

Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Oregon's budget surprise

Oregon's September economic forecast was a big surprise: Instead of a coronavirus-caused \$1 billion shortfall, the state predicts to end the 2019-21 budget with a leftover pile \$1.7 billion high.

A COVID-19 boom? We are not so lucky. The seemingly good numbers conceal two pieces of disturbing news.

The first is: High-income households were spared by the pandemic. It hit low-wage sectors of the economy the worst.

Josh Lehner, Oregon state economist, and others crunched some Oregon data, and the preliminary findings were "that low-wage workers in high-wage industries are the ones being laid off there, while high-wage workers in low-wage industries have been spared to a great degree. Regardless of industry, workers earning lower wages have borne almost the entire recession." That would mirror what is happening nationally.

The second is no less worrisome. Oregon's state spending is expected to grow faster than government revenue. Unless something changes, Oregon is anticipated to face a structural deficit. State spending goes up every two years by 13% to 15%, and revenue has only been going up by 8%.

Wildfires and the pandemic will increase state spending. But much of the increase in spending is also related to increasing personnel costs. State employees are getting raises — some \$200 million. Total pay increases will be 15% on average. Those are step increases as well as cost of living increases. The increases were approved before the pandemic began. Whether you believe they are deserved or not, they will put more pressure on Oregon's Public Employees Retirement System, which already is struggling to keep up with obligations to pay future benefits. PERS was more than \$20 billion behind before the new raises.

Where might the state's Democratic leadership go to get more money? Provide incentives for business to grow? No. The default Oregon answer is taxes.

One target might be zapping the new state tax cuts automatically copied from the federal coronavirus relief bill. Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, and House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, had them on their list. The tax breaks were estimated to cost the state \$225 million. The tax breaks do things such as eliminating the cap on business losses that taxpayers can deduct. An argument for getting rid of them is that they primarily benefit wealthier taxpayers. An argument for keeping them is they help businesses stay afloat during the pandemic.

A handful of other states that automatically copy federal tax breaks into state code have stripped the tax breaks. Will Oregon be next?

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.

OTHER VIEWS

Best defense against disinformation? Look in the mirror

(Minneapolis) Star Tribune:

Deploying disinformation as well as other asymmetric tactics, Russia attacked America's 2016 election. "Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate Secretary (Hillary) Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump," according to a 2017 report from the director of national intelligence.

In 2020, Russians have returned. And they've got company: China, which the National Counterintelligence and Security Center believes

prefers Joe Biden, and Iran are also trying to degrade our democracy. "Foreign states will continue to use covert and overt influence measures in their attempts to sway U.S. voters' preferences and perspectives, shift U.S. policies, increase discord in the United States, and undermine the American people's confidence in our democratic process," according to an NCSC statement. With these three nations "all seeking greater influence online, the dynamic somewhat resembles a Cold War arms race, but with information rather than missiles as the weapon," Sarah Kreps, a Brookings Institution senior fellow, wrote in an analysis. "Whether the United States has learned how to guard against these

weapons, and their evolving use, remains far from clear."

Part of the guard is government, which has mostly focused on preventing an election hack. But less has been done to blunt the insidious internet meddling from foreign forces or even deliberate disinformation from homegrown groups. Sure, some social media companies have mitigated the impact. Facebook, for instance, announced Sept. 24 that it was taking down three disinformation networks with ties to Russia's military and intelligence agencies. But for the most part, social media sites have reacted after the damage is done.

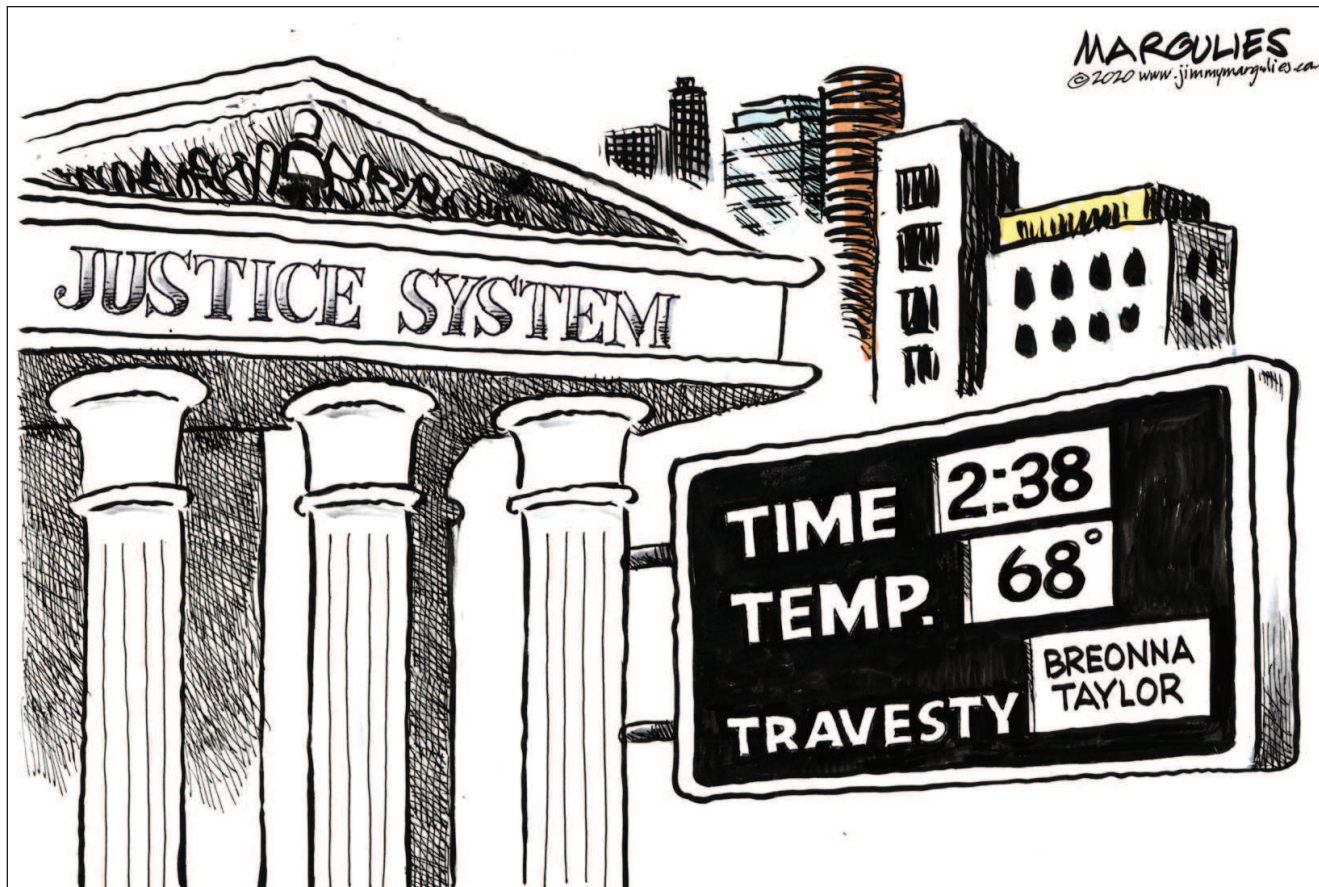
Since these institutions can't do it alone, individuals are the best

line of disinformation defense. But unfortunately, it turns out that we're not always that good at it. That's the conclusion from a study by the Reboot Foundation that states, "People are overconfident about their media literacy skills, and they believe that they have more skills than they actually do. For all age groups, determining the reliability of websites is problematic." Especially social media. Even among moderate and light users, "the more time spent on social media, the worse the user's news judgment."

So sound judgment on media choice is important in imparting facts. What works best? According to the Pew Research Center, which ranked respondents on correct answers to

29 fact-based questions, the highest political knowledge is seen by those who "use a news website or app as the most common way" to get political and election news. That figure, at 45% "high political knowledge" and 31% "middle political knowledge," is followed by radio (42% high/34% middle), print (41%/29%), cable TV (35%/29%), network TV (29%/35%), social media (17%/27%) and local TV (10%/21%).

Emphasizing professionally produced news (even delivered via social media) isn't self-serving but democracy preserving, as Americans need to be on guard that they don't advance adversaries' attacks on the 2020 election.



Your views

Vote yes on Measure 110: It's a humane approach

I want your readers to know that I can hold my 230-pound, 6-foot-2 son in the palm of my hand. Why? Because what's left of him fills half of a ziplock bag. On April 13, 2015, my son, Ryan Culley, was successful in his suicide attempt. He had run out of hope. He had no job, no prospects of finding even a minimal employment, had lost contact with his children, and lived by the grace of his parents and friends.

Many parents in Oregon have children who have lost hope and chosen to make such a drastic decision. I still wonder today if my son would be alive if Oregon had stopped stigmatizing people with mental health and addiction issues and instead had provided better access to services. That's why I support Measure 110.

Oregon's drug laws are antiquated. Instead of helping people who struggle with addiction, we punish them, give them criminal records, send them to jail, stigmatize them. It's cruel, ineffective and expensive. Criminal records and punishments only make it harder for people with serious mental health and addiction issues.

Measure 110 on the November ballot is a way to help address the imbalance of Oregon's current drug laws. Measure 110 won't legalize drugs, but it will shift us to a health-based approach, where people are offered treatment instead of jail. Measure 110 doesn't create a new tax. The money to pay for it will come from existing taxes on marijuana.

Please join me in voting Yes on Measure 110. It's a more humane and effective approach.

Jorja Culley
Baker City

Letters to the editor

We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. 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.

Voters have a clear choice this year: Use it wisely

It doesn't make any difference whether you are a Democrat, a Republican or an Independent voter in the upcoming presidential election. It all comes down to two options. First, do you want the country to continue to be a capitalist government and enjoy our many freedoms we enjoy, our high standard of living and freedom of worship? Or do you want a socialist state with the many restrictions placed on individual freedoms and eventually end up like another Venezuela, Cuba, Russia, China, etc.? The choice is yours ... vote wisely!

Gary McManus
Baker City

Thoughts to consider about racial injustice in U.S.

The following continues on the same theme as my last opinion piece (Sept. 8), in which I wrote about slaves who worked in the households of several antebellum U.S. presidents, and about slaves who helped build the White House and the Capitol building, without receiving any compensation for his/her labor.

One of those presidents was slaveholder James Madison, our fourth president. He told a visitor from Britain that "he could make \$257 on every Negro in a year, and spend only \$12 or \$13 on his keep." (Howard Zinn, "A People's His-

tory of the United States: 1492-Present." Zinn's book would be enlightened reading for every person who serves in Congress.)

Another of those presidents was slaveholder Thomas Jefferson, our third president, author of the Declaration of Independence, wherein we find this statement:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

There follows a long list of grievances, many of which would apply to Black slaves. Unlike the successful rebellion of the colonies against Britain, slave rebellions were quickly subdued, frequently with execution of the leaders.

The whole Winter 2019 edition of the "Oregon Historical Quarterly" was devoted to the topic "White Supremacy & Resistance." On pages 466-467 are reproduced two rough-draft passages from Jefferson's "Notes on the State of Virginia" (1781-1785) written in his own hand. The OHQ editors summarize the passages thus:

"The excerpts below describe Blacks as naturally inferior to Whites, which became the very basis for White supremacy policies underlying 'manifest destiny' claims of the pioneer generation. Jefferson goes on to describe Blacks as not feeling grief, at least not for long, allowing him to escape the guilt of enslaving humans, even if he considered them naturally inferior."

Some things to consider during the present demonstrations taking place about racial justice and equality in America.

Comments welcome at tubingeneoni.com.

Gary Dielman
Baker City

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

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