

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Going bonkers on taxing beer, wine

If you brew beer or make wine in Oregon, the past year has been a challenge.

It could hardly be otherwise, what with bars and restaurants, the places where many people prefer to enjoy Oregon-made beverages, being closed or severely restricted for much of the past 12 months.

Proponents of House Bill 3296, which is under consideration in the Oregon Legislature, are offering as a treatment for these economic wounds a hefty dose of salt.

The bill would boost state taxes on beer by almost 2,700%, and on wine by nearly 1,500%.

Or to put the proposed tax hikes in a perspective that's perhaps easier to comprehend than four-digit percentage boosts, the tax on a 31-gallon barrel of beer would rise from \$2.60 to \$72.60. The tax on wine would increase from 65 cents per gallon to \$10 per gallon.

John Harris, founder and brewmaster for Ecliptic Brewing in Portland, branded the proposed tax increase as both "ludicrous" and "bonkersville."

Harris obviously has a particular bias.

But his description — including coining a noun not found in most dictionaries — is hardly inappropriate given the scale of the proposed tax hikes.

The basic purpose of House Bill 3296 has merit.

The state would use the new tax revenue to expand its addiction treatment programs, including building detoxification centers and residential treatment centers.

Proponents, including Mike Marshall, executive director of Oregon Recovers, which helped write the bill, also say the tax increase, by boosting the price of beer and wine, would cut back on underage and binge drinking.

This claim isn't compelling, considering that even more dramatic actions by the government — recall the failed experiment known as Prohibition — didn't exactly result in a drier society.

Using taxes on alcohol to deal with some of the societal problems that it contributes to is sensible.

But imposing tax increases so exorbitant that they almost certainly would harm an industry that has brought economic benefits to rural parts of Oregon, including Baker County, as well as its urban centers, isn't justified.

Passing House Bill 3296 would be a Pyrric victory given that it almost certainly would doom some businesses. Breweries that don't brew and wineries that stop fermenting grapes don't pay alcohol taxes.

House Bill 3296 can provoke a discussion in the Legislature about beer and wine taxes and the state's role in dealing with alcohol addiction and its associated problems.

But it doesn't deserve to become a law.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joe Biden: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

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. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 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.

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Your views

Cooperation between Baker brewers is enlightening

In the face of what might be termed a national cultural divide, I found it most inspiring to read a story about enlightened cooperation here at home ("Bullish on the Beer Business in Baker," Baker City Herald, Feb. 23).

According to your article, when Kevin Multop opens his brewery and tap house in Baker City this year, he will be offering us a craft beer product he loves in a city he loves.

But, at the same time, his North Seven Brewing will be placed in what might appear to be direct competition with our outstanding Barley Brown's Tap House. Will there be still more division?

Not at all. Instead, Tyler Brown has been "...very gracious and inviting," according to Multop. "He's been awesome, he and his team."

Brown said he "...welcomed Multop, and offered to help him in any way possible." And, "I look forward to having Kevin as another alternative in town. It's one more reason for people to stop in Baker and spend some time."

I'd say we're lucky to be given the lofty perspective of people following their dreams with a mutually supportive attitude for the betterment of all.

To me, this is a win-win vision worth taking to heart and spreading around.

Marshall McComb
Baker City

Baker City should have equal say in spending lodging taxes

I am pleased that County Commissioners voted unanimously to extend the Baker County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau's operational contract through August, during the Commission's Wednesday, March 3rd meeting. This is a positive action, and keeping the Chamber — which is funded with Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) money — where it is, with Shelly Cutler firmly at the helm, is good management. Cutler has done a great job, and will continue to serve the community and visitors well.

Having said that, there are numerous issues with the processes associated with contract Request for Proposals (RFPs), TLT administration, and committee and board member conflicts of interests and actions. These require continuous monitoring, review, and changes where necessary, as past and recent events have clearly proven.

Any contract for another entity to take over Chamber operations that involves potential or realized legal or ethical issues, as well as business conflicts of interest — one of the issues brought to light recently — should not be considered or approved. Cutler voiced concerns about the future of the Chamber, because she had valid reasons to do so. The Chamber and Visitors Bureau needs to remain in its highly visible and accessible location, with live people operating it — something you cannot

replace with a machine.

Administration of TLT funds has caused a major debate recently. At the very least, the City should have an equal say in TLT funds administration, since about three-quarters of the tax money is collected from guests who pay that extra fee to city lodging businesses. To allow the County full control of TLT fund administration was, and is poor management — similar to a minor shareholder taking over control of a whole company, which makes little sense. The City/County board that County Commissioners have proposed during the March 3rd meeting to provide oversight to TLT administration and other concerns is one small step in the process.

Todd Arriola
Baker City

The Equality Act, passed by the House, is far from equal

The Equality Act, just passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and now headed to the Senate is far from equal!

It is especially unequal for women and girls. Boys would be allowed in girls' sports, in girls' locker rooms, men in women's shelters, and men in women's prisons.

It would force teachers and students to publicly pretend that a biological male is a female. Schools will be coerced to instruct children to individually choose to be a boy or a girl, or neither, or both, making biological sex (and science) a relic of the past.

Businesses, ministries and organizations would be forced to hire people who have no passion for the business, beliefs, teachings or mission.

Health professionals, doctors and counselors would be forced to engage in gender transition treatments such as hormone-blocking, cross-sex hormones, or surgery. Catholic and other faith-based hospitals would have to do the same. In many cases taxpayers would be held accountable for the associated costs.

It would be a government tool to deny or threaten accreditation to any college or university that does not satisfy the demands as applied to sexual orientation and gender identity in dorms, sports, places of privacy, and even teachings and could threaten the availability of federal student loans and grants at certain disfavored schools.

People could be fined or lose their jobs for using the wrong names or pronouns and empower the government to interfere with how regular Americans think, speak, act at home, at school, at work and at play. Any bill promoting such authoritarianism is a danger to our nation and our basic freedoms as contained in the Bill of Rights.

The impact of this legislation is immense. We must not remain silent and accept what we know is wrong — especially when we have the power to do something about it!

The Equality Act will come up for a vote in the U.S. Senate soon. Call

friends and family in other states to inform them. Call your senators today asking them to vote No on the Equality Act. In Oregon: Senator Wyden 202-224-5244; Senator Merkley 202-224-3753. You can also call the U.S. Capitol switchboard (202) 224-3121, and be connected with any Senate office. Please let the White House know your strong opposition to this bill. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/TheWhiteHousephone>; 202-456-1111.

John and Susie Busch
Baker City

River Democracy Act could close access to vital minerals

These are my comments and warnings on Senators Wyden and Merkley's SB 192, the River Democracy Act, under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

About 40 years ago the Oregon Department of Geology discovered rare earth elements in the Columbia River basalts. The Columbia River basalts takes in a large portion of Oregon east of the Cascades Mountains clear into Idaho.

What are rare earths (REES)? Almost everyone has a smartphone. Ask Google, it will tell you there are 17 naturally occurring REES. These are broken down into heavy and lights, and it will tell you what they are used for, all the way from our F-35 fighter planes to your smartphone, windmills, cars, etc.

Ever since 2010 when Japan seized one of China's fishing boats, China closed all shipments of REES to Japan. We miners in the Blue Mountains of Oregon got curious, so we started having some assays done which we have several reports on our tailings (metal that is left after the gold is taken out), and we found REES oxides in all 17 REES in paying quantities, but to our disappointment we found there is not one single processing mill in the U.S. That is why we have to rely on China for almost 100% of our REES. I understand there are going to be some processing mills coming on line in the near future, that we can send our concentrates to.

Now under the River Democracy Act, there will be 4,700 miles of waterways that are qualified with a one-half-mile closed on each side of the river. Now a lot of those acres are in the gold belt of the Blue Mountains in Eastern Oregon.

Now Senators Wyden and Merkley knew of these REES, or should have known before SB 192 as a national survey was done in 2018 of critical minerals in conjunction with the USGS (executive order 13817 and secretarial order S03359).

Now if Wyden and Merkley are so set on closing these river corridors off, and we rely on almost 100% of our REES coming from China, I would say that they are close to committing a treasonous act.

Ed Hardt
Baker City

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 will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.
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