EAST OREGONIAN
OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Don't hide a tire tax

The new year will bring a new Oregon Legislature, and there are already discussions for new taxes.

There might be a new tax on tires. Other options are a new tax on the sale, lease and rental of off-road equipment; a new tax on new heavy trucks; and a new tax on diesel fuel used off-road. A legislative task force is set to discuss options on Thursday, Dec. 3.

It is for a good cause. Legislators are looking at these options to bring in money to provide incentives to help businesses reduce diesel emissions and get cleaner air. Waiting around for businesses to slowly adopt cleaner vehicles was believed to be happening too slowly. So legislators have been looking at ways to help vehicles burn cleaner fuel, burn less or just burn cleaner.

The Legislature also won't necessarily move forward with all these taxes. It may just pick one. It might well be a tire tax.

There's already a federal tax on tires. Many states have them. The state taxes can be about $1 per tire. West Virginia apparently charges the most at $5 per tire.

The idea in Oregon might be to charge the tax and use the revenue to help with recycling tires, and also put money into a fund to provide incentives to help businesses move to cleaner vehicles. That's basically what California already does. In Oregon, the Legislative Revenue Office estimates the annual average revenue from a surcharge of a $1 per tire would be about $3.1 million, growing with population growth.

The argument for a tire tax is that it is related to the goal of reducing damage to roads and also reducing diesel emissions. Arguments against are pretty much the traditional against any new tax — the industry is already taxed in other ways and it just raises costs to consumers. There is also a fairly unique "equity" argument that there is no equivalent tax on railroads or transportation using waterways.

If the Legislature does move forward with a tire tax, legislators should require it be clearly labeled as a tax. Consumers should see it when they make their purchase. Legislators crafted Oregon's $1 billion annual gross receipts tax to conceal the cost from consumers. Don't do that with a tire tax.

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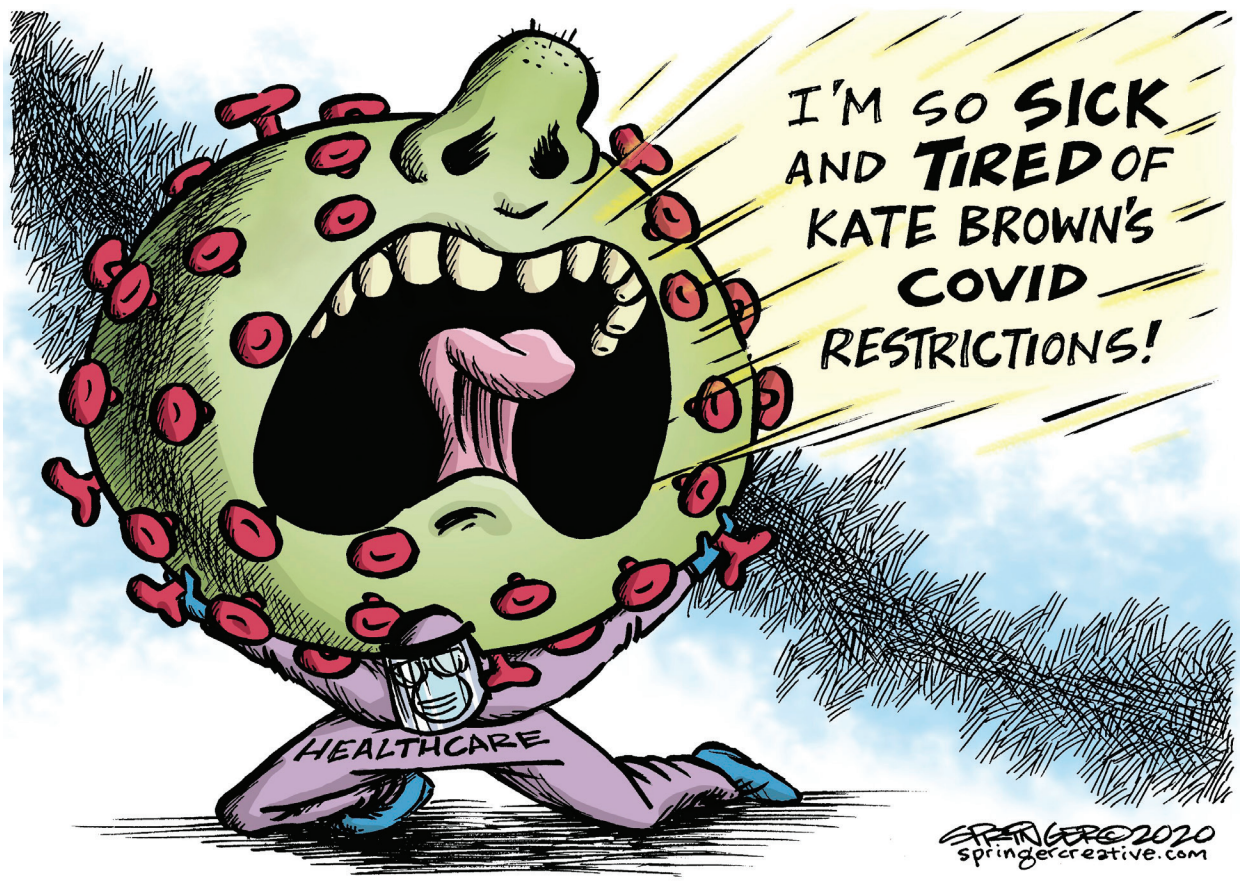

Will 2020 change us for the better?

DANIEL **WATTENBURGER**
HOMEGROWN

December is usually a time for reflection, of looking back on the year that was and measuring its highs and lows. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas — Americans' two favorite holidays — we can tend to feel charitable in our evaluation. Even hard times take on a glow of lessons learned and opportunity for personal growth.

I'd suggest we take a different approach this year. There is a lot to learn from 2020, and it will surely take up more than a few chapters in the history books of the future. But we have spent plenty of time already recounting the difficulties of this year, marking the slow march of days since the coronavirus first entered our lives and the never-ending parade of annoyances, disappointments and devastations.

Let's spend this month looking forward instead. The unfortunate truth is that Dec. 31, 2020, will not be a magical boundary that separates the past and future. But we can collectively set our sights on where we want to be in three months, six months and a year.

This isn't to say we discount the current reality. In Umatilla County and around the state, we have failed to make significant headway in dealing with coronavirus. The disease is still spreading rapidly, spiking for the second time this year and putting our reopening and many lives in jeopardy.

We're all fatigued. Those who have religiously followed public health guidelines and those who have dismissed them as useless are both tired of being reminded of the basic tactics of slowing an epidemic — masking, distancing, washing and staying home. And then there are the vast majority of others who fall somewhere along the spectrum, wanting to do their part to protect the health of their families and community but worn down by nine months of plodding repetition.

By turning our focus to our desired future, we can begin to move toward it as we anticipate the coming challenges and goals of 2021.

For instance, the biggest long-term threats we face are the setbacks to our public education system, and particularly our most vulnerable students. The difficulties of distance education have been well-documented, but the true impact of shuttered schools will reverberate for a generation of students. Those already at highest risk of falling behind are the same students with significant barriers to accessing online education.

We need to begin preparing now to help catch students up on the months of classes and learning they've missed. Rethinking the school calendar is a critical first step, both to help high school students in their push to graduation and to provide a path for younger students in need of remedial help. Failing these students is a disservice in their lives and will take a societal toll for decades.

Then there's the economic recovery we are aiming for, with local businesses again operating at full capacity and local consumers empowered to spend money in their support. Many businesses have closed their doors and more may join their ranks, but we can continue to create resources for recovery and restarts as we continue to develop our workforce.

It will be up to city, county and state leaders to create and encourage these opportunities, and at a time when their budgets have been bitten by coronavirus. Finding ways to nurture businesses and support the workforce will be critical.

Of course, the only logical first step toward this future begins today and remains largely outside the control of those reading this column. We must work to contain this virus by following the guidelines we're tired of hearing about and be advocates for others to do the same. Only when the number of new cases subsides will we be able to return to the classroom and fully reopen the economy.

But this better future will require more than just putting the coronavirus behind us. While it will be up to education, business, political, and government leaders to enact the changes necessary, it's incumbent on all of us to join the effort. Our patience with one another has held out remarkably well considering what we've been through, and we'll need to continue to foster that spirit of cooperation to see our recovery through.

It's a goal worth aiming for, for 2021 and beyond.

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YOUR VIEWS

Education deserves better than DeVos

Certain things President-elect Joe Biden says really resonates with me, among them is that we will have a new U.S. Department of Education secretary. Hopefully, this will be a person who has taught in a public school classroom. Betsy DeVos never should have been named head of the U.S. Department of Education.

Soon after Donald Trump was elected president in 2016, he appointed DeVos to the cabinet position. During her confirmation hearing, she proved to educators what they already knew — she was not qualified to fill this important office, and for the first time in the nation's history, a vice president's (in this case, Mike Pence) vote was necessary to approve the nominee.

During the ensuing four years as she tried to figure out the major responsibilities of her office, educators throughout the nation stood in fear of what she and Trump were planning.

The major activity DeVos is known for is her promotion of vouchers and charter schools, which proved to be destructive to public school education.

DeVos lost was when she was sued in 2017 for violating federal law for student loan cancellation in defrauding college students. Around this time, Trump-DeVos made deep federal budget cuts in public education programs.

As an educator, I, and my colleagues, were dismayed by other education events that occurred under DeVos. Trump's administration rescinded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA. Fortunately, in 2017, the United States Supreme Court ruled against this action.

One of the education cuts DeVos tried to defend before a House Committee was by cutting $7 billion from special education programs (music, sports, art) and having larger classes. This plan truly upset teachers and parents whose children were in elementary schools.

As late as May 2020, DeVos excluded students in need under the $6 billion CARES Act, which provided college students with food, rent and other expenses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To my knowledge, there never has been any plan to make schools safer for students and faculty. Trump and DeVos continue to urge school reopenings as the coronavirus cases keep surging.

Along with my colleagues, we believe Mr. Biden will appoint a person with knowledge of education (his wife is an educator) and his vice president, Kamala Harris, is a champion for education.

Dr. Dorys C. Grover
Pendleton

KidWind combines clean energy, education

Oregon's energy landscape is rapidly changing. Here among Columbia River communities, where most of Oregon's wind farms are located, we're fortunate to not just be a witness to our state's incredible growth in clean energy, but a key participant.

Importantly, this also means bringing renewable energy education into the minds of Oregon students. Through the support of the KidWind program, EDP Renewables (EDPR) believes this is a critical link to the success of clean energy in our state.

The inaugural REpowering Schools Awards recently took place to recognize the growing value of renewable energy education. EDPR was proud to receive the Industry Champion Award for our support of the KidWind program. KidWind provides several unique workshops that show how wind and solar projects work to inspire our next generation.

The awards also recognized the important relationship that takes place between local education and developers of renewable energy projects. Building support for KidWind in Boardman has meant working with educators like Rhonda Fox-Brennan, who twice has traveled across the country with her team of students to compete at the highest level at the National KidWind Challenge thanks, in part, to funding from EDPR.

Our drive to provide sustainable, clean energy for our state helps the environment and the economy, but it also means taking our commitment one step further to support the education of Oregon students looking to enter the workforce.

These recent awards are a great reminder: supporting the growth of renewables in Oregon means affordable energy — and new careers — for decades to come.

Jarod Wizner, operations manager
Rattlesnake Road/Wheat Field
Wind Farm
Umatilla