

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Careful on tax reform

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

The Oregon Legislature seems certain to consider property tax reform when it meets next year. Yet finding changes that make the current system better, then persuading voters that they're fair, will take leadership that we have yet to see.

Oregon's property tax system has problems. That's so, in part, because of Ballot Measure 50, approved by voters in 1997. It was a third attempt at limiting property taxes, and it did that. It immediately cut taxes, and going forward it established permanent rates, reduced properties' assessed value, on which taxes are charged, and limited the growth of assessed value.

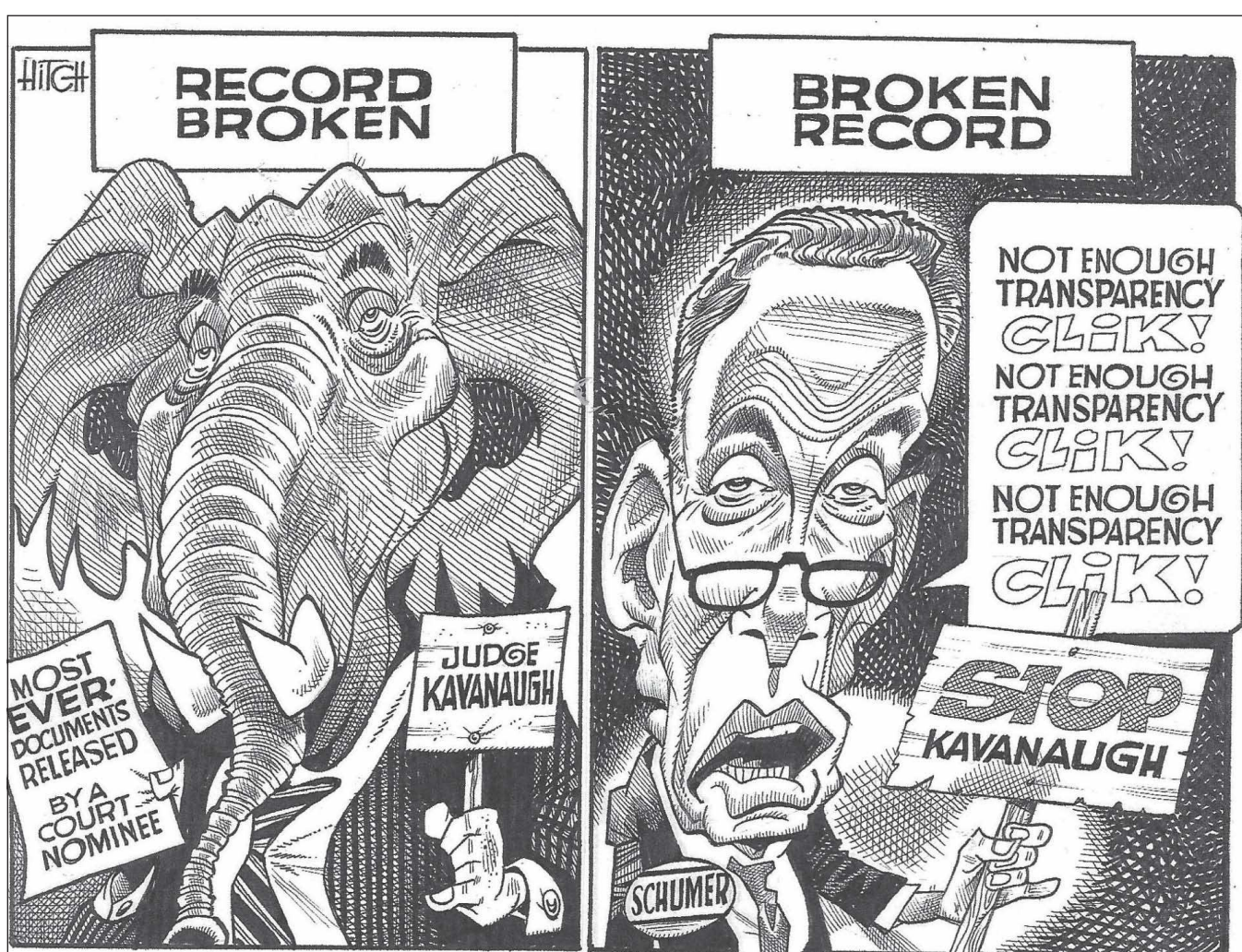
Measure 50 created inequities, however, because it disconnected a property's assessed value from its real market value and limited growth of the former. As a result, the owners of similar homes in different neighborhoods can have very different tax bills.

So far no one has come up with a concrete plan to improve the situation. Lawmakers are talking about it. House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, brought it up at a meeting of coast-area lawmakers and others earlier this month. And Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, has been working on the problem for months.

Hass did make one suggestion in June. Just refer a measure to voters that asks if they want a fair tax system, he said. Then, when they say yes, lawmakers could go ahead and create the system and let the courts sort it out.

One hopes Hass had his tongue firmly planted in his cheek when he came up with that one. No doubt voters would love the idea of a fair system. But one person's "fair" system is another person's unfair one. The former would see property taxes go down, no doubt, while the latter would see them go up. Besides, broad ballot questions offered without any specifics are misleading to the point of worthlessness.

That's the problem with tax reform. It creates winners and losers, and no one wants to be a loser. Lawmakers have their work cut out for them. The very reason voters supported Measure 50 to put strict limits on what the Legislature can do with property taxes is that voters didn't trust legislators.



Your views

McLeod-Skinner will make higher education accessible

Labor Day is dedicated to the achievements of American workers and the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country.

As I celebrate Labor Day, I am grateful for the public education I received that opened many doors in employment and allowed me to earn a livable wage, own a home and support my family. Many workers need training and education beyond high school to be prepared for today's job market. While trade schools and colleges once were affordable, current costs are out of control. Just when graduates are new to the workforce and should be looking forward to greater economic independence, they are strapped with debt. We need more affordable education and better job opportunities for our youth.

For many years, I was a work-study coordinator for a public university and helped students use their financial aid to find part-time career-related jobs. When they graduated with the combination of a college degree and on-the-job experience, they were well-prepared and able to find work in their chosen field. I also worked with graduates who became AmeriCorps members and worked in public service programs to pay off their student loans. We need more of these programs in our trade schools and

colleges to help young people avoid debt and secure meaningful employment.

We also need government representatives who support our young people and work to ensure they have a bright future. That is one reason why I support Jamie McLeod-Skinner for Congress. She has proposed an exchange of public service for trade school or college education and she will build partnerships for good jobs in renewable energy, rural broadband access, affordable housing, transportation and water systems.

Jamie asks our district to "Please join me in honoring our workers by committing to protecting our unions and building the partnerships that will bring good-paying jobs to Oregon. Because when you work hard and you create wealth, you deserve a living wage." Join me in voting for Jamie McLeod-Skinner on Nov. 6.

Gretchen Stadler
Baker City

Passing school bond a benefit to the community

We are writing to show our support for Measure 1-88. Baker City is a beautiful place to live, raise a family, and retire. Unfortunately, the condition of our schools has become a blemish for our entire community. Workers, professionals, and entrepreneurs are all important parts of a stable community. These people want to see a healthy

educational system which includes a healthy infrastructure and our school buildings are just not adequate. When potential active community members select other locations to live we all lose. We lose when Baker City can't attract or keep quality medical professionals. We lose when entrepreneurs don't select our city to open a new business. We lose when current businesses can't expand due to a lack of trained workers in the area.

Our community is in desperate need of schools that are safe, functional, and capable of handling current enrollment. The average age of the educational buildings in our district is 79 years. There are many areas that these buildings fall short and after a year of study the Long Range Facilities Planning Committee identified the main issues. Enrollment in Brooklyn, South Baker and Baker Middle School far exceed safe capacity while Baker High School is only at approximately 50 percent capacity. Measure 1-88 would address this problem while also improving safety, security and energy efficiency.

The last school construction bond passed in 1948! It is time to support the children of this community and in turn support the community itself. It's time to Vote Yes for Kids!

Travis and Krista Cook
Baker City

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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GUEST EDITORIAL

Editorial from The Hartford Courant:

The federal government should not use taxpayer money to put guns in schools. There is no precedent for it, and education grants are commonly restricted from being used to purchase weapons.

The National Education Association is opposed to arming teachers. Legislators are opposed to it. Even the \$50 million STOP School Violence Act, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in March, explicitly forbids the money from being used to buy firearms.

So why is Education Secretary DeVos even entertaining the question? Because Texas officials asked if the money could be used to pay for a firearms program there. But she must

answer with a resounding "No."

At issue is a program known as the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants, which — unlike other federal education grants — do not clearly forbid weapons purchases. Texas asked the U.S. Department of Education for clarification on what those grants can be used for, and it's a fair question. And DeVos should not be castigated for simply considering a legitimate question from a grant recipient.

But her hesitation to respond quickly shows that she's willing to consider it. Given her previous statement that guns in schools could protect children from "potential grizzlies," it's clear where her sympathies lie.

If she gives Texas the green light, then any state could use the money

to arm teachers, which goes against broad federal policy and the wishes of educators across the country, not to mention common sense.

It seems obvious that the best thing for DeVos to do would be to tell Texas that the money should not be spent on guns, in line with precedent. Some, including U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., have argued that states should have flexibility to spend block grant money as they see fit. But restricting state officials from using the money to buy guns hardly ties their hands.

The loophole needs to be closed, and quickly.

Guns and schools don't mix, and taxpayer money shouldn't be used to endanger children. DeVos should make that clear.

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

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Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

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State Rep. Lynn Findley (R-Vale): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Mike Downing, Loran Joseph, Randy Schiewe, Rosemary

Abell, Arvid Andersen and Adam Nilsson.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Fred Warner Jr., city manager; Dustin Newman, police chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Jeff Smith, roadmaster; Matt Shirtcliff, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Cindy Carpenter, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

Baker School District: 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m., Baker School District 53 office boardroom; Andrew Bryan, Kevin Cassidy, Chris Hawkins, Katie Lamb and Julie Huntington.

