystems. While forest fire smoke eventually clears out, industrial and vehicle air pollution is more persistent.

Over the past four years, the Environmental Protection Agency has repealed or weakened rules regarding vehicle and power plant emissions, fought against the states' abilities to set and enforce their own measures aimed at reducing air pollution, relaxed mercury emissions standards, and encouraged coal use and development despite a national energy glut.

These actions will make it tougher to reach air quality goals established by the U.N. Paris accords in 2016, so the administration has announced their intent to pull us out of that international agreement the day after our next election.

Clean water is important

We need clean water to survive and for fish and wildlife to thrive. Recently, the federal government reduced protections

for wetlands and headwaters of the nation's streams, removed protections for fish in Central California in favor of agricultural uses, backed off the requirements for protecting streams and reclaiming land, and fought against the ability of states to set and enforce water quality standards.

They reversed earlier federal decisions that had been protecting the Boundary Waters in Northern Minnesota and Bristol Bay in Alaska from mines proposed by foreign companies, thereby putting at risk some of the nation's best backcountry and the world's most productive salmon fishery.

Wildlife species are important

The Endangered Species Act was signed by Richard Nixon in 1973 and has a clear intent to halt and reverse trends toward extinction of species, whatever the cost, because once a species is lost, it will never return.

The current administration announced plans to roll back and weaken these protections. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt, an experienced oil-industry lobbyist, has been working against the best science to remove threatened and endangered species from the list and change the way decisions affecting the habitat of these species are made.

The administration has prohibited the use of climate change science in these decisions, but added the consideration of economic effects, essentially putting a pro-development thumb on the scale. They also tried to open 9 million acres of sage grouse habitat to oil and gas development, and to remove Yellowstone area grizzlies from the endangered species list, moves so far blocked by the courts.

A recent review by *The New York Times* and Columbia and Harvard law school lists more than 75 similar actions of the administration that threaten the future of our nation's environment, actions which

in enacted will dramatically degrade the environment that we leave for our children and grandchildren. We are right to consider: are these federal actions good long-term public policy?

Make no mistake about it, this is about the money, not our future or the well-being of our planet. These pro-development, anti-environment actions have been on the wish list for extractive industries for years, and they are racing to roll back as many restrictions as possible while they can.

Fortunately, our constitutional system of checks and balances is having some effect. Courts have blocked some of the most egregious changes in regulation, and the midterm election saw to it that there's an opposing force in Congress. This is the beauty of a system that allows us to periodically weigh in with our vote.

Like, next month.

As Americans, we understand that not everyone agrees with the direction our government is moving at any point in time. We live with that, as it's part of being in a democratic republic. If you are happy with relaxing restrictions on oil and gas industries, lowering national energy efficiency standards, or encouraging mine development by foreign companies in some of our most treasured natural landscapes, then you may want our nation to continue down this same path. It's a path focused on making it easier to use natural resources for corporate wealth.

For me, I want us to prioritize sound stewardship of our climate, our environment and our natural resources for our future. It's not always about how much money can be made from our public lands, and how easily. In fact, it should rarely be so.

That's how I will vote.

Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

YOUR VIEWS

Give all voters the chance to vote

Today, Oregon politicians draw the boundaries for their own state and congressional districts. In our view, politicians in power shouldn't be allowed to draw voting maps that benefit themselves or their party — a serious conflict of interest. Unfortunately, the Oregon Redistricting Initiative didn't make the ballot — but there is bright hope for another electoral reform in Oregon: opening up our primary system.

Oregon's primary system is closed to all but Democratic and Republican party candidates and voters. Nonaffiliated and third-party voters and candidates are barred from participating in primary partisan races. That's over 1 million — almost 40% — of registered voters that are shut out. Our primary system is much like it was when it was adopted in 1904 — we're one of only nine remaining states with a closed primary system.

The solution? A fully open primary system. All voters should be entitled to vote in political office primaries, regardless of their party preference or

nonpreference. All candidates, regardless of party preference or nonpreference, should be allowed to compete and broaden voter choice. You shouldn't have to join one of the two major parties to be allowed to participate in primary races — let all voters vote.

Oregon Open Primaries is a non-partisan team of volunteers working to advance a ballot measure that will replace our antiquated, preferential primary system with one that levels the playing field for candidates and gives all voters the chance to vote.

See us at www.oregonopenprimaries.org.

**Michael DeWolf
Redmond**

Money spent on fires instead of forestry

I just read Ann Brown's letter (Past logging practices sowed seeds of today's fires, Sept. 26, 2020) about timber cutting in 1979. I can confirm her statements. I was on a marking crew around that time on the Baker district. We would mark a sale and leave a

larger pine here and there. When we done, we were complimented on a good marking job. Then, shortly after that, we would see blue paint on the trees we left. "Not enough volume" was always the reply. "No reason to save those decadent old pines."

I worked as a crew leader rehabilitating a burn on the Unity district from 1969 to 1971 and watched the big pines fall like the buffalo did on the plains. It happened all over the West. It was a lawsuit waiting to happen and when it did, the mills shut down instead of retooling to process the smaller trees that needed to be removed.

I thinned timber for three years and that was financed by Knutsen Vanderbilt money. That put a portion of timber revenues back into forestry. That dried up and the forest became overgrown. There was damned little coming out of Congress to rectify the problem, so we spent the money on fires instead of forestry.

I quit the U.S. Forest Service over the issue and a friend of mine on a different marking crew quit, too. I am past my word limit so the rest will remain unsaid.

**Steve Culley
Baker City**

EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

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