

# Opinion

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

# State squanders tax dollars

### Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Today's lesson: How to squander taxpayer money. Start with a cause that looks good. Use public money to pick winners and losers. Add in questionable oversight. And wait.

Oregon's Department of Energy helped create a textbook case, highlighted recently by a new state audit and an article in *The Oregonian*.

Legislators created a small-scale energy loan program to "finance fixed-rate, secured loans for the development of energy conservation, renewable energy and recycling projects within Oregon."

There's your good cause.

Enter SoloPower. It was going to make better solar panels. They were lighter and thinner. It was going to create some 450 good-paying jobs in Oregon in north Portland.

The state of Oregon backed the concept.

The state Energy Department loaned the company \$10 million in 2011. Business Oregon gave it \$20 million in tax credits. There were another \$197 million in federal tax credits. Portland chipped in too, agreeing to cover half the debt to the state if SoloPower created the jobs.

There were reasons to think it would all come together. The company had access to millions to invest in a factory and did so.

There's the picking of the winner.

What could possibly go wrong?

The product was untested. It was not a proven market.

There's some questionable oversight.

It all came crashing down. The panels turned out to be more expensive than other panels. They did not sell well enough. The company shut down the factory in 2013. Soon after, all the government entities were scrambling to get their money back. Multnomah County was looking to seize SoloPower's equipment for delinquent taxes. Portland was on the hook for its \$5 million to the state. It will be paying that off until October 2020.

Then in July 2017, the state Department of Energy heaped on some more financial misery. SoloPower asked the department for money to cover its rent for a couple months. The department had already declared SoloPower in default. It gave SoloPower \$641,835 for rent, anyway.

It was not a quick or casual decision. It took months of discussion. But a new state audit shows the state department got no collateral. It chose to believe verbal assurances that some injection of capital would revive SoloPower. Go ahead and call that stupid.

There's some more questionable oversight.

SoloPower now appears to be dead. Squandering complete.

## Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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## Your views

### Small savings can cover your share of school bond issue

How are you ever going to afford to pay your assessment on the school bond issue?

After all, on your \$300,000 home with an assessment of \$1.97 per \$1,000 your additional yearly tax burden will be \$582. If you divide that by 12 months, your monthly contribution is \$48.50. That works out to be \$1.59 per day. Where do you find those additional dollars?

Here's an idea. Get a big plastic jar (you can't recycle it anyhow) and label it (\$s for the Kids). Each time you are a smart shopper and make good decisions, put those savings in your jar.

When you stop at The Pig for your morning coffee, just have coffee rather than a vanilla latte. You'll save \$1.50, but wait, there's two of you. Put that \$3 in your jar.

Off to Ace to buy paint. Be a smart shopper and use your \$10 rewards card.

While you're having lunch at Lone Pine, just have water rather than a soft drink (high fructose corn syrup isn't very good for you anyhow). You'll save \$2, but wait, there are two of you.

You need to stop by Albertsons for food. Use your monthly \$10 coupon, your \$9.50 bottle refund and an additional \$18.10 on promotional savings. Oh good, you have \$37.60 to put in your jar.

It's Tuesday, so you're off to D&B to do some serious shopping. Because you have silver hair, you saved \$12.32 on senior day.

Need fuel. Use your 2 Safeway reward points and save \$3.20.

Time for a beer at Barley's. Go during Happy Hour and you'll save \$1.50, but

wait, there are two of you.

Just try this for September or October and when voting time comes around you'll have a way to save the dollars to cover your assessment.

Alice and her staff at the Baker County Treasurer's office may not be excited when we all bring our jars in to pay our taxes, but we could do that.

Try this idea for a month and see if the school bond issue is affordable for you.

Then vote YES for the Kids.

**Irv and Susan Townsend**  
*Baker City*

### Baker City's population trend is sustainable

My good friend, Gary Dielman, is absolutely correct about the stability of Baker City. He and I disagree on everything political, but as a historian, naturalist or local supporter, he is an asset to the community.

For most of a century, Baker, and/or Baker City, has varied little above or below the population figure of 10,000. The trauma to the town was significant when the U.S. Forest Service opted to stop harvesting its valuable crop of trees. It took time, but some very significant and diverse businesses gradually filled in the void. Good jobs are available as expansion is continuing. The town is growing, but at a rate that appears sustainable. There is lots of support for what we have here. Let's not mess it up by over promoting.

**Dan Warnock**  
*Richland*

### Motorists feel endangered, too, when encountering bikes

After reading the article regarding

the bicyclists and the log truck (Baker City Herald, Aug. 10) I feel compelled to speak up.

I spend a good deal of time driving around Baker County. The roads I travel are two-lane highways that often have an abrupt edge and nothing else. Each year when the weather warms up I am forced to swerve into oncoming lanes of traffic, slam on my brakes and perform other quick-thinking maneuvers to avoid the parade of cyclists on these narrow highways. This makes me, as the driver of a vehicle, feel endangered as well.

I am pretty sure these highways were designed for motorized vehicles which are maintaining a certain, state-mandated, speed limit. When someone using said road is not able to maintain this speed — i.e., cattle drivers or wide loads — they provide some form of warning to oncoming motorists that the flow of traffic is about to change. With bicyclists, however, there is no warning that someone traveling much slower than you is going to pop up on the next blind corner and, I repeat, force you to swerve into oncoming traffic, slam on your brakes and/or perform other quick-thinking maneuvers so as not to kill or injure yourself, the cyclist and any other traffic on the highway.

So while I am sorry for the gentleman who felt endangered by the log truck, I would like to note that many motorists feel the same way every time they are forced to dodge bicycles on the highway. Perhaps this side of the story deserves a voice as well.

**Donna Valentine**  
*Baker City*

## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Editorial from The Chicago Tribune:

The not-quite-as-ubiquitous plastic grocery bag took another big hit Thursday. The nation's largest grocery chain, Kroger Co. - parent of Mariano's - dedared that it would phase out single-use plastic bags from its nearly 2,800 stores by 2025.

Kroger orders about 6 billion bags a year - yes, billion. So this isn't a minor ripple. It should accelerate the slide of plastic bags into oblivion, at least in the U.S. We realize that dog owners will have to find another means to scoop and workers will have to find another vessel in which to ferry lunch.

Sorry, folks, but there's a greater good here. Billions of bags are tossed out every year in the U.S. Many of those bags, and other plastic waste, wind up littering the world's oceans, lakes, beaches, parkways and streets. These bags take up to 1,000 years to degrade.

Are American consumers ready for this shift? Kroger, which says it "listens closely" to customers' concerns, thinks so. As do we.

Most of the plastic produced since the

dawn of the Plastic Age after World War II — more than 9 billion tons — is still around, cluttering up the planet. On the current pollution trajectory, researchers say plastic refuse in oceans could exceed fish, ton for ton, in three decades. Or, as one scientist chillingly notes, for every pound of tuna taken out of the ocean, people are dumping two pounds of plastic in.

People carelessly tossed trash out the car window, on sidewalks and on the beach until public education campaigns at least made many of them feel guilty about it. Millions of Americans no longer litter. Many of them also shun plastic bags and other one-and-done plastic containers.

The bags and other single-use plastic items like straws are drawing the evil eye from food purveyors and other retailers who seek to promote themselves as green.

Starbucks, Disney, Marriott, Hyatt Hotels, Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises and McDonald's are among the companies moving to dump plastic straws. McDonald's is also pledging to

use only recycled or other environmentally friendly materials for its soda cups, Happy Meal boxes and other packaging by 2025. Dunkin' Donuts vows to eliminate polystyrene foam cups by 2020. Ikea plans to eliminate single-use plastic products by 2020.

We hope the Kroger move encourages even more companies to follow suit.

To save the planet's oceans and lakes, however, companies and consumers will need to do more than swear off plastic bags and straws. Waste handling systems have to improve worldwide, particularly in countries that now struggle to deal with plastic litter. The prime mover here is rising public awareness - and a resulting willingness of many among us to make modest lifestyle changes. Some stores even reward customers with cash back or other bonuses to forgo plastic bags.

Stash a few reusable bags in the trunk. Use them. Once you get into the habit, you'll be surprised how quickly you forget that you ever relied on out-of-fashion plastic.

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