

Measure 101 is a Band-Aid but necessary one

The one-issue ballot that arrived in your mailbox and the complicated question therein is proof that something is rotten in the state of Oregon.

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain

It's a confusing, complicated decision that asks a lot — too much, we'd argue — of voters. The voters' pamphlet (again, all that for just one question) includes arguments in favor and in opposition that are often too thick to penetrate.

In short, Oregonians are asked to decide the fate of a two-year, 0.7 percent tax on some hospitals that was approved by the Legislature in the last session. A 1.5 percent tax also extends to insurers, the Public Employees Benefits Board and coordinated care organizations.

Voting "yes" keeps the taxes; voting "no" repeals them.

If the tax is repealed, the state would lose anywhere from \$210 million to \$330 million in revenue, in addition to \$630 million to more than \$1 billion in federal Medicaid matching funds. Proponents say as many as 350,000 low-income residents could lose health insurance, while opponents say the state could find other ways to cover them (though they haven't been able to clearly identify any).

There is a lot at stake, but voters have a right to feel like legislators — and initiative proponents — have put them in a vise.

One jaw of the vise is the fact that we know access to health care for people who cannot afford their own insurance comes at a cost. The cost is on those who can afford it — they pay a little extra to cover those who

cannot.

Supporting the sick and suffering is something that many believe is a moral and financial obligation. And the fiscal conservatives among us also understand that the obligation is lessened if we pay a little bit up front (in the form of insurance) instead of a lot more in the end (loss of societal production, emergency room visits, delayed care and avoidable suffering and deaths).

Yet there is pressure from the other side of the vise, too.

Measure 101 isn't fair — not everyone in the state pays equally. People covered by self-insured medical plans through their employer (the Chieftain, for one) and unions are exempt, among others. Small businesses, school districts, nonprofits and college students aren't.

Shouldn't everyone bear the burden of supporting the neediest in our society? The insurers and hospitals are likely to push their costs onto customers, many of whom count the high cost of health care as one of the biggest challenges in their lives.

Fiscal conservatives are also justified in feeling that the Legislature is holding the state's most vulnerable residents hostage in its thirst for ever-increasing taxes. Who is going to argue against medical coverage for sick kids? But why weren't deeper cuts made in other programs to offset this expense?

That's the pattern of the Legislature. As long as



powerful interests — such as the public sector employee unions — carve out their pieces of the pie, solutions to complex problems such as health care will continue to be unevenly applied. And applied poorly, like a two-year Band-Aid over an open wound.

And this is a Band-Aid — a temporary solution that does real good. It will make many Oregonians healthier and less financially stressed. But it does mask the festering issues beneath.

Yet at the same time, we're not comfortable with complex legislation being picked apart by the initiative process.

We live in a representative democracy, and we elected our representatives to run our state — to make laws, make sure the bills are paid and the right investments made.

The initiative process is an excellent way to decide on easily understood social issues like same-sex marriage or marijuana legalization. But complicated tax policy should

not be nit-picked this way, and repealing these taxes would set a bad precedent. Business and the government both need stability in revenue and expenditure in order to make decisions and plan for the future — the rug cannot be pulled out from underneath either at a moment's notice.

We sent our legislators to Salem to do a job and this is the job they did. If we don't like it (and we don't), then we should vote them out. Until such time, voters should

approve Measure 101.

In recent years, we've seen the number of insured Oregonians increase dramatically in the state. And with the help of coordinated care organizations, we've seen health outcomes improve, too. The opioid epidemic is lapping at these gains, however, and we cannot be complacent.

Assessing that situation, a Band-Aid is better than pushing a still recovering patient back into the street.

Digging for 'doody' demands due diligence

Welcome to a special New Year's edition of The Handyman's Guide To Doing Stuff. This week we'll explore the finer points of searching for a long-lost septic tank lid and digging holes while the ground is frozen solid.

Unearthing a reservoir of waste matter hidden beneath snow and ice combines the thrill of the chase with a high degree of technical digging difficulty. Truly a challenge to relish.

My recent scavenger hunt for access to something you don't normally desire to find was made even more intriguing thanks to a metal building that had been built directly on top of where the lid turned out to be. Really added a nice element of challenge to the whole adventure.

I had not kept up on technological advances in locating septic systems. The last publication I'd read on the topic was the 1976 treatise by Erma Bombeck, "The Grass Is Always Greener Over the Septic Tank." A classic, certainly, but Bombeck's research did not encompass snow and ice.

Three test holes later, imagine my delight when Rahn's Sanitary revealed they possess high-tech wireless poop-finding gadgetry. They flush a little transmitter down the pipe and track it with a beeping science fiction device that reveals where to dig. Somebody better have gotten a shiny award for this invention.

Safety Tip: Definitely wear



AND FURTHERMORE

Jon Rombach

safety glasses while swinging a miner's pick into icy ground. Frozen dirt shards propelled by a pick axe are extremely sharp and pointy. Seriously, wear safety glasses if you have to do this.

A backhoe, excavator or steam shovel was not really an option because of that metal building being in the way. So it was slow going, literally chip-chip-chipping away a little at a time, driven by the promise of hopefully finding sewage.

But that was OK. My alternative was writing an earlier draft of this column, where I was trying to do a mix of The Year In Review along with some Bold Predictions for 2018, that kind of thing. Hoo boy.

It was not going well at all. I'm the reverse of a political junkie and gladly leave that stuff for others to examine and come up with theories about. But, man. As a barometer of my own experience attempting to review 2017 and think on what 2018 might bring personally, I found that I much, much preferred kneeling on ice slowly chipping away frozen rocks, gravel and dirt hoping to find a payload of feces.

So the best technique, in my limited experience, is to tough it out until you finally get beneath the frost layer, then mine away the

softer material underneath by poking around with your shovel or breaker bar. Scoop that stuff out until you have a nice overhanging ledge of frozen ground.

Then stomp or smash that ledge until it breaks away. Without the support of the softer matter propping it up, the brittle nature of the problematic top layer now works against itself by snapping off in a clean break. Very satisfying.

I finally did uncover the lid, got it open and had a thousand gallons of yucky stuff removed. Recommendations on how often to have your septic tank pumped vary, depending on different factors, but some say a good general timeline is every four years.

An election cycle. Hmmm. To help me remember to assess the need to clean out a potentially problematic buildup of ... let's go with "doody" ... in the future, I'm going to associate septic service with elections, just as a mnemonic device. I think I can remember that.

That's not to say you have to wait four years. Take my recent experience, as an example. Things were spilling over. It was just going to get worse. Dealing with it was certainly not pleasant. Not at all. But the alternative, well, I didn't want to think about that.

Jon Rombach is a treasure hunter specializing in lost septic tank lids and a Wallowa County-based columnist for the Chieftain.

Strange behavior in cyberworld these days

This week, a cyberspace mystery.

Regularly, our online team sends out metrics for our website and social media pages. In comparison with the newspapers in our ownership group, the Chieftain does well in many categories.

One of the highlights each month is determining which story on the website was read most. It's always interesting to see what people are clicking.

Several months ago, the top story was a piece we had published about shooting death in Troy — in 2006. That's unusual to have a story that old suddenly become the "most read."

Some of you may remember the case. Two couples camping at Grizz Flat near Troy on Nov. 27. Gun play ensued and a Yakima, Wash., man was eventually charged with killing a Weston man. The story as told to the Chieftain by then-sheriff Fred Steen was quite fascinating, the stuff movies are made from.

Benjamin Paul Harrell was eventually exonerated by a Wallowa County Grand Jury and the case quietly went away. Until back in October 2017.

Suddenly, hundreds of people began seeking out the story, clicking and reading.

For the next three months, the story from the Chieftain electronic archives was the most read and commented upon. It was somewhat eerie.

We've never really figured out why the sudden interest. In some sleuthing of my own, I discovered that the Chieftain story was the only coverage of the incident in newspapers published in a three-state area, so that solved some of the mystery.

But why now? It's a 10-year anniversary of the incident and we couldn't confirm anything else in the current news cycle regarding the two parties.

If I've piqued your interest, visit our website and search "Troy shooting." If you find clues as to why the sudden popularity of the story, please share them with me.



WAHL TO WALL

Paul Wahl

A TRAGIC report on the death of Marc Duncan of Joseph finally knocked the Troy story out of the top spot for December.

Marc's family shared an extremely intimate obituary with the Chieftain. Hopefully, the content will cause people to stop and think about what they say about folks who aren't like them.

I'd like to believe our attitudes regarding gay individuals has changed over the past decade. I'd like to believe that were Marc a high school student today, his life might have been less stressful.

I'd like to believe bullying for any reason whatever doesn't exist in our schools.

I'd really like to believe that.

LOTS OF sporting events in the county this past weekend. Joseph hosted a wrestling tournament. Cross-county rivals Joseph and Wallowa squared off in basketball Saturday night.

The Wallowa gym was as full as I have ever seen it. Both teams played well, but the Eagles triumphed in both the girls and boys games.

If you have the chance to attend a Wallowa basketball game this year, your olfactory sense will be scintillated by the smell of popcorn as you enter the gym. Do not leave without having some. It is great stuff and a bargain, to boot.

More coverage in our sports section this week.

DO NOT miss the current art exhibit at Joseph Center, "Puppy Love." It's guaranteed to put a smile on your face on even the grayest winter day.

The exhibit runs through Feb. 14. Josephy's gallery is open Monday through Saturday noon to 4 p.m.

Kudos to everyone who had a part in this project.

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Writer urges 'no' on Measure 101

Measure 101 is not the way to fund Medicaid. To do so puts the burden on the shrinking middle class and small business owners and lets the unions and big corporations pay nothing.

I assume my Medicare won't be taxed the 1.5 percent. But will my personally paid Medicare Supplement Insurance Policy be taxed?

As a senior citizen, I ask you to vote "no" on Measure 101.

Rowena Patton
Enterprise

Letters to the Editor are subject to editing and should be limited to 275 words. Writers should also include a phone number with their signature so we can call to verify identity. The Chieftain does not run anonymous letters.

In terms of content, writers should refrain from personal attacks. It's acceptable, however, to attack (or support) another party's ideas.

We do not routinely run thank-you letters, a policy we'll consider waiving only in unusual situations where reason compels the exception.

You can submit a letter to the Wallowa County Chieftain in person; by mail to P.O. Box 338, Enterprise, OR 97828; by email to editor@wallowa.com; or via the submission form at the newspaper's website, located at wallowa.com. (Drop down the "Opinion" menu on the navigation bar to see the relevant link).

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P.O. Box 338 • Enterprise, OR 97828
Office: 209 NW First St., Enterprise, Ore.
Phone: 541-426-4567 • Fax: 541-426-3921

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Reporter Kathleen Elynn, kellyn@wallowa.com
Newsroom assistant editor@wallowa.com
Ad sales consultant Jennifer Powell, jpowell@wallowa.com
Office manager Cheryl Jenkins, cjenkins@wallowa.com

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