

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

A sneaky tax attack

Editorial from *The (Bend) Bulletin*:

Watching the Oregon Legislature, sometimes we sit back and marvel. Think of yourself as clever or inventive? It's hard not to feel small time compared to the way the Legislature sneaks in new ways to fleece taxpayers.

Earlier this year, at the request of Gov. Kate Brown, House Bill 2269 was introduced. It was an innocuous bill about studying ways to fund health care. The bill directed that the Oregon Health Authority would have until Jan. 1, 2020, to come up with some ideas. That was all the bill said.

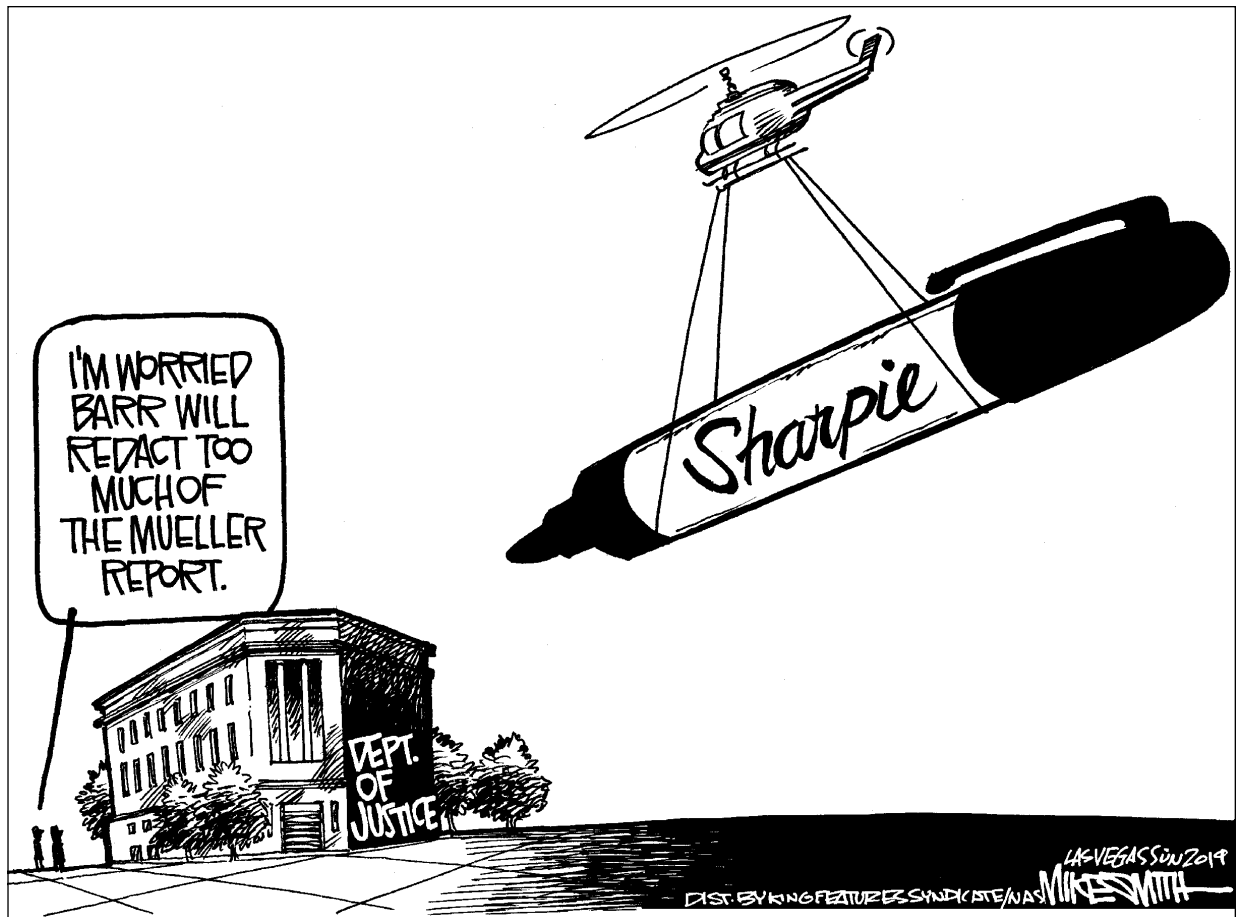
But surprise! It's now becoming a new tax on business that may bring in more than \$500 million to the state. It would tax employers who employ 50 or more people up to about \$1,040 per employee, if they don't already pay that toward the employee's health care. And it won't be elected officials in the Legislature who will set up the details of how the program will work, so Oregonians could hold them accountable. It will be set up, instead, by a board appointed by Gov. Brown.

Also this session there is House Bill 2975. The bill doesn't say it reduces the kicker — the tax rebate Oregonians are set to receive. The legislative analysis didn't say the bill reduces the kicker. When it was debated in committee, reducing the kicker didn't even come up. It passed out of committee as nothing more than a routine budget adjustment.

But the bill reduces the state's estimated kicker by about \$108 million from what it was at about \$749 million. That means kicker tax rebate checks sent to Oregonians will be less. The bill passed the House and the Senate on the strength of support from Democrats. It now awaits action by Gov. Kate Brown.

Where was the opportunity for Oregonians to sound off about how they felt about cutting their tax rebate?

Democrats in the Legislature apparently don't care. They just want the power to decide how to spend more taxpayer money.



Your views

Keep sexual, gender identity topics out of schools' health education standards

It has been brought to my attention that Oregon schools are planning on educating our 5-year-old students in sexual and gender identity in their proposed health education standards. Yep, starting kindergarten and up to 6th grade they are proposing to expose our kids to this "gender identity" garbage. Did you know about this? Was it ever announced?

I watch, in horror, as kids commit suicide in ever increasing numbers each year, use violence in schools and become addicted to drugs/alcohol. We stand in awe and blame everything but the source. Social media has become the "schoolyard bully" and now we want to pile even more garbage onto our kids with this? Kids need to be kids and more concerned about real education and develop the skills necessary for later in life. Not confused and questioning their own sexuality. Such nonsense doesn't belong in our schools. If parents feel the need to teach this matter, do so in the privacy of the home. Don't force our teachers who are burdened enough already.

As a teacher, I would refuse to force this upon our children.

We've become so fearful of exposing our kids to Christian beliefs in our schools we've taken God out, and substitute Him with this and nobody questions it? Well I'm offended that my tax dollars are funding this proposed curriculum. Here's some topics from Oregon schools own website for 5-year-olds. "List a variety of ways people

express affection in various types of relationships." "Explain that there are many ways to express gender." "Discuss ways to communicate respectfully with and about all people of all gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations" and many more.

Come on, 5-year-olds? Ridiculous! Is this really a subject we want teachers to be instructing our kids on? I would hope not. Go to the Oregon Department of Education's "common core standards" and see for yourself. Join us at Brooklyn School Library on April 8 at 6 p.m. and voice your opposition. Keep this harmful material out of our elementary schools.

Thomas Wilcoxson
Baker City

Editor's Note: The event at Brooklyn on April 8 is a meeting of the school's Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), at which Betty Palmer, the school district's assistant superintendent, is slated to explain the new state health education standards. School PTOs have no authority over those standards, which are mandated by the state. Residents who want more information about the standards can contact Palmer at the Baker School District office.

Email letters to news@bakercityherald.com

Pondering newspapers' futures — and pasts

I've fielded quite a lot of questions recently about the future of the Baker City Herald and The Observer in La Grande but I've found myself, often as not, pondering instead the newspapers' pasts.

This is no small thing, no small span.

Our legacies are considerable, the history of our businesses as intertwined with our communities' as are mining and logging and farming and ranching.

The Herald traces its lineage to the Bedrock Democrat, which published its first issue on May 11, 1870. That was less than nine years after a group of prospectors discovered gold in a gulch near the present site of Baker City, which itself was started just six years before the Herald's forebear came off the press.

Which means, if I've done the math correctly (or, rather, if I've entered the proper figures into my calculator), that the Herald will celebrate its 150th anniversary a little more than a year from now.

The Observer is only a bit less venerable, with a journalism record dating to 1896.

And so when people ask me, in the tentative way most people use when broaching a potentially unpleasant topic, what I think is going to happen with the newspapers, I inevitably insert "optimistic" into my response.

And I do so in part because all those years and decades carry for me a considerable weight. The notion that these two businesses which have brought news to our communities for more than a century — indeed, for nearly a century and a half in the Herald's case — would cease to chronicle life in



JAYSON JACOBY

our corner of Oregon seems to me improbable, if not unthinkable.

Tragic, certainly.

I understand, of course, that history, no matter how extensive or rich, is no guardian of the future.

When the Herald and The Observer debuted, the livery stable was still a profitable enterprise. But these days you're not going to find a place in downtown Baker City or La Grande or Enterprise suitable for tying up a horse for a couple hours while you visit the mercantile or perhaps slake your thirst with a cold beer.

The world moves on, and businesses once seen as necessary, even immortal, become obsolete.

In the case of the livery stable, and the horse-powered world it represents, the internal combustion engine was responsible for its demise.

Some would argue that the internet and its many digital tentacles will do — indeed, are already doing — to newspapers and other "traditional" media what the gas-fueled automobile and tractor did to the owners of livery stables and the makers of buggy whips (and of course buggies).

But when I compare the two I don't see anything like a parallel case.

That the internal combustion engine was an improvement over the horse in every way (except, I suppose, possibly the aesthetic, depending on whether your nose

prefers the earthy odor of dung over the sharp scent of distilled petroleum) is beyond dispute.

Yet I have seen nothing to convince me that the supposed digital replacements for newspapers — Facebook pages and their ilk — even in the most generous definition constitute an ersatz substitute.

I don't question their popularity, to be sure. That ubiquitous blue lower-case "f" occupies my computer and smartphone screens too.

But I shudder at the prospect of having to rely solely on any online source, with their anonymity-fueled exaggerations and infantile character assassinations, to tell me what my city council or school board is up to.

The only digital exceptions to this, in my view, are the websites that newspapers themselves, including the Herald and The Observer, produce — electronic replicas of the quality journalism we print on paper three days each week.

The ultimate proof of the continuing relevance and popularity of our newspapers, I believe, is that both remain profitable despite the immense technological changes that the internet era has brought.

I understand why readers are curious about the future of the Herald and The Observer. It is a natural reaction after reading last week that our parent company, Western Communications, just a couple months after making a Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing, now is trying to sell its newspapers.

The key word here, though, is "sell."

You sell only things that have value, of course — and the Herald and The Observer are valuable.

I mean this in two ways.

There is the monetary value, and it reflects the willingness of businesses to pay us to advertise their products and services in our pages. They do this because you, and our thousands of other subscribers, are willing to pay us to learn what's happening in their communities.

This has been the case, for the Herald, almost as far back as the Civil War. And it has continued to be so, for both newspapers, through wars and droughts and depressions, a role we have played with the reliability of August's torrid heat and the October yellowing of the tamaracks, a consistency which has few, if any, peers.

But our newspapers are also valuable in ways that can't be quantified in dollars and cents or even in years, but which are, I believe, equally and perhaps even more important than the numbers on a spreadsheet or a calendar.

The Herald and The Observer represent the heart, rendered in ink and paper, of the communities whose people and businesses and institutions we have followed and described and narrated for so long in ways that generate laughter and tears, agreement and hearty, respectful dissent.

There is no better way to appreciate this awesome span than to walk the room-spanning rows of volumes that bind every issue of our publications over many decades (the collections, alas, are not complete, as archiving during the 19th century was not as thorough).

There are hundreds of these books and each is quite a stout thing, requiring considerable effort to pry it from between its neighbors and lug its barbell-like weight to a

table.

(And a wide table it should be, as each volume stands about as tall as a kindergarten.)

The sheer volume of information that the newspapers have compiled confounds my ability to comprehend. I feel a trifle fuzzy in the head when I ponder it, as I do when I try to understand the number of stars and galaxies in the universe.

The numbers in this case don't require so many digits, of course. But it is still an immense chronicle. Imagine how many thousands of people appear in this long and continuing story, how many of their triumphs and tragedies, how many games won and lost, how many faces smiling on the front page, how many lives bookended with a birth announcement and an obituary in the very same newspaper, the former typed by a reporter who like as not had already gone to the grave by the time the latter was printed.

The Herald and The Observer were there for it all.

And through it all we have depended, as a person depends on oxygen, on our communities.

I'd like to believe their residents feel the same about the newspapers. I previously referred to the papers as "ours" and I mean that in the best and the purest sense of the word. I chose that all-inclusive pronoun because I believe the newspapers, in the most elemental way, belong to us all, as do the other persistent institutions, the schools and churches and libraries, without which a town is just a place.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.