

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Reject the tax hike on booze

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

If you are already worried about Gov. Kate Brown's plan to raise \$2 billion in new taxes, she's going to make it harder to drown your sorrows.

Brown plans to ask the state's liquor commission for a 5 percent increase in the markup on liquor.

Oregon already holds the silver medal in high taxes on spirits in the country. The markup in Oregon of \$22.75 a gallon is second only to Washington.

When a consumer buys a bottle of liquor in Oregon, they pay more than double on average the cost of the product. That makes the Oregon tax the most expensive ingredient in a bottle of booze.

Brown dropped the idea of jacking up prices on beer and wine, saying in a conference call there wasn't enough "bang for the buck. ... It's a tough fight in the Legislature, and we're not likely to be successful at the ballot."

Why would she give up on beer and wine and stick it to liquor?

It's easier. Beer and wine increases go through the Legislature. Distilled spirits markups are a decision made by the state liquor commission, and the commissioners are picked by the governor.

Twenty years ago not many people heard of Oregon wine or beer. How are Oregon distillers supposed to match that performance if they get clobbered by more taxes? The markup is not going to be great for Central Oregon's economy, either: There are five distillers in Central Oregon that are members of Oregon's distillery guild.

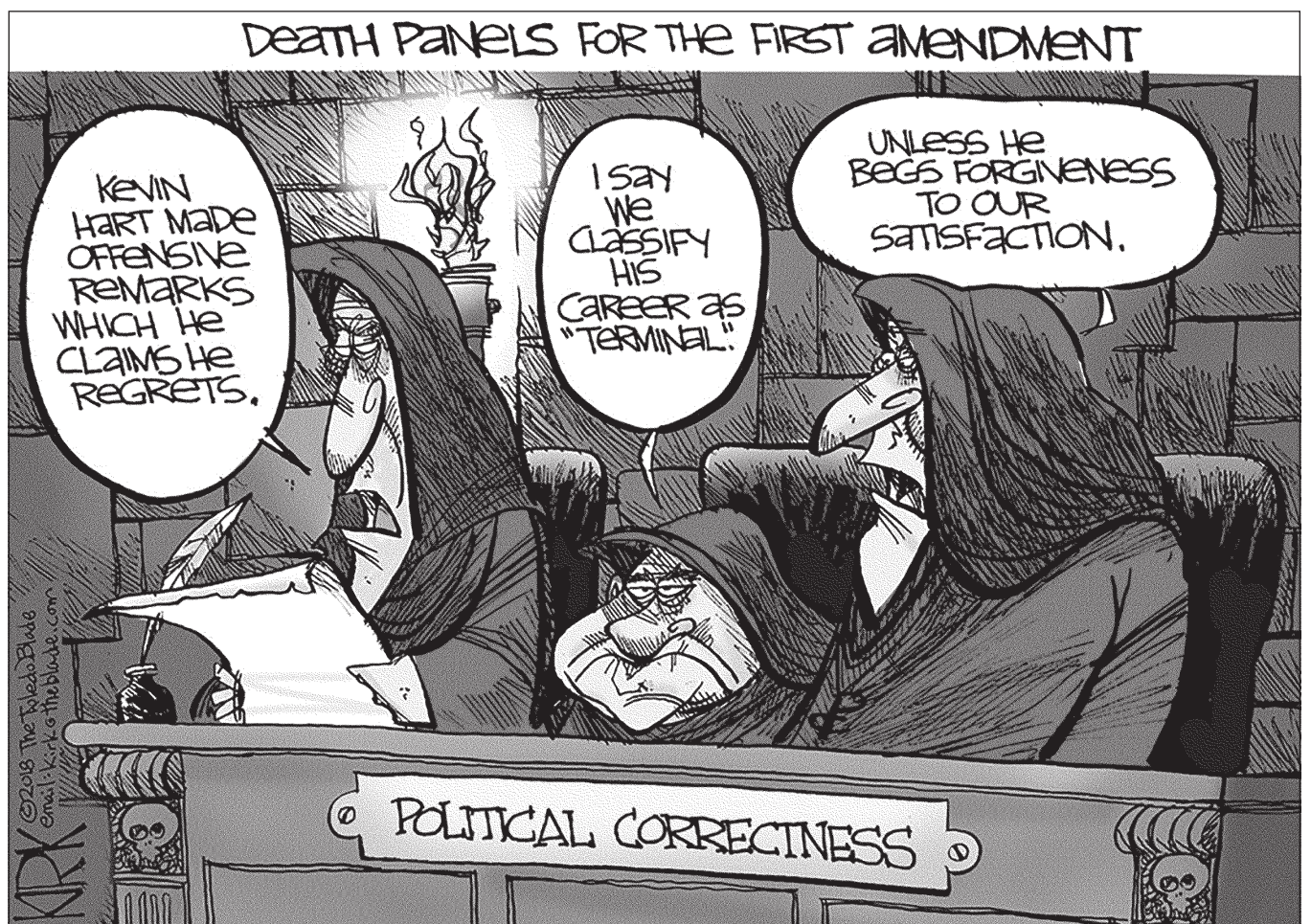
Brown's plan to punish distillers makes about as much sense as the way she dropped it on them. Brad Irwin, a Bend whiskey distiller who serves as president of the 39-member Oregon Distillers Guild, said he talked to the governor's office on Oct. 25. He got good news. He was told that a new, proposed 50-cent temporary surcharge was off the table and distillers might even get a break on the fees they must pay when they sell booze in their tasting rooms. There was no mention of a 5 percent markup. Then Brown's budget was released and — surprise!

New taxes and tax increases are never going to win popularity contests. The only way to make them fair is to ensure they are broad-based and do not punish specific industries. Brown's liquor markup should be rejected by the liquor commissioners.

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).

Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814
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Your views

Forest plan objectors played a valuable role

To every one of you who attended the first set of meetings on the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision, thank you. It was great to see everyone who had traveled from around the West to have their objections heard or to support those who were speaking out about the plan.

I was impressed with the care each of you took to present your objections to Mr. French and his team, but even more, I was awestruck at the control each of you showed in a matter that is very dear to each of our hearts and

that impacts our ability to sustain our families in Northeastern Oregon. While open access to our mountains seems to be such a simple concept when it comes to subsistence use, it eludes those that make decisions who have never had to worry about heating their homes with firewood or had to extract food that supplements our families through the winter.

While we saw a solid turn out of objectors in the meetings from Nov. 27 to Dec. 1, I fear a great deal of those who objected missed out on these first meetings and did not have their voices heard. The team from D.C. stated we would

hear back from them sometime at the end of January and we should expect additional meetings sometime in March to see what the next steps would be.

If the meetings are held in March, it will be paramount that every objector attend the meetings and participate in the process. I ask each of you that know you are an objector to follow Forest Access For All on Facebook to get current information on the process and how to participate.

Again, thank you to all that participated.

John George
Bates

GUEST EDITORIAL

Impeachment talk largely premature

Editorial from The Chicago Tribune:

The impeachment rumbles were audible even before the latest filing by federal prosecutors, and the volume has gotten much higher since. When Michael Cohen entered a plea that said he committed a campaign finance felony "at the direction of" Donald Trump, it became clear that the president is in greater jeopardy than ever.

Over the weekend, U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., said, "This criminal must be brought up by the Congress of the United States for impeachment." Rep.-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., a voice of progressives, was asked earlier if that step would be premature and replied, "Not to me."

Nancy Pelosi and other House leaders are not so sure. But a November Politico/Morning Consult poll found that 61 percent of Democratic voters want to see impeachment proceedings commence. Billionaire activist Tom Steyer, who is contemplating a presidential run, has put together an organization called Need to Impeach.

The case for impeachment has become more plausible. In arranging payments to Stormy Daniels and Karen McDougal to keep them from revealing purported affairs with Trump, prosecutors argued, Cohen "deceived the voting public by hiding alleged facts that he believed would have had a substantial effect on the election."

If the claims that Trump ordered the hush payments are true, he is evidently

guilty of a campaign finance crime. But long-standing Justice Department policy is that a sitting president is "constitutionally immune from indictment and criminal prosecution." After he leaves office, a president may face criminal charges. But for the time being, the only remedy for presidential crimes is in the hands of Congress.

The saga of Trump's misdeeds, real or imagined, has been lurid and riveting, and like impatient readers plowing through a murder mystery, many Americans are tempted to jump to conclusions about the ending. It may seem that with all the smoke around the Oval Office, this presidency is bound to go down in flames. But that's far from certain.

Republicans assumed they had the goods on Bill Clinton after a special prosecutor found he lied under oath and obstructed justice to conceal his affair with a White House intern. But the public wasn't persuaded that this wrongdoing justified removal. When the House voted for Clinton's impeachment in 1998, 63 percent of Americans opposed it.

So did this page. "Clinton lied to avoid deep personal embarrassment, not to seize, maintain or subvert the power of the state," we noted, in words that could be applied to the current controversy. Impeachment, we said, "is a constitutional sword meant to be unsheathed only in the gravest, most unusual circumstances and to be wielded only to preserve the security and integrity of

the republic."

The Senate acquitted Clinton; he rose in popularity; and Republicans suffered politically. In many ways, it was a surprising outcome. And yes, there was no suggestion that Clinton had tried to illicitly influence an election. Still the lesson for today is that Americans of all political hues should keep their heads and wait for all the facts to emerge before reaching a judgment.

It may be that the revelations will vindicate Democrats who regard Trump as thoroughly corrupt and dangerous. It may be that what Cohen claims is the most serious credible accusation against Trump — and that it may never be proven. Does Cohen have evidence more convincing than his recollections that Trump was his puppeteer?

If there is strong, abundant evidence that Trump has committed "high crimes" of the sort feared by the Framers, it will come out in due time. If special counsel Robert Mueller and other federal prosecutors are unable to confirm serious wrongdoing that warrant upending the result of the 2016 election, likewise. At that point, Americans can reach fully informed judgments about whether Trump should be impeached and removed from office, or subject to federal prosecution, or both, or neither.

Those who think they already know the truth are only guessing. The investigations are not yet complete. And if Americans have learned anything from the past three years, it's this: The future can always surprise.

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.

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.

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Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

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

State Sen. Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-301, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. District office: P.O. Box 1027, Ontario, OR 97914; 541-889-8866.

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; John Clark, fire 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 Shircliff, 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 5J office boardroom; Andrew Bryan, Kevin Cassidy, Chris Hawkins, Katie Lamb and Julie Huntington.

