

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Gun storage measure confusing

No responsible gun owner would object to the basic premise that guns should be stored in a way designed to ensure that nobody who shouldn't have access to the guns will have.

The National Rifle Association, no fan of restrictions on gun owners, emphasizes safe handling and storage of firearms. One of the NRA's gun safety rules puts it this way: "Store guns so they are not accessible to unauthorized persons."

This is basically the ostensible purpose behind a ballot measure that Oregonians could vote on in November 2020 if supporters gather sufficient signatures.

But that measure, No. 40, also includes some provisions that seem intended more to discourage people from owning guns at all, than to prompt them to safely store their firearms.

Section 1 of the measure requires gun owners to "secure" all firearms, or face potential fines.

The measure defines a "secure" gun as one with an engaged trigger lock or cable lock, or that is stored in a "locked container, equipped with a tamper-resistant lock."

The measure also calls for the Oregon Health Authority to adopt temporary rules by Jan. 1, 2021, setting minimum specifications for those locks and containers, and to adopt permanent rules for those specifications by July 1, 2021.

Using locks, or locked containers, is a legitimate, and common, way for gun owners to secure their firearms.

But the measure would also impose on gun owners a much more stringent, and potentially unrealistic, legal standard.

It reads in part: "... a firearm is not secured if a key, combination or other means of opening a lock or container is readily available to a person the owner or possessor has not authorized to carry or control the firearm."

The key phrases in the preceding sentence are "or other means" and "readily available."

If we're going to require gun owners to secure guns with locks, it's sensible to also ensure that they keep track of the keys, or combinations, that open those locks.

But mandating, at penalty of law, that gun owners also ensure that nobody can have "other means" to access a locked gun is such a broad requirement that in effect it means if anybody gets your gun, by any means, it's your fault, legally speaking.

What if the "other means" is a pair of bolt cutters, an item that's "readily available" at any hardware store?

The measure also states that "space within a vehicle" does not qualify as a container that meets the requirement for "secure" storage. This ignores the growing availability of lockable storage spaces, particularly in pickup trucks, which could be nearly as secure as a locked container inside a home.

The measure's section regarding transferring firearms to a person younger than 18 is also ambiguous. It requires that "a person who transfers a firearm to a minor shall directly supervise the minor's use of the firearm," yet the same section also states that the requirement doesn't apply to the transfer of a firearm "that is owned by the minor."

It's not clear how a person can transfer a gun to a minor who already owns that gun — or more to the point, why this would be a "transfer."

Measure 40's backers have good intentions, but the initiative doesn't deserve voters' support as written.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



We can afford Medicare for all

Democratic presidential candidates Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders have struggled to explain how they would pay for "Medicare for all."

This is puzzling. A single-payer approach like Medicare for all can reduce overall health spending. Other wealthy countries that have universal coverage spend far less on healthcare than the United States as a share of their gross domestic product. A lack of money is not the problem. That's why it should not be difficult to devise a way to pay for Medicare for all to benefit the vast majority of us, particularly low- and middle-income earners.

Canada has such a system, which should cast doubt on all the naysayers who claim that it is impossible or ruinous. Canada, with a single-payer system, spends half of what we do on health care and gets better results. Britain, France, Australia and Japan, all with universal health care, also spend less than half of what we spend per capita and get better results.

Medicare for all is widely expected to cost about \$3 trillion a year. The government — through Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP and various other programs — already pays more than \$1.5 trillion of this health care bill. Private insurance and out-of-pocket costs account for another roughly \$1.5 trillion. Going to Medicare for all would increase the budget of the government by about \$1.5 trillion a year.

STEPHEN MARKS

Here are some ideas on how to fund it:

End the cap on payroll taxes and apply payroll taxes to all income, including interest and capital gains. This will not have a significant effect on anyone whose income is less than \$132,900, the current cap, and will raise about \$1.5 trillion. Those making somewhat above the current cap will end up paying a bit more, but they will not have to pay health insurance premiums or out-of-pocket medical expenses and will come out ahead.

Large employers now pay on average \$6,000 per employee for individual health insurance and \$14,000 per employee for family health insurance. Many smaller employers pay similar rates, as do the self-employed. Let's suppose that we tax all employers \$5,000 per year per employee and relieve them of the burden of providing employee insurance. Most come out way ahead. This raises about \$650 billion.

Elizabeth Warren's proposal of a 2% wealth tax on wealth over \$50 million would raise another \$250 billion a year. Her proposed corporate tax on off-shore earnings would raise \$100 billion a year by requiring companies like Amazon to pay taxes on their worldwide

income.

Finally, if Canada, spending less than half of U.S. expenditures on health care, has better health outcomes, that suggests there are savings to be had. Let's be conservative. Suppose a Medicare for all system can help the U.S. cut total health spending by 20%. That would save us \$600 billion — and still leave us with the highest per person health care spending in the world.

If we add all of these together, that would be more than \$3 trillion in additional revenues or savings per year, well over the \$1.5 trillion in additional government spending necessary to fund Medicare for all.

None of this would increase the burden on the middle class or the poor. Indeed, without insurance premiums and out-of-pocket expenses, their overall costs would fall dramatically. And none of this puts an excessive burden on the rich. Corporations would reap huge savings. And all Americans would get health care, with enough left to invest in other health, wellness and education programs.

Other ideas may be even more attractive. These simply demonstrate that we can have Medicare for all without ruining the economy or raising taxes on middle- and low-income earners. Let's do it.

Stephen Marks is an economist and professor of law at Boston University School of Law.

Your views

Baker City Fire Department should continue as ambulance provider

We are gravely concerned with the potential of changing Baker City ambulance service to a contractor instead of continuing the excellent service provided by Baker Fire Department. We support continuing to use the Baker Fire Department for the ambulance service.

We observed contracted ambulance attendants recently in another community care for a family member. They were scheduled for transport from a hospital to a treatment facility and return. They were very late, nearly causing our family member to lose his appointment. He was in a great deal of pain and very cold. They were not respectful of his condition, handled him poorly, did not provide a blanket

or protection from the weather (raining) during transport, and worst of all, they did not know where they were going and missed the location several times. We made a complaint, but the community said that this was the only ambulance service available and they were contracted. We have not used the current Baker City Fire Department ambulance service, but know friends that have. They are reported to be very prompt, caring and careful with the patients. They certainly know where they are going as well.

Another significant reason to keep the ambulance service with the Fire Department is that it allows the Fire Department to keep the permanent staff they currently have. This helps our community twofold; by keeping qualified firefighters on hand that are also trained as paramedics. We get

more bang for our bucks this way plus we continue to employ folks that live in and contribute to our community. Also, if a private ambulance company takes over then the city fire department will most likely lose much of their capabilities for fire suppression and rescue due to reduced staff.

Baker Fire Department staff are dedicated employees that provide important professional services, both medical and fire suppression, as well as fire prevention education and other services. Baker Fire Department staff have knowledge of the people who live here and where the medical services are located.

Please support keeping the ambulance service with the Baker Fire Department.

Dorothy and Bob Mason
Baker City

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