

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

# New taxes may make single-payer frightening

Nothing may scare Oregonians away faster from the state moving to a single-payer health plan than big, fat new taxes.

And the state's Task Force on Universal Health Care is talking about ... big, fat new taxes.

Just how big and fat? Billions.

A new state income tax. A new payroll tax on businesses. And maybe even a new state sales tax.

The Legislature set up the task force to design a single-payer health care system. The government would create and run a system with promises of providing better care, coverage for all Oregonians and lower cost. Single payer means all the variety of benefits, policies and networks would go away and be replaced by government. Instead of paying health premiums or having an employer pay for coverage, taxes would be paid to the government.

People and employers are frustrated with rising health care costs. The new taxes may be less than what Oregonians effectively pay now. But there are no guarantees that single payer will be the cure everyone wanted. As imperfect as the health care system is, it is the devil Oregonians know. It is not some new devil with new taxes and change.

The state task force has a deadline of September to finalize its proposal. Then Oregonians will have something firmer they can covet or reject. The task force is scheduled to meet Thursday to get more into the numbers. Some big decisions might be made this week.

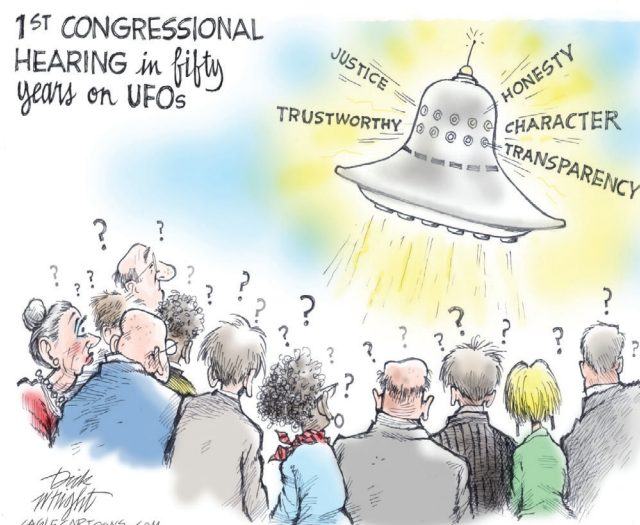
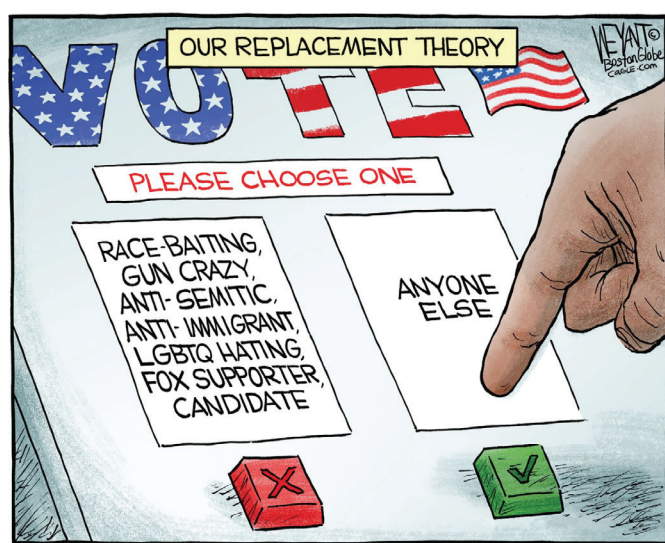
The task force needs to pick an assumption for how much will the system cost to run. The difference is in the billions. And the decision can lower or raise the proposed new taxes. A state consultant backed spending 6% on state administrative costs, so about \$3.5 billion in 2026 dollars. Some task force members believe the state can do it for less, perhaps 4%. But that 4% assumption is called "aspirational" in task force documents and is not supported by the state's actuarial analysis.

How should the new income tax on households work? Should there be a cap on the household contribution roughly in line with what the premium might be? Or should it be with no cap, so household contributions increase with income? With a cap, nobody would pay more than the projected cost of their coverage. Without a cap, it would work like a progressive tax and some households may pay several multiples of their projected coverage cost.

The task force needs to lay this out clearly for Oregonians. There is a good draft FAQ that answers many questions. There are many it doesn't, yet. Oregonians will need to know what they would pay in a new income tax. Oregonians will need to know what employers would be paying in a new payroll tax. And, is a new sales tax coming, too?

Give us the numbers. Justify them. Picking aspirational goals not supported by actuarial analysis may not help. Only with justified numbers can Oregonians decide it is good to essentially destroy private-sector health insurance jobs and increase government control for promises of better, cheaper care. Only then can Oregonians decide if they should leap from the devil they know and toward another who comes making promises.

You can tell the task force your thoughts by emailing [jtfuhc.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:jtfuhc.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov).



## YOUR VIEWS

### City manager's new budget

The Pendleton city manager is currently presenting his 2022-23 operating budget, and if you haven't seen it, you'll find it on the city's website in the finance department section or the budget meeting agenda.

The first thing you should notice is that since 2020, expenditures have doubled with this new budget proposal. Much of the increase is earmarked for city streets, a welcome relief for local residents; the airport in support of the UAS program, providing a welcome increase in high paying jobs; and the latest project, a bus barn for Elite Taxi.

This particular project is designed to allow Elite Taxi and bus drivers to perform routine cleaning and vehicle storage in a controlled environment out of the weather. The cost for the facility, originally pegged at \$2 million, has ballooned to \$3 million in this latest budget proposal. Increases in the transportation budget were also needed for the purchase of an additional bus and another handicapped van for use by Elite Taxi.

I'm not quite sure how subsidizing Elite Taxi fits into any of the new goals developed by the mayor and city council. They may claim that more vans and buses will create additional jobs, but are these the type of high paying professional jobs the city has been promising with the large investments in airport facilities?

The city manager now admits that frivolous spending is a problem within city government and suggests

that rewards be given to departments that find ways to conserve funding by allowing excess funds to remain within their department and be carried over to subsequent budgets.

It sounds like a good theory at first glance, but, in reality, and human nature being what it is, it will most likely just postpone the frivolous spending to the following budget cycle, while limiting the flexibility to cover funding departments unable to meet their budget. Do you suppose this change is an effort to shift accountability directly to department managers rather than city management?

Perhaps it's time to question your ward representatives on whose best interests this \$3 million bus barn serves. It certainly isn't the residents. And it's a perfect example of frivolous spending going unchecked by city management?

**Rick Rohde  
Pendleton**

### There's an ethical side to the wolf issue

Recent coverage on the wolf/cattle situation in Wallowa County omitted significant facts.

It failed to mention that taxpayers compensate ranchers for confirmed and probable losses at full fall market value, and for confirmed and probable injuries.

It failed to mention that taxpayers pay ranchers for extra work in protecting their stock. This year some ranchers will be paid directly to do their own range-riding, but taxpayers also pay for hired range-riders. Last year one

rancher received \$11,713 from taxpayers for extra work and was the primary beneficiary of \$5000 paid by a conservation group for range-riders. Oregonians also pony up for nonlethal tools and equipment, including ATVs.

Oregon wolves are not a nonnative species and were not introduced to Oregon. They came on their own from Idaho and are the same species as those exterminated in Oregon.

There's an ethical side to the wolf issue. Thousands of wolves were shot, trapped, poisoned, strangled and bludgeoned by livestock producers and their agents until extinct in Oregon. This savagery lasted 100 years and continues today. The landscape was denuded of an apex predator and cattle proliferated at great cost to the environment. The cattle are bred for weight and lack horns and the physical agility for defense against predators. They are wolf bait. Especially on public land, common breeds should be replaced by horned, agile cattle such as Corrientes, a successful commercial breed. Putting wolf bait out on public land and then killing wolves for eating it is a crime.

Wolves are due thousands of cows (and sheep) in compensation for the thousands of slaughtered wolves. In expiation of their sin, livestock producers should themselves bear the cost of compensation. The Oregon and national cattlemen's associations should collect funds from their own members for their own compensation fund. Taxpayers should not be responsible.

**Wally Sykes  
Joseph**

### EDITORIALS

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