

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Big taxes may make single-payer switch scary

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.



Election results provide a lesson in party politics

OTHER VIEWS

Randy Stapilus



Discerning through lines in elections where each campaign has its own distinct story can be a problematic exercise. One argument to be made from the Oregon primary election just concluded: You're most likely to win a party's nomination if you most closely resemble and appeal to your party's core.

The two most noteworthy results from Tuesday, in the Democratic primary contests in the 5th and 6th Congressional Districts, make the point.

These two races got the most national attention, for good reason.

Sitting members of Congress rarely lose renomination elections, and it hasn't happened in Oregon since Democrat Robert Duncan in 1980 lost his party's nod in the 3rd Congressional District in an upset by a first-time candidate named Ron Wyden. A Washington Post article at the time said Wyden's "campaign was bolstered by some important endorsements from unions, including the major state teachers' organization. Some labor leaders were unhappy with Duncan's votes against a federal Department of Education and deregulation of the trucking industry and the congressman's support of oil deregulation."

Duncan, in other words, had moved away from the emotional core of his party (or, he might have argued, it from him).

Democratic base

There's something rhyming with that in the current primary between seven-term U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader and challenger Jamie McLeod-Skinner, who picked up support from a number of core Demo-

cratic groups including county Democratic organizations. Schrader has been a middle-road blue dog Democrat, breaking from the majority of the caucus on a number of key issues, and his Democratic base back home has noticed (as Duncan's did).

At this writing significant votes are still out but Schrader is far behind, losing 39.3% to 60.1%. Because of the slow vote count in Clackamas County, final numbers aren't expected until maybe June, but Schrader will have a hard slog making up his current deficit (albeit that it is likely to shrink).

The new 6th Congressional District, where there is no incumbent, got as much attention but for a different reason.

Conventional wisdom is that, next to incumbency, the best thing a congressional candidate usually can have going is money, preferably lots of money. One Oregon candidate in particular tested that idea this cycle.

Carrick Flynn, running in the Democratic primary, had almost no local contacts or organized support, was known before the campaign hardly at all locally and showed no distinctive issues or talking points. But his candidacy was supported by money — mountains of it, amounts most House candidates would never dream of.

A cryptocurrency billionaire contributed millions to a pro-Flynn political action committee, and a national Democratic PAC added in with more — totaling \$12.2 million according to the most recent campaign finance reports. Flynn did not control that PAC money, but the funds spent on his behalf were enough to cast a deep shadow over the funding of all the other eight candidates.

Flynn flops

The leading conventional candidate in that primary, Andrea Salinas, was well funded by usual standards but brought to bear only a fraction as much. Pro-Flynn ads (and toward the end, anti-Salinas ads) swamped the district. Salinas did however

have plenty of endorsements, a strong campaign organization and some familiarity with the district through work in the legislature and in advocacy organizations. Voters heard a message appealing to the Democratic base.

The result? The count is not finished at this writing, but the result seems clear from early numbers: Salinas at 36.7% to 18.6% for Flynn. (Flynn has conceded the race.)

Running toward the party's base seemed to help quite a few other candidates on Tuesday, too.

Former House Speaker Tina Kotek's win of the Democratic gubernatorial primary was no shock, but her margin was notably large. She had been running with the support of much of the state Democratic establishment and support network while her opponent, Treasurer Tobias Read, had been running as an outsider.

In the Republican primary for the 6th Congressional District, legislator Ron Noble picked up loads of endorsements and lots of votes in his home legislative district but trailed Mike Erickson, who was an unsuccessful Republican nominee in 2006 and 2008 but ran hard to the Trump-flavored base.

That approach also may have helped former legislator Christine Drazen, though she sometimes moderated. It almost certainly gave Q-anon supporter Jo Rae Perkins her narrow edge for the U.S. Senate Republican nomination against Wyden.

Hewing to the party base isn't always a prescription for winning primaries. But our times are notably polarized, and evidence of sticking close to the party core in this season seems to be more asset than liability.

Randy Stapilus has researched and written about Northwest politics and issues since 1976 for a long list of newspapers and other publications. A former newspaper reporter and editor, and more recently an author and book publisher, he lives in Carlton.

EDITORIALS: Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Wallowa County Chieftain editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Wallowa County Chieftain.

LETTERS: The Wallowa County Chieftain welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns

about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

SEND LETTERS TO: editor@wallowa.com, or via mail to Wallowa County Chieftain, 209 NW 1st St. Enterprise, OR 97828