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# Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

## Gov. Brown helped some vets

**Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:**

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown took on her own Department of Corrections recently, and veterans won. In doing so she not only saved a small group of veterans a bit of money but made it clear to DOC that the law means what it says it does.

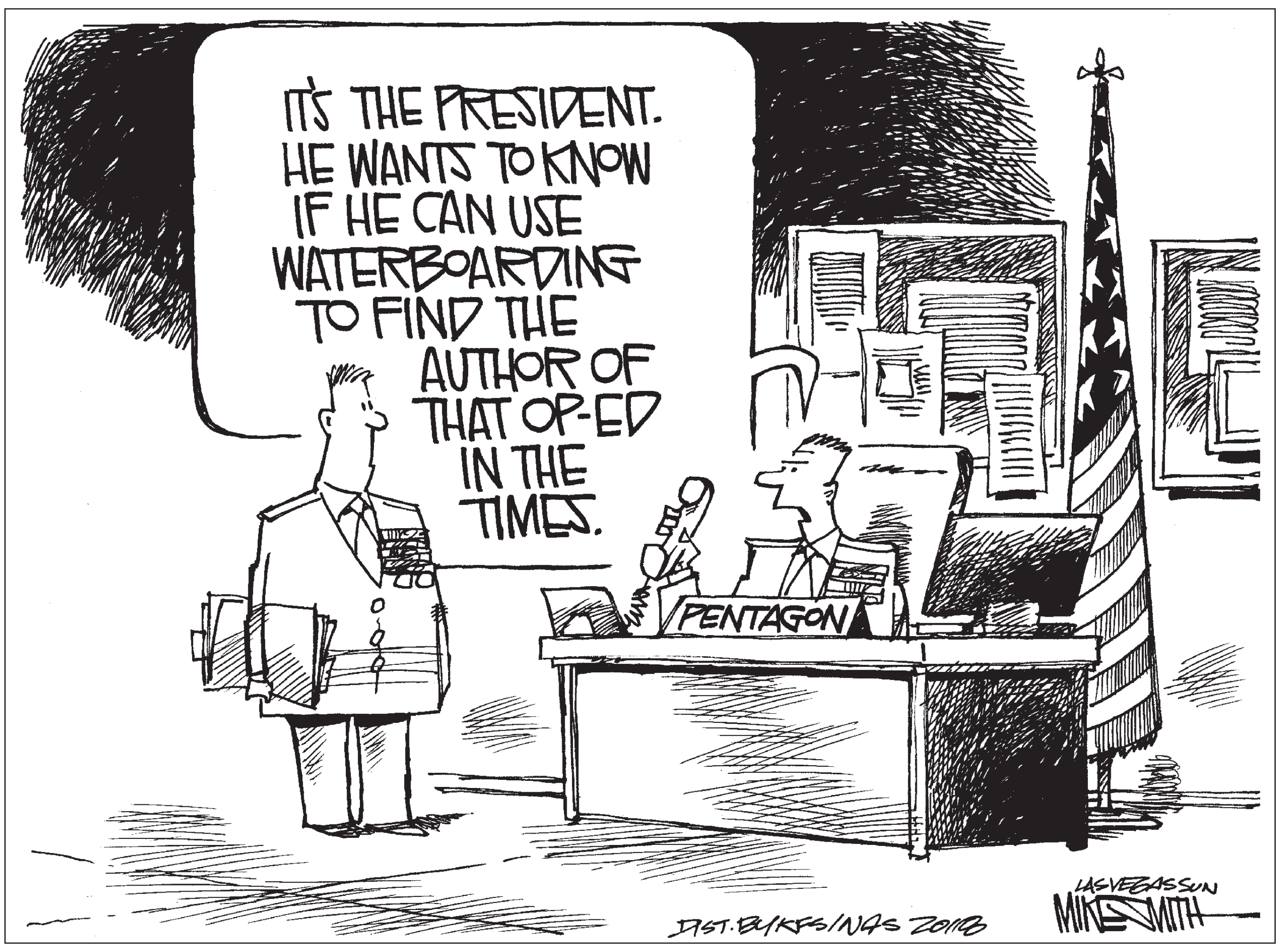
The 2017 Legislature approved, and Brown signed, Senate Bill 844, which gave the department the right to collect a portion of inmates' bank accounts. The department was to use 5 percent of each account to create a transition fund available to the inmate upon release. Another 10 percent was to go to pay court-ordered fines, attorney fees and the like. Off limits, the Legislature said, were federal disability benefits paid to incarcerated veterans, Native American tribal payments and railroad retirement benefits. The veterans' disability and railroad retirement benefits are protected from garnishment for debt by federal law.

Still, there are good reasons for the Oregon law. Convicted criminals were responsible for almost half of the state's uncollected debt the year the measure was passed, and that wasn't unusual. Too, the bill was sold as a way to hold convicts accountable for their actions and to ensure they had a bit of money available when they got out of prison.

DOC officials decided to work around the carve-outs, however. Lawyers who work with veterans involved with the justice system found out about it and objected. The state Department of Justice rejected their objections.

This summer, veterans' advocate and lawyer Jesse Barton took up the cause. DOC refused to look into it, and Barton took the matter to Brown. She told her staff to get involved, it did so, and now DOC has decided not to garnish veterans' disability funds.

It may seem like a small thing, protecting federal payments to the fewer than 2,000 veterans in Oregon prisons, but it was a worthy cause, nonetheless. Veterans on disability for problems caused during their service, even those in prison, deserve protection of their benefits. Brown understood that and ensured the Department of Corrections did, too.




## Your views

### School bond measure too much of a financial burden

I commend the efforts and good intentions of the Long Range Facilities Planning Committee re: School Bond Measure 1-88, but I cannot support their recommendations. $48 million is an unnecessarily heavy burden to place squarely and solely on the shoulders of property owners.

Recent letters suggest that by sacrificing less than two dollars a day, property owners can easily cover this proposed increase in their taxes. Left unsaid is that this amount would have to be set aside every single day without fail for the next 30 years. Many home-owning families in our town must already budget creatively just to cover the basics, as the cost of those basics continue to rise: groceries, heat, electricity, gasoline, clothing, medical costs, insurance, etc. Thirty years of an additional tax that is non-negotiable, non-modifiable, and — if passed — mandatory, is not a good solution.

Baker City property taxes already include assessments specifically for education, comprising nearly 30 percent of the total tax bill (School District 5-J, Intermountain ESD, and BMCC).

The 1946 School Construction Bond cited in School District fliers as justification for building new schools now, took more than two generations of taxpayers to pay down. Surely modification to already existing, structurally viable schools would be far less expensive than constructing anew, then hoping that vacated school property could be used for "other purposes."

School District fliers identify multiple areas of concern which came under review. Measure 1-88 seeks to solve all of these at once. Can't we address some of these elements separately, in a prioritized manner, without the $48 million price tag?

Those who are pushing "Vote Yes For the Kids" with Measure 1-88 seem to imply a No vote is a vote against our kids. This is hardly the case. My No vote urges fiscal responsibility and creative problem-solving, without the burden of an additional $48 million tax.

Baker City has always been a leader in finding innovative solutions and forging broad partnerships to get things done. Let's do it again. Measure 1-88 is not the answer.

**Joyce Hunsaker**
*Baker City*

### School bond highlights unfairness of tax structure

Don't get me wrong, I'm not against supporting children's educations, but I think everyone should contribute evenly. The current method only taxes landowners to support schools. People who rent homes can have a dozen children and they don't pay anything in the way of real estate taxes for their children to attend Baker County schools. I know that there is going to be those who claim the landlord charges the tenant the taxes in the rent structure, but that is not true in most cases. I currently pay over $3,000 in property taxes within 5J School District; if my same house and property were in the Pine-Eagle District my taxes would be less than $1,500.

Now 5J wants the voters to pass a 30-year bond of up to $48 million for upgrades and a new school for a community has had a decreasing student enrollment for several years. 5J's tax rate is already within 95 cents per thousand dollars of the maximum allowable in Oregon. Now take an average $160,000 house in Baker City with taxes of $2,700 per year. With no additional taxes other than the 3 percent-per-year increase of Measure 5 and the quoted $1.97 per thousand for 30 years for the school bond, this house's taxes in 30 years will be over $5,000 per year. I guess I would have to ask why 5J is driving all over their district in 40-foot buses with one child on it, if they have any idea of the value of money.

Think about this — in the same 30 years Social Security will probably no longer exist, maybe DSHS will start paying property taxes for those who no longer can afford them.

**Bruce Morrison**
*Baker City*

## Pain in the neck: Switching internet providers

**JAYSON JACOBY**

I decided, after enjoying many years of general satisfaction in electronic matters, to hire a different company to satisfy my family's relatively modest appetites for internet, television and telephone.

My subconscious, traitor that it is, seems to have concluded that my life was too tranquil.

The medical specialists assure me that the crick in my neck from trying to hold the phone to my ear for 17 consecutive hours without using my hands should gradually correct itself over the next few decades.

Apparently there are surgical remedies as an alternative.

The word "experimental" and the term "shock therapy" were used.

I was, like so many before me, seduced by technology.

I assumed, in this day of instantaneous and ubiquitous communication, that swapping providers would be light work, involving little more than flipping a few switches and perhaps plugging in a couple of lengths of coaxial cable.

Perhaps this is so in the idealized world of advertising. You know the sorts of commercials I mean, in which an eerily attractive family, after bidding farewell to the eternally smiling installation technician, gathers companionably on the sofa to gobble popcorn and become enraptured, possibly to a dangerous level, by the sheer volume of viewing options.

I don't live in that world.

My family has argued not only about what we ought to watch, but also about the proper volume and whether we should close the blinds to cut the glare.

At my house the transfer of power, so to speak, extended over more than two weeks and introduced me, telephonically speaking, to a goodly percentage of the world's customer service representatives.

(Oscar — I'm assuming that's the correct spelling; perhaps he is Oskar — was especially pleasant, although he was no more successful at solving my problem than any of his counterparts.)

I was surprised not so much by the technological glitches, though, as by the dogged way in which companies cling to their customers.

(Because I had "bundled" my services there were multiple corporations involved; much as the Richter scale works, this didn't double the number of frustrating phone calls but rather boosted it by more like a factor of 10.)

This is business, of course. I hardly expected to cut the cord without having to listen to a few "well, what would you say to this offer?" pitches.

(Frankly I was hoping the words "Ginsu" and "knife" would be uttered. Alas this was not the case.)

But if, say, the gasoline outfits were as determined as telecommunications corporations, every time you pulled in for a fill up there would be half a dozen attendants from competing stations beckoning with 5-gallon cans.

And to get to the produce section at, say, Albertsons, you'd have to run a gantlet of Safeway employees who don't come right out and say so but who strongly imply that they will not only slash prices on your groceries but also show up at your house and hand deliver a frosty beer to you in your easy chair.

A few times, while listening to yet another representative explain, as diplomatically as possible, why I was putting myself on the brink of financial ruin by canceling my service, I actually felt a trifle uncertain about my decision.

Another time, when I thought the employee I was talking with had barely suppressed a sob, I felt guilty, as though I had hip-checked a kindergartner and stolen his cookie.

The transition was finally effected, and on the day promised, but this hardly concluded the matter.

Several days later I received a letter from one of my previous providers. I expected a rebate, since the firm bills in advance and I had canceled our services mid-month.

It was a bill.

Curiously enough, it seemed that in closing out my account I had signed up for a new phone number.

I'm prone to making questionable decisions, to be sure. But I was certain I would remember doing something as illogical as switching my old phone number to a new company yet also asking the old company to assign me a new number just in case I misplaced the other one or forget the digits or something.

I tried to explain how unlikely this was to the first representative I reached after navigating 17 menus and waiting on hold long enough to read two chapters in a Tom Clancy novel.

She assured me it was probably just a clerical error.

I assured her that I agreed, but her assurance wasn't settling the matter of this bill.

She responded, with what seemed to me real regret — although as I've mentioned I'm susceptible to emotional outbursts in these situations — that she was not authorized to rectify the error.

But she was happy — overjoyed, really — to transfer me to the proper department.

(I was a trifle concerned, frankly, about being involved with a company that needs a department just to delete accounts that seemed to arise spontaneously, but I refrained from saying so.)

Apparently that department had knocked off early, because I finally decided, after the numbness had crept from my phone-holding shoulder clear to the top of my head, that nobody was going to answer.

I tried again the next day and got through to a man who, although he had to interrupt our conversation twice because of a coughing fit — his, not mine — told me he would cancel the new account and take care of the bill.

I'd like to believe that's the end of the matter.

But I expect it will take some months before I can approach the mailbox without a certain trepidation, as though there might a venomous snake coiled in the dark.

Or another phantom phone number to add to my collection.

*Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.*