

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Stopping the tax kicker theft

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

The re-election of Gov. Kate Brown and Democratic control of the Legislature means a special kind of progress for the state — progress in the amount Oregonians pay in taxes.

Brown is aiming for a \$2 billion increase in a state that will already be bringing in record revenues. And just as bad, her allies in the Legislature are planning to swipe the kicker from Oregon taxpayers.

How much is the kicker swipe? Some \$724 million. Oregonians making \$61,600 in adjusted gross income (that was the state average in 2016) would get \$355 kicked backed on their taxes in 2020.

Some lawmakers want to put the kicker instead into a rainy day fund or to use it to help fund education. Those are good causes. Aren't the finances of Oregon taxpayers a good cause, too?

Maybe to some legislators \$355 isn't much.

We're sure Oregonians could think of any number important things to spend it on — groceries, the heating bill, child care.

The kicker is one of the only controls on spending that exists in the state. The law requires the state "to return excess revenue to taxpayers when actual (non-corporate) general fund revenues exceed the forecasted amount by more than two percent."

It was Central Oregon's own Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, who helped protect the kicker by passing the legislation that helped put it in the Constitution.

Lawmakers may be eyeing plans to suspend the kicker. They can do that with approval of two-thirds of lawmakers or they may have bigger plans to undo the law entirely.

We agree the kicker is an oddball way to control spending. What other method is there?

Even with record revenues, Brown and lawmakers only show appetite for more.

"We can no longer do things as we have in the past," Brown recently announced to supporters.

Actually Democrats are doing exactly what they have always done — seeking to extract more money from Oregonians. This time around, they even want the kicker.

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.
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Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald,
P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814
Email: news@bakercityherald.com

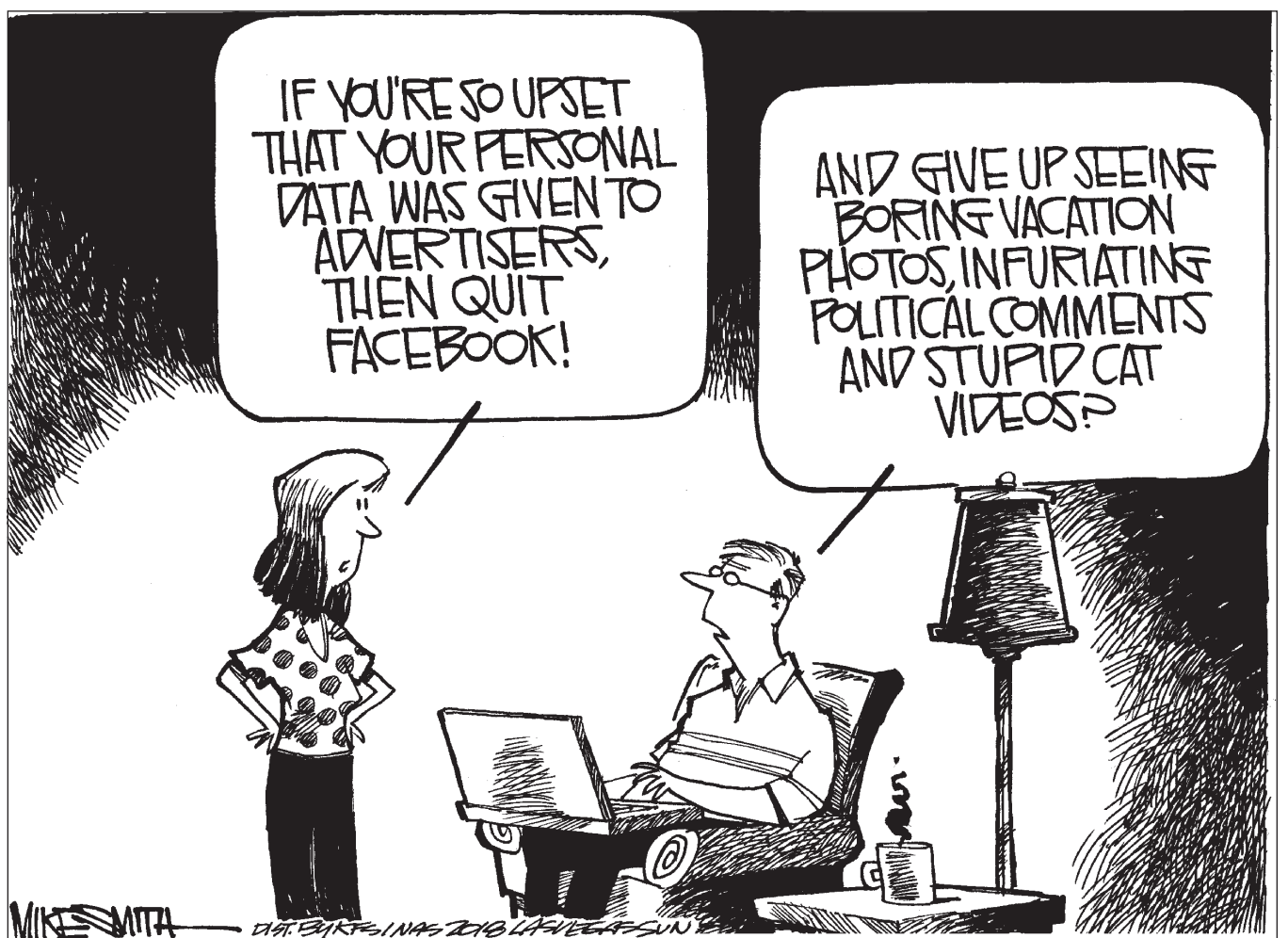
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President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.



What's an education good for?

My family, filled with smart, shrewd and funny people, would shrug their collective shoulders and ask, "What good is college?" Only my mom, who died when I was young, valued education. I knew that because her single ambition for me growing up was that I might marry a man with a degree.

I applied to college only because my high school history teacher told me the place he'd attended on a football scholarship just started accepting female students. He thought maybe I had a shot.

When I told my relatives that I was heading to New Hampshire in 1975, they assumed I was pregnant. Why else would an 18-year-old girl leave the state? "It happened to your cousin," one aunt whispered as I boarded the bus for White River Junction. "You can always come home."

They were skeptical about what I'd learn in some cold building far away that I couldn't learn in Brooklyn. What was an education going to get me — except into trouble?

I had no idea what I wanted to do or wanted to be, but I wanted a degree of my own. Revising my mother's wishes, I didn't just want to stand next to someone who was knowledgeable. I wanted to be knowledgeable.

Also, an education can't divorce you. Besides, receiving an education is different from getting a degree. A degree is like a wedding ring: It's meaningless if it's there just for show. Like a thin piece of gold, a printed piece of paper — even in a fancy font — is worthless unless it represents substantial personal commitment.

An education is about learning things



GINA BARRECA

you don't know. Just as way we need to try foods we've never eaten before, we need to approach unfamiliar subjects. Life's menu can be innovative, varied and delightful, but without outside influences, it can too often be limited, boring and unappetizing.

I have a friend who pretty much eats only those things she was served in childhood: meat, potatoes, beans and applesauce. She's not excessively fun when it comes to dining out.

Curiosity, like originality and delight, has to be nurtured. But if we keep emphasizing the notion of familiarity and security at the expense of new and potentially challenging experience, then we'll be stuck with the intellectual equivalent of a 1968 Swanson's TV Dinner.

Authentic education demands that students learn, and not merely that they are taught. It's not about simply offering access to information or data. What happens in classrooms is not the same as what happens at UPS: It is not like transferring an unexamined parcel of information from one person to another. It must include, as all reputable teachers know, instructing students in academic discipline and personal responsibility.

This is one reason that students should be required to take classes from outside their area of specialization. Their futures are under construction. While they may have blueprints in place, perhaps handed down through

their families or fantasies from glittering daydreams, there are many architectural models from which to choose. That way they won't end up with the academic equivalent of a five-story one-bedroom apartment with no kitchen and a bathroom on the roof.

Unable to predict the ineffable results of education, I worry we're defining it in merely quantifiable terms — judging institutions, subjects and majors by how much money their graduates earn once they're in the workplace. That's not an assessment of a demanding course of study. That's an assessment of who makes coin. If that's all anybody needs know, I could have stayed in the old neighborhood. Gangsters, after all, make more money than anybody else.

An authentic liberal arts education has value of a different kind: It's a triumph over ignorance and a refusal to be intimidated by the unknown.

It's about taking a class in a cold building on a quiet morning and learning that words, as well as numbers, in the proper sequence, can unlock the universe. It's about proficiency, of course, but it's also about perspective.

It's not what you "get" out of college that changes your life; it's what you're given. You gain authority not only over subjects, but over yourself.

As my family predicted, education got me into trouble — but it was trouble for which I looked, not from which I ran. That's the payoff.

Gina Barreca is a board of trustees distinguished professor of English literature at University of Connecticut and the author of 10 books. She can be reached at www.ginabarreca.com.

GUEST EDITORIAL

DeFazio's comments on wolf bill is insulting to ranchers

Editorial from The Capital Press:

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed legislation that would remove the grey wolf from the federal Endangered Species list. The bill passed on a 196-180 vote.

The measure would strip wolves of federal protection in California, and the western two-thirds of Oregon and Washington. Wolves already have been de-listed in Idaho and the eastern one-third of Oregon and Washington.

Cattlemen are hailing the measure's passage. It now goes to the U.S. Senate where, because chamber rules require 60 votes to end debate, it faces extremely long odds.

We take exception to comments made by Rep. Peter DeFazio, a Democrat who represents Oregon's 4th District, in defense of keeping federal protections on wolves. He called the bill "a talking point for a few idiots."

We recognize there are honest disagreements about wildlife policy, but insulting

the intelligence of your opponents is hardly the stuff of thoughtful debate. The cattle and sheep producers of the West are not idiots and they deserve more respect from an elected representative.

We also think DeFazio should consider those who have to deal with the wolves firsthand.

DeFazio told the House about Oregon's famous "wandering wolf," OR-7. OR-7 hailed from Northeast Oregon. He wandered to California, came back into the southern Cascades where he found a mate and has produced pups. He and his progeny, seven or eight wolves in total, comprise the Rogue pack — so named not for their behavior but after the river valley where they roam.

"Guess what? We are not having catastrophic predation on cattle in Southern Oregon," DeFazio said. "We could accommodate more wolves."

The Rogue pack has a taste for livestock. It was credited with five confirmed kills in a three-week period earlier this

month. Producers say the toll is higher, but those kills have not been confirmed by state wildlife officials.

Are the losses to depredation in Western Oregon "catastrophic"? Certainly not, if you aren't running cattle or sheep on public and private grazing allotments.

Maybe DeFazio would have a different opinion if his livelihood was being devoured on the hoof and there was little he could do about it because the federal government tied his hands.

The gentleman from Springfield need not fear. His district will get more wolves. But should ranchers be forced to continue to bear their losses?

We have always believed that wolves have a place in the wild. But we've never believed that cattlemen and sheep producers should be required to provide a free buffet.

It's time to end the protections for wolves as they continue to multiply and spread across the region without any help from wildlife managers.