

OUR VIEW

Who benefits most from eliminating student debt?

Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley are backing a plan to cancel up to \$50,000 for federal student loan borrowers.

"It's ridiculous that so many students are forced to take on back-breaking amounts of debt to go to school — especially as the coronavirus continues to upend our economy," Merkley said in a statement. "It's time to cancel student loan debts so we can free up Americans burdened by student debt to chase their dreams, contribute to their communities, and help us pave the way to economic recovery."

The idea supported by Democrats is also to eliminate any tax liability from having the debt wiped out.

People who are low income or who are racial minorities would certainly benefit, but the benefit would accrue mostly to wealthier families. They hold most of the federal education debt. A simple policy of eliminating \$50,000 in federal student loan debt would be a regressive policy, not a progressive one. It would be a policy that would give more benefits to people who need it less.

Wyden and Merkley say they want to ensure that debt cancellation "helps close racial wealth gaps and avoids the bulk of federal student debt cancellation benefits accruing to the wealthiest borrowers."

OK, how is that going to be done? By race? By race and income? And is this only a one-time deal or can colleges start escalating their costs and advertising: Don't worry, your first \$50,000 in college debt is now free.

Should federal stimulus checks increase your state taxes?

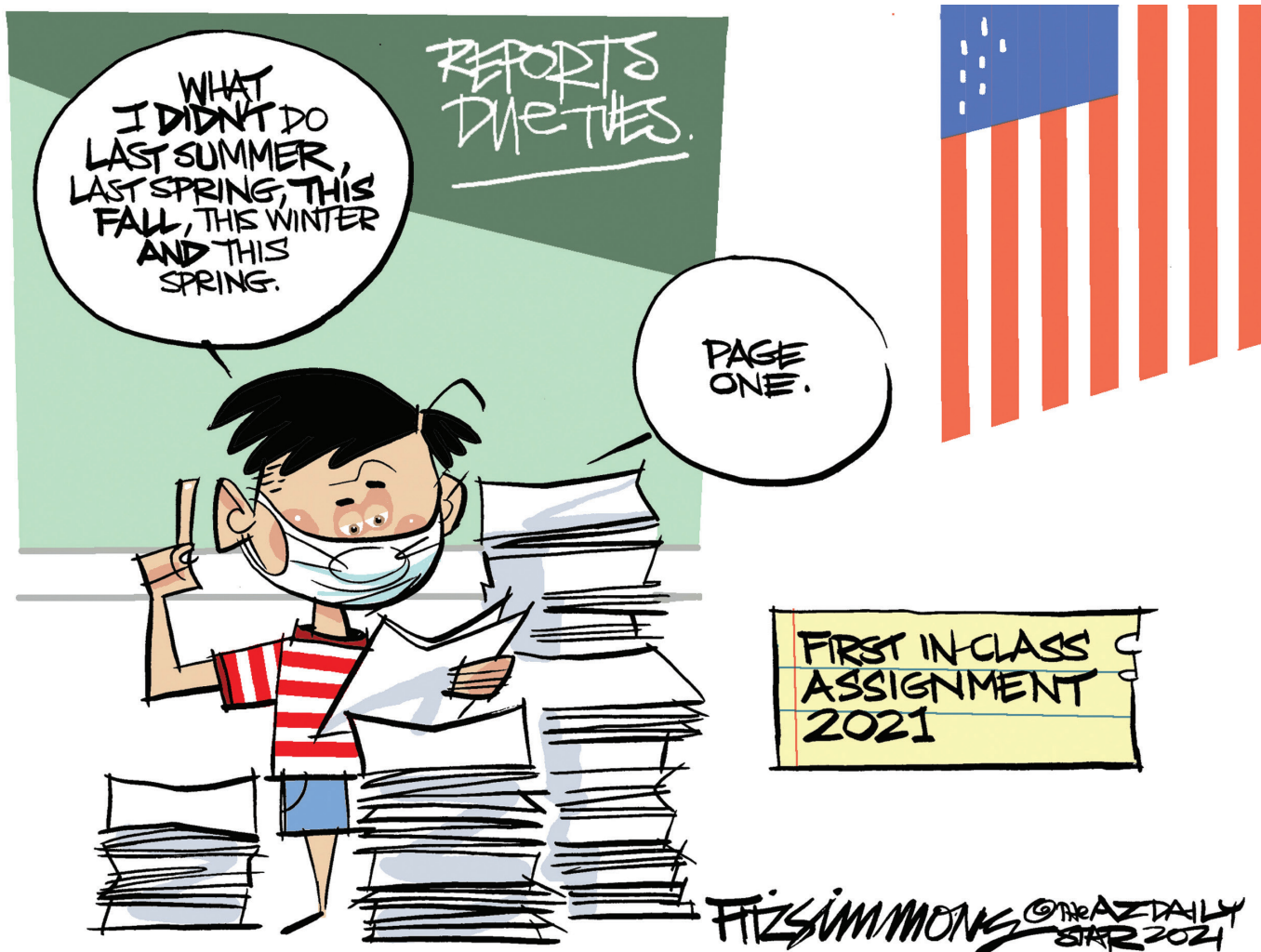
The federal stimulus checks helped a lot of Oregonians out when they needed it. And it is also going to help out Oregon government — about \$100 million in federal stimulus payments is going to wind up in the state treasury.

The federal government is not taxing the stimulus payments. In Oregon, they are not taxed as income, either. But the payments can impact the federal tax calculations used on your Oregon income tax. And so the stimulus payment may mean you owe state tax on more of your income and wind up paying more taxes or get a reduced refund.

Does that sound right to you? The stimulus checks sure seemed to be aimed at helping individuals, not helping state government.

U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, a Democrat, wants state lawmakers to pass a bill to eliminate the state tax liability owed by Oregonians on federal stimulus payments. State Sen. Dick Anderson, R-Lincoln City, is already working on such a bill. The idea has at least half a nod from Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek, a Democrat. A spokesperson said Kotek "supports the House Revenue Chair evaluating this issue."

Tell your legislator what you think.



Remembering Lucifer brings tears, laughter



TAMMY MALGESINI
INSIDE MY SHOES

It would be an understatement to say this pandemic year has been trying for many people. The most difficult thing for the Malgesini Pack would be the loss of my husband's 11-year-old German shepherd, Lucifer was diagnosed with leukemia the day after Thanksgiving.

In his prime, our majestic canine kid tipped the scales at 115 pounds. When he passed on Feb. 5, he weighed less than half that.

As we mourn, little things can bring tears — like eating scrambled eggs. Although he didn't beg for food, Lucifer always waited patiently for me to drop the footrest on the recliner, which signaled that he was getting a snack.

During his last day with us, Lucifer accompanied me on errands. I decided to swing by Safeway to get some ice cream, a rare treat Lucifer first tasted when he was barely 2 years old. I never saw his tongue move so fast, and then he very daintily ate the cone. I always wondered if he got an ice cream headache.

Aside from getting carsick on long trips, Lucifer loved to travel. He enjoyed exploring new destinations in Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Washington — but

mostly he just wanted to be wherever John was. He was just 10 months old when he took his first trip to the Oregon coast.

He enjoyed going to the "big water," except when getting caught in a hail-storm. Captured on video, Lucifer would glance at John with a look on his face that seemed to say, "Make it stop, Papa." Still trying to run for shelter, he'd bring one paw up to brush the pelting ice balls off his face.

Lucifer risked his status as man's best friend during the terrible twos when he chewed three remote controls, the couch and various shoes. However, he was very well mannered at hotels, houses and bungalows.

One time at Soap Lake, Washington, I was out taking photos. John was on a run when I returned to our suite. I pattered around the room, poured myself some Pepsi, turned on the TV and was reading a newspaper.

John returned about 30 minutes later by himself. In a panic, I asked, "Where's your dog?" Looking confused, John pointed to the dog crate, where Lucifer had been quietly laying inside the entire time.

His size, color and name sometimes intimidated people. As we were packing up the Jeep at a hotel in Meridian, Idaho, our dogs were taking care of business in the designated pet area. John snapped his fingers and called out, "Lucifer, General."

As they came running to the rig, a gal parked in front of us froze at her bumper. As I walked to the garbage can, she commented how beautiful and well-behaved our dogs were but was a little afraid when she heard "Lucifer."

After we picked up Lucifer's remains last week, John ordered an Egyptian Anubis urn. Initially, he put it on the entertainment center next to the turntable.

A couple of nights ago, when John had fallen asleep in his recliner, I glanced at the entertainment center and the urn was gone. "Where's Lucifer?" I said out loud. Flashing back to being in the hotel at Soap Lake, I chuckled to myself and said, "Where's your dog?"

If you ever loved and lost a canine kid, you need to watch a video of Jimmy Stewart reading his poem "I'll Never Forget a Dog Named Beau." It was filmed during a 1981 appearance on "The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson," and like the host, tears welled up in my eyes when viewing it. The poignant words of the late actor share the joys of dog ownership and the heartache of losing your best buddy.

While Lucifer has passed on, he remains with us in spirit.

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

YOUR VIEWS

Bentz a good addition to water subcommittee

Newly-elected Rep. Cliff Bentz was appointed ranking member of the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife. Bentz served in the Oregon Legislature as chair of Oregon Water Resources Commission and is a trained attorney in water law.

This is a very important appointment for Oregon's freshman congressman. Issues like the Columbia/Snake river system EIS renewal, and now Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, introducing his plan to remove the four lower Snake River dams will come before this subcommittee. Republicans on the subcommittee are devoted to promoting low-cost, clean and renewable and emissions-free hydro-electricity generated by federal dams and reservoirs.

Bentz has a thoughtful approach to issues and finding solutions. He is in a unique position to help Oregon and the Pacific Northwest by continuing to have a reliable river transportation system, inexpensive electricity, adequate irrigation water, and abundant recreation opportunities.

As a wheat grower, I know the burden it would have on the lower Snake River agriculture producers to not have the hydroelectric dams that provide barge service to transport commodities to market, the inexpensive electricity and abundant water for crops.

Please let Bentz know you support his appointment to the water subcommittee.

Clinton R. Carlson
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Diversity and maintenance are necessary

The COVID-19 pandemic has left Pendleton's economy on its heels with a not-so-rosy picture of the future. Familiar with that term "Black Friday?" That's the day when retail profits for the year jump into the black and a preview of future financial health. It's generally the day after Thanksgiving.

For locally-owned small businesses in Pendleton, it's been the day after Round-Up. If you're not in the black by then, you just might as well close the doors.

With the shift of retail to the big box stores like Walmart and the internet, the local economy has become more dependent than ever on tourists. That over-reliance on the hospitality sector, a sector notorious for generating minimum wage rather than living wage jobs, has become our Achilles heel.

Our mayor, city council, city manager and city employees are fortunate. They don't work in the hospitality sector and aren't personally affected financially by the pandemic. They have, however, determined that whether you frequent those tourist-reliant businesses or prefer

to cook, eat and drink at home to avoid contacting the COVID-19 virus, they still have a financial obligation to use your tax dollars in support of businesses that even the banks are reluctant to touch.

City officials have been more than willing to spend hundreds of thousands of your tax dollars on renovating buildings, financing new eating establishments, decorative statues, even speed bumps in an effort to draw shoppers to the downtown area. Then a blizzard hits and they ignore the area completely.

Have you visited the area during the latest wintry weather? It's deplorable. Unplowed streets and sidewalks are the rule rather than the exception. Then again, none of our current city officials were around when our streets downtown were plowed. The lack of any snow removal along curbs now requires men with shovels to keep the drains clear. Progress?

A major cleanup effort at the airport has done wonders for the economic outlook of that facility. Why is the downtown ignored? It's unfortunate city management's vision of the future is just another dog park rather than a well-maintained city with a more diverse economy. As our country moves back into manufacturing, perhaps that's the direction we should be looking. The latest computer chip shortage is one example of opportunity knocking.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton