

OUR VIEW

Raising alcohol tax has pros, cons

Raise your glass for mental health. Alcohol drinkers could be contributing \$746 million in new taxes every year to raise money for mental health.

The Oregon Health Authority had proposed a similar tax in its plans, but Gov. Kate Brown declined to include it in her budget. The nonprofit Oregon Recovers has teamed up with legislators to work up a tax bill anyway. Is it what Oregon needs?

Suggesting higher taxes on alcohol might not make you popular at parties, but it makes sense on some levels. Higher taxes can reduce consumption and raise money. As the price goes up, some problems might go down. The state can also raise taxes without creating a whole new bureaucracy because the bureaucracy is already there. The concept under consideration would take the money raised and use it to help Oregonians with mental health problems.

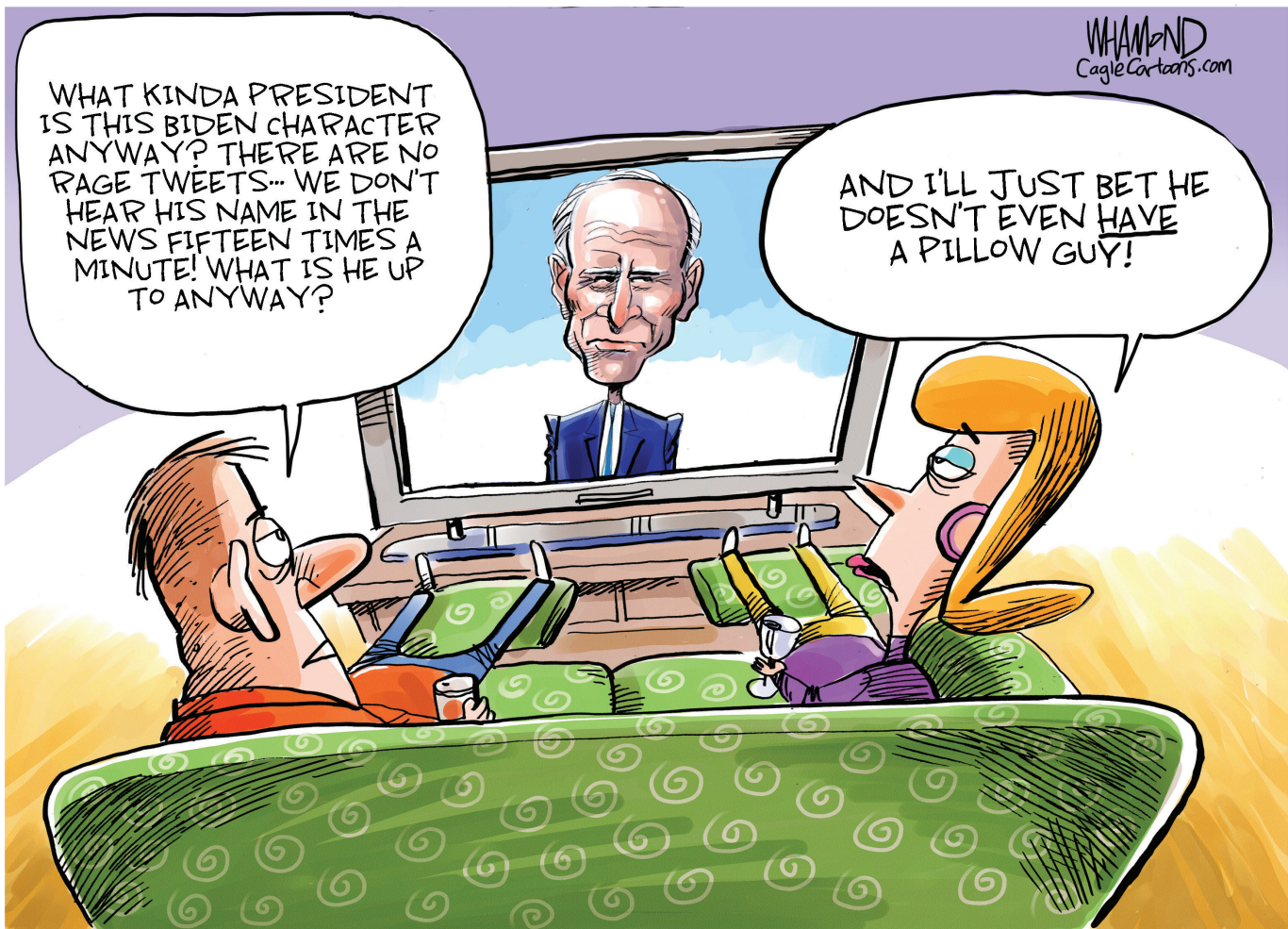
And there is a need. Relatively speaking, the state of Oregon has one of the highest rates of need for mental health care and the lowest rates of access, according to Mental Health America, a nonprofit dedicated to mental health.

We haven't seen the exact proposal, but according to the Willamette Week, it would "compel the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to raise prices 20%" on hard alcohol. The rest of the money would be raised by increasing taxes on beer and wine. It's not clear what that would mean to prices for a six-pack or a bottle of wine.

Are Oregon's taxes on alcohol too high or too low now? The Tax Foundation regularly puts out maps that show relative rates among the states. Beer taxes in Oregon in 2020 were about 8 cents a gallon, giving it one of the lowest rates in the country, 45th. Wine taxes were about 67 cents a gallon, making it 31st in the country. And Oregon was No. 2 in taxes for distilled spirits at \$21.95 a gallon, though that takes into consideration an implied rate because the state of Oregon controls hard liquor sales.

Of course, higher taxes could mean lower sales, and that could mean jobs. Oregon has some 900 wineries, 400 breweries, 100 cideries and 73 distributors. You can't walk far around some communities without bumping into a brewer or distiller. And many of those businesses have been slammed by the pandemic.

No matter how you feel about this tax proposal, you can let your legislator know.



Things that make me go hmmm



TAMMY MALGESINI
INSIDE MY SHOES

Back in the day, comedian Arsenio Hall had a regular part on his late-night talk show that centered around things that were puzzling or defied logic — "Things that make you go hmmm."

Many things in life, especially this past year, leave me scratching my head. Here are some things that make me go hmmm:

- Evidently some members of Congress view themselves as being above the law. Lawmakers were crying foul about new security measures instituted after the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Many said their constitutional rights were being violated by being required to pass through metal detectors to enter the House chamber.
- Speaking of foul, Utah lawmakers recently passed a resolution calling out Shaquille O'Neal for his sub-par free throw shooting during his NBA days and for his pitiful performance in "Kazaam," a movie he starred in more than two decades ago. Their action was taken in response to Shaq's recent encounter where he dissed Utah Jazz star Donovan Mitchell.

It seems Shaq doesn't think Mitchell has "what it takes to get to the next level," despite the fact Mitchell has a signature shoe with Adidas, is scoring an average of 23.4 points per game and his free throw percentage is currently 30 points higher than Shaq's final career stats from the charity stripe.

- And while we're on the topic of sports, doesn't it seem odd that, despite a pandemic, the National Football League and National Basketball Association figured out a way to keep playing — yet, here we are 10 months later and officials still haven't figured out a way to get kids back in the classroom full time.
- And here's another head scratcher — most students haven't been able to go to school but they can go to day care centers or programs operated by parks and recreation.
- What's with all the special names and acronyms for whatever it is we're calling school these days? Students "returned" this past fall with an educational model referred to as "Comprehensive Distance Learning." And more recently, schools are transitioning into LIPI, aka Limited In Person Instruction. I'm waiting for KBIS (Kids Belong In School) or FOC (Fill Our Classrooms).
- The Los Angeles Times and other media outlets reported in late December 2020 that several physicians based

in Beverly Hills have received inquiries from wealthy patients wanting to know what it would take to "cut in line" to get a COVID-19 vaccination. One doctor had hundreds of calls a day and another said a patient offered a hefty donation to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

Yet, here in Eastern Oregon, an acquaintance who works as a frontline health care worker told me that of the vaccines made available to agency staff, only about 12% of the allotment was signed up for in advance.

- Conspiracy theorists continue to claim that mainstream media has exaggerated the impact of COVID-19 to their benefit. I have no idea what those supposed benefits are. Newsrooms across the country have been hemorrhaging staff — including mass layoffs, furloughs and the closure of media outlets — since the beginning of the pandemic. While consumer demand for news has increased, advertising revenues have declined, resulting in fewer people available to gather and disseminate accurate information.
- And finally, does anyone else find it odd that birth control pills aren't packaged in child-proof containers?

Tammy Malgesini, the former East Oregonian community editor, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.

YOUR VIEWS

Readerboard messages don't appeal to everyone

I urge local businesses to consider their customers when they choose to make political statements on their reader boards critical of Gov. Kate Brown's response to the pandemic. Not every customer agrees. It is the pandemic that has created these hardships, not Ms. Brown. Our governor responded as best she could to save lives, and her measures have been more successful at that than those of most other states.

If you must blame human beings for renewed measures and economic hardship, blame the people who refuse to follow commonsense guidelines on masks and gatherings. They act out of selfishness or the misguided belief that they are making a political statement and do not seem to have much regard for human life.

Joseph Brusberg
Hermiston

Democracy is the winner with Biden's election

In this year of peril, our new president has many obstacles to face, the least of which is the coronavirus.

For me and many Americans, we are pleased to note we rejoined the Paris Accord and World Health Organization, and addressed immigration and

border wall restrictions. My Nebraska friend called to say Mr. Biden revoked the Keystone XL pipeline, which will save the habitat of the sandhill cranes. Nebraskans are as resolute about the cranes as Oregonians are about preserving the Columbia River Gorge.

As Mr. Biden noted, few people in our nation's history have known a time more challenging or more difficult than now.

I expect two of Pendleton's larger organizations would agree — the Confederated Tribes and the Pendleton Round-Up and Happy Canyon.

We will get through this year of peril with President Biden and Vice President Harris behind us. And remember, Mr. Biden has a trio of bipartisan former presidents backing him — Clinton, Bush, and Obama.

You cannot defeat democracy.
Dr. Dorys C. Grover
Pendleton

Let's lend a hand wherever we can

A few days ago, I was in a meeting that included elected officials, public employees, business owners, and private residents.

We spoke freely about school closures, vaccine supplies and delivery, public perceptions of implemented actions, community consternation, economic woes, flawed and faltering responses and initiatives at various

levels of government, and so forth. One of the aforementioned people is a landlord. He adjusted rental rates for one of his tenants in order to help the business remain viable. Not all property owners would be able to do that, but he could. Part of the motivation was humanitarian, but the other component was that if the business failed he would have no tenant in the near term.

Another person mentioned going to businesses, especially restaurants, that we would have otherwise patronized during the pandemic and writing a check in the amount we might have spent if the business had not been closed. Travel agents, waiters, waitresses, clothiers, tailors and dry cleaners were mentioned.

It went without saying that not everyone would be able to do something like what was suggested, but plenty of people are in different circumstances, especially those who have been able to work remotely.

I thought the suggestions and ideas were worth passing along to others as a suggestion for what some of us could do for those among us who need a hand. I wish I would have thought of saying something earlier, but it looks as though we may still have plenty of opportunities to lend a hand. That's what communities do.

I encourage us to do what we can. I think we'll all feel better by so doing.

Kim B. Puzey
Hermiston

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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