

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

The sin within sin taxes

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

The Oregon Health Authority is proposing whopping tax increases as a way to balance its Medicaid budget.

The Oregon Health Plan, which covers Medicaid patients in Oregon, faces a budget deficit of some \$830 million in the coming biennium. The agency hopes to fill the gap, in part, by raising taxes on wine, beer, cider and cigarettes. The increases — 150 percent on a pack of cigarettes plus 10 percent increases in alcohol taxes — no doubt will be sold as health measures that just happen to raise oodles of boodle along the way.

Sin taxes are popular because so many of us use the “sinful” products not at all or not terribly regularly. They are taxes on things acknowledged to have negative repercussions on society.

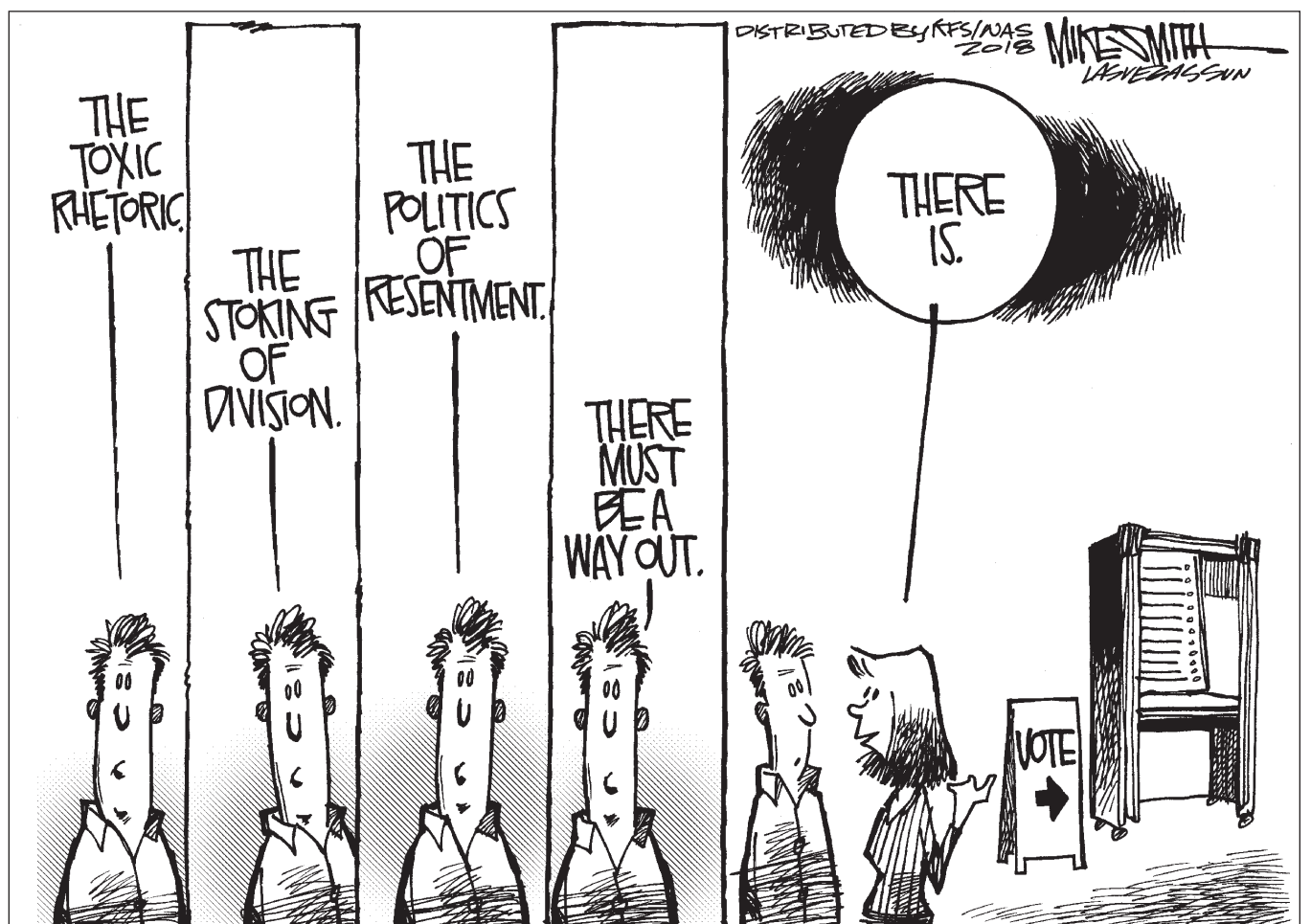
There are good reasons to tax them, but the taxes can be regressive. People who make less money tend to spend more of their money on alcohol and cigarettes.

Any health impact of increased sin taxes may indeed be progressive, but what’s really the likely outcome? People will just be paying more to get what they want.

The affordability of booze and cigarettes doesn’t transform people into health nuts. It’s cheaper to drink water, not wine. It’s cheaper to be a nonsmoker than a smoker.

It’s not like jacking up prices on sinful products over the decades has turned smoking and drinking into rarefied habits of the wealthy. A sin tax increase can be an effort to do good that does bad for the poor.

Oregonians would be better served by a broader, general tax that is not so regressive.



Your views

Walden deserves support from 2nd District voters

I am writing in support of Congressman Greg Walden. He is an honest, hardworking and experienced representative for our 2nd Congressional District. Greg Walden is chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. He fights for better forest management, improved healthcare for veterans and rural America, and improvements in education for rural students. He works hard to get legislation passed that benefits all of us.

The Oregonian, Bend Bulletin, East Oregonian, Grants Pass Daily Courier and Medford Mail Tribune have all endorsed Greg Walden. Greg Walden has the skills and experience to continue to represent our 2nd Congressional District. I urge all voters to continue to support and vote for Greg Walden for Congress.

Brenda Holly
Baker City

Walden is a true friend of Eastern Oregon

Congressman Greg Walden is a true

Letters to the editor

We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Letters are limited to 350 words. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days. Writers must sign their letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Email letters to news@bakercityherald.com.

friend of Eastern Oregon. He has championed many issues while in Congress related to effective use and management of our national forests. Under his leadership the Forest Service has been given new tools to reduce the potential of catastrophic wildfires by getting funds dedicated to fire prevention in addition to providing adequate funding to fight forest fires when they do occur.

He has passed legislation in the House to ensure we can remove the burned, dead trees after a fire occurs while they still have commercial value and reduce fuel to help reduce the severity of any future fires. This bill also requires replanting to help protect one

of Oregon’s most valuable renewable resources.

Congressman Walden has a true heart for veterans and the military. With the passage of VA Choice (allowing vets access to doctors outside the VA), veterans are no longer restricted to the Veterans Administration to seek care. Congressman Walden has voted for funding better training and equipment for the largest pay raise for our troops in almost a decade.

Greg has voted many times to protect our local communities in areas that include protecting probably our best renewable resource, access to low-cost hydropower. He has voted to protect our dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers, supported using the best science available to determine how issues on the rivers should be managed — leaving decisions to biologists, not judges.

We need Greg’s commonsense solutions back in Washington, D.C. I ask you to vote with me to support Greg Walden for Congress.

Joe Bailey
Baker City

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

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.

Feeling sick at possibly being scammed by writers

My son Max learned the concept of duping recently and he employs this little trick often enough that he straddles the line between amusing and annoying.

He waits until your back is turned or your attention focused elsewhere, then he makes some claim and, when you react with appropriate urgency, he’ll quickly say, with great enthusiasm, “duped you.” He garnishes this pronouncement with the sort of grin that defines “mischievous.”

As a 7-year-old, Max’s ability to discern between the plausible and the implausible is not fully formed. But occasionally he’ll invent some scenario — he spilled a can of soda on the new carpet, let’s say — that is all too believable.

I’ve been thinking about duping this week after a reader alerted me to the possibility that the Herald, and me in particular, had been scammed by people who submitted letters to the editor under false pretenses.

False names, anyway.

Suzan Ellis Jones, who is chair of the Baker County Republican Party, said she and others were unable to find evidence, such as voting records or property ownership, proving that the purported authors of three letters published in the Oct. 26 issue are who they claim to be.

(Suzan’s letter on the topic was published in Wednesday’s issue.)



JAYSON JACOBY

I think Suzan likely is right about the authenticity of at least some of the letter writers’ names.

This bothers me.

Actually it infuriates me.

But although I think it’s an act of cowardice to write a letter to the editor under a pseudonym, I reserve by far the greater share of my anger for myself.

The fault, as regards the letters being published, is mine alone.

The Herald’s policy for confirming letters is not foolproof. Absent an FBI-like level of forensic scrutiny it hardly could be.

Even when someone I’ve known for 25 years delivers to my desk a handwritten letter, I can’t be completely certain that his hands wrote the words, or that his mind conceived the sentences.

But of course there is a distinct difference between someone who enlists some ghostwriting aid, and someone who invents a name to go with a letter.

The former at least represents the feelings of a person who has the courage to put his or her name to an opinion.

The latter is a sort of fraud.

I don’t doubt that whoever wrote

the letters in question, if indeed the name is false, sincerely believes the opinions expressed.

I don’t understand, though, why a person would not take pride of authorship and accept the potential rebuttals, or validation, that come with putting your name on a piece of writing that attempts to persuade readers.

Dozens of other people have done just that over the past month, in advance of a Nov. 6 election that has a variety of compelling races.

Every year hundreds of people do the same on this page.

That I might have neglected to nab a few imposters feels especially galling because in this very space in the Oct. 26 issue I contrasted the virtues of the Herald’s Opinion page with the vices of online comment functions, message boards and the like.

Specifically I pointed out that in the online arena, anonymity is common, and I believe this contributes to a coarsening of the debate.

I suppose this brands me as a hypocrite, although it’s a charge I deny.

My failure — and if the letter writers used fake names then failure is a perfectly valid word — arose because I was too eager to enrich the paper with as many opinions as I could fit on the pages.

I feel an especially keen pressure during campaign seasons to ensure

that readers have a chance to display their wares in the marketplace of ideas.

Over the past couple weeks, letters to the editor have dominated the Opinion page. On Oct. 26 I devoted two pages, rather than the usual small part of one, to accommodate the onslaught.

I mention this not as a feeble attempt to excuse my lack of diligence in confirming the authenticity of letter writers’ names.

But as with everything else in life, my actions are influenced by experience. And over the years I’ve had to explain to quite a number of people, some of whom I know, that their letter didn’t run because they didn’t answer the phone when I called or didn’t respond to my email message.

Ultimately, though, what matters — all that matters — is that the letters on this page are the work of the person whose name is printed at the bottom.

It pains me to think that I might have allowed unscrupulous — and I need to reiterate, cowardly — people to pervert the purpose of this page. In my Oct. 26 column I disparaged the online “cloak of anonymity,” and I feel sick at my stomach to imagine myself serving, in effect, as the tailor who draped that garment over people who choose to slink beneath its dubious shelter.

I’m distressed as well that the letters could have had any influence on voters. Two of the letters endorsed Bruce Nichols for Baker County Commission chairman. Nichols told me he is disgusted that someone would use a false name — he didn’t recognize them, either — even though the writers supported his candidacy. Nichols told me he thinks the letters polluted the political process and were unfair to his opponent, Bill Harvey, and to himself.

I agree with Nichols on all counts.

Each of the three letters Jones cited arrived, as most letters do, by email. Before I received Suzan’s letter I had sent multiple requests for confirmation to all three purported writers, and I did the same after. As of this morning I hadn’t received a response.

Whether this silence is tantamount to a confession I can’t say. But I presume that even if the person, or people, who submitted the letters are liars, they probably also read the paper, and enjoyed a meager thrill from their handiwork.

Perhaps the next time they think of trying such a stunt they’ll consider, if they lack the fortitude to claim responsibility for an opinion, whether they truly believe the words they wrote.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.