

# Opinion

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

# How to pay for health care

### Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

When Oregon had a \$900 million budget hole to fill for medical care for the poor, voters approved new taxes in January. They backed \$320 million in taxes on hospitals and health insurers to help preserve Medicaid services for about 400,000 poor Oregonians.

But the problem of paying for the coverage has returned. The Oregon Health Authority has a slightly smaller total hole to fill for the 2019-2021 biennium — down to an estimated \$830 million. Where should the Legislature come up with the money to pay for the coverage?

The state needs to look at cutting costs and raising revenue. One of the options Gov. Kate Brown's office is considering is bad policy.

The budget hole returns because those taxes passed in January are scheduled to expire. Federal support is dwindling. Costs are also expected to rise by 3.4 percent.

Tina Edlund, senior health policy advisory to Gov. Kate Brown, has revealed some of the revenue options being considered in interviews.

One she mentioned is to tax employers whose workers are on the Oregon Health Plan — that's the state's version of Medicaid. This concept is sometimes called a Walmart tax. The idea is companies that don't pay their workers enough are getting a corporate subsidy from the government, so they should pay it.

But it would likely have many unintended and unwanted consequences.

If such companies were taxed, they may raise prices, may not be able to hire as many employees or may pay employees less. None of that is great.

If such companies were taxed, how would the tax be determined? Eligibility for government programs is based on household income and household size. Companies have no direct control over household income or household size. Is it then fair to saddle them with that tax? It would create a perverse incentive for companies to hire people with small families or a spouse who gets paid very well.

It's also important to remember that many employees who are not on Medicaid get some sort of federal subsidy for their health insurance. If the argument is that companies should have to pay up when they aren't paying enough, why would that only apply to employers with employees on Medicaid?

The state shouldn't just target certain types of employers to pay for health care for the poor. The tax should be transparent and broadly based across the economy.



# 9/11: One nation, undivided

This week calls for reflection as we pause to remember the 2,997 people who died in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and the thousands of Americans killed and wounded in military service to our country since that horrific day.

Seventeen years later, we also honor the heroic actions of two American statesmen, former Gov. Thomas Kean and former Rep. Lee Hamilton. They led the eight members of the 9/11 Commission — four Democrats and four Republicans — in an unprecedented, bipartisan effort to understand one of the worst tragedies in American history and to provide the government with a path forward to ensure it never happens again.

We have come to accept the idea that our nation comes together in times of crisis. But collaboration in crises is neither easy nor inevitable. The commission's work took place during the run-up to the 2004 presidential election, and amid fierce and divisive debates about the Iraq War.

Under different leadership, the commission could have easily devolved into partisan finger-pointing focused on blame instead of solutions. Instead, Kean and Hamilton understood that success depended upon building trust among commission members, recruiting an expert staff, building a strong factual record, listening to all relevant viewpoints and always presenting a united front. In short, they knew then what too many are forgetting now.

That's how the 9/11 Commission produced a unanimous report with broad bipartisan credibility. Since then, nearly all its 41 recommendations have been adopted into law, making the government far better prepared than it was before 9/11. Thanks to the vigilance and determination of those involved in

### JASON GRUMET

protecting our country, there has not been another catastrophic attack on that scale on our soil.

The dedication of Kean and Hamilton to public service was evident well before their work on the 9/11 Commission.

Kean served two terms as governor of New Jersey from 1982 to 1990. A leader in education reform, advocacy for the arts, and environmental protection, he also presided over the first measure enacted by any state to divest from apartheid South Africa. "The best thing about being governor, and the only thing I really miss about it, is that I didn't go home any night without feeling I had done something for somebody," Kean said.

President George W. Bush, in appointing him to lead the 9/11 Commission, said: "Tom Kean is a leader respected for his integrity, fairness, and good judgment. I am confident he will work to make the commission's investigation thorough."

Hamilton served as the representative from Indiana's 9th District from 1965 to 1999. A leader on foreign policy and international issues, he chaired several panels, including Foreign Affairs, and Intelligence, along with the House's Iran-Contra investigation.

And their service didn't end there. After the conclusion of the 9/11 Commission's work, Hamilton went on to lead the Iraq Study Group.

"At a time when foreign policy issues are part of the partisan trench warfare of Washington, there aren't many people who can rise above it, but (Hamilton) is one of them," former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said while serving with him on the group.

Kean and Hamilton continued to be leaders in national security, forming the 9/11 Public Discourse Project to press for the implementation of the commission's recommendations. They joined the Bipartisan Policy Center as co-chairs of its National Security Project, where they persisted in their post-9/11 warnings about failures of imagination, management, capabilities and policies that might threaten our national security.

In honor of their lifelong commitment to public service, and the example they have set in putting the national security interests of their country over partisan posturing, BPC is recognizing Kean and Hamilton with its 2018 Patriot Award.

The award recognizes leaders who demonstrate political courage and exceptional leadership throughout their careers, even in the most partisan of times, when others might retreat from the challenges of opposing interests, ideology and demands of our diverse nation.

The legacy of 9/11 is not just one of tragedy. It is also one of national resilience and unity. As we honor Governor Kean and Congressman Hamilton, we remember that legacy and hope we can learn from it in today's divisive times. There is no cause more vital than keeping American lives safe, and bipartisanship will always be fundamental to that mission.

"We don't live in a perfect world, and we can't attain one. But in the end, politics is about striving to get there — to make the world, or at least this country, better," Hamilton said.

*Jason Grumet is founder and president of the Bipartisan Policy Center. The Bipartisan Policy Center is a D.C.-based think tank that actively promotes bipartisanship.*

## Your views

### Why we're voting for the school bond measure

We have an opportunity this fall to choose hope and solve big problems together with a carefully studied, community-supported plan. We can create better learning environments for our children and community. Though our (now adult) kids graduated BHS in 2003 and 2006, we are voting Yes for Kids on Measure 1-88 for:

- Children's safety and security. Safety needs have changed.
- Vocational Opportunities for seventh and eighth graders, using existing space at Baker High School.
- Increasing energy efficiency and

decreasing operating costs. Maintenance costs for Baker's old buildings are twice Oregon's average (8 percent of Baker's budget vs. 4 percent state average)

- Alleviating overcrowding at Brooklyn, South Baker and Middle School.

Overcrowding is a daily problem for kids trying to learn and their teachers, aides and volunteers. Schools have converted broom closets, a stage and an old shower room into space for educating kids. As a weekly volunteer reader, I have used a closet/storage space to read with first-graders at Brooklyn. Middle schoolers have no cafeteria, so food is transported from BHS, getting cold, and kids eat in a balcony over the gym. What kind of

message are we sending our kids, to leave them in these overcrowded, old facilities?

I was shocked to learn that Baker hadn't passed a school facilities bond in 70 years, since Harry Truman was President! It's time that we invest in our children.

After more than a year of study by 24 Long-Range Facilities Committee members, the School Board chose among identified problems those highest priorities that surveys show the majority of voters support.

Please join our family in voting Yes for Kids on Measure 1-88. Thank you.

**Mary Tomlinson**  
Baker City

## 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.

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**Oregon Legislature:** Legislative documents and information are available online at [www.leg.state.or.us](http://www.leg.state.or.us).

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