

## OUR VIEW

Oregon  
targeting  
businesses

Oregon Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden worked in the waning days of the Trump administration to ensure the federal government would not hammer struggling businesses that received Paycheck Protection Act loans.

Thanks, in part to their work, it's been made clear: Forgiven PPP loans will not count as income on federal taxes. And even expenses paid with a PPP loan are deductible on federal taxes.

But Oregon legislators may do things differently. An amendment to House Bill 2457 seeks to tax the federally forgiven PPP loans.

PPP loans were designed by Congress to keep struggling businesses alive and their employees employed. It would be a sucker punch for the state to try to grab it. Why would that be OK? Haven't Oregon businesses suffered enough?

To make matters worse, it's not clear which legislator or legislators introduced this amendment. That is not identified in legislative documents. Why the secrecy? Oregonians need to be able to hold their legislators accountable. At least, legislators won't get away with hiding who votes for the amendment. We will be watching.

We should be clear that the company that owns the Baker City Herald received a PPP loan. So did thousands of other Oregon businesses. And the PPP program has received some criticism. It was put in place quickly. Some businesses who needed the help had trouble getting the help. It's been argued others that didn't deserve help got it.

But it's reprehensible that the state would attempt to raid money to keep Oregonians employed and allow businesses to avoid collapse. Oregon already taxes some businesses even if they don't make a profit under the state's corporate activity tax, so maybe some legislators think plundering the PPP is fair game. Do you?

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## 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.
- 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). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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## Improving civics education

By **Trudy Rubin**

Anyone who wondered, during this past annus horribilis, whether many Americans no longer grasped the meaning of democracy, could find plenty of stats to back that dismal conclusion.

In 2018 only around a third of Americans could pass a basic U.S. citizenship test modeled on the one required of immigrants for naturalization, according to a survey released by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship foundation. And that was before the Trump administration made the immigration test harder.

And in 2019, the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania found that only 39% of American adults could name all three branches of our federal government. In 2020, that number jumped to 51%, perhaps because the first impeachment of Donald Trump provided a short course in civics.

But as antidemocratic trends threaten our country, this level of civic ignorance has revived bipartisan interest in civic education. Sens. Chris Coons, D-Del., and John Cornyn, R-Texas, have just introduced the Civics Secures Democracy Act, which would fund educators, nonprofits, and state agencies to strengthen civics education for K-12 students. The idea is to ensure sustained federal support for civics curriculum developed by districts and states.

Before this bipartisan bill gets bogged down by partisan attacks, I suggest all sides take a look at Germany's deep experience with civic education, and the role it plays in combating extremism and racism. There are important lessons to be learned.

"Germany has a long tradition of civic education," I was told by Daniel Koehler, director of the German Institute on Radicalization and De-radicalization Studies in Stuttgart. Given the country's history of fascism, the German federal democracy set a goal of "spreading basic knowledge of democracy, rule of law, and history of past conflicts," Koehler said.

"We call it political education, and it

is very established in our primary and secondary schools, including a history of the Shoah [Holocaust], the reign of the Nazis and national socialism, and World Wars I and II. When I went to school we had to visit several concentration camps."

Beyond Germany's particular history, political education includes the basics of "how democracy works, how a law is made, how elections work, and why democracy today is the way it is," says Koehler. That includes discussing democracy's current problems in Germany and elsewhere. (Civic education, available for adults and kids, hasn't prevented actions by far-right extremists. But it well may have contributed to sliding support for the far-right Alternative for Deutschland party, which won 12.6% of votes in the last federal election.)

And here is the most critical part for Americans to ponder: Germany has a Federal Agency for Civic Education, along with civic education centers in each of its 16 states, that is considered nonpartisan. That means they focus on producing books, workshops, and materials for teachers based on "the values ... in our constitution," says Koehler.

Teaching materials are augmented by a vast array of nongovernmental organizations, including foundations funded by each political party. There is a strong focus on the need for pluralism, and lessons on how to tell fake news from real.

Sound too good to be true? Koehler says not. "There is no partisan conflict over [federal and state] civic education centers," he says. "They are more or less independent in choosing their topics, and have academic expert advisory groups." Each state, he adds, "has its own focus points, different culture and political issues, but they try to follow the basic template."

However, and here comes the key: "What is controversial in society must be presented as controversial," explains Koehler. In other words, students must be presented with all sides of a controversy and then given the chance to argue it out in the classroom.

"The idea is so they can make their own views. There must be no conversion on political issues. This protects political education from political overreach."

Is such a concept even imaginable in today's America? In the last months of 2020 the Trump administration called for "patriotic education." His presidential "1776 commission" promoted a "pro-American" civic curriculum that would downplay the role of slavery in American history. President Joe Biden has already disbanded the commission as overtly political.

Yet the fact remains that as of 2018, only nine states and the District of Columbia required a full year of civics. (In 2018, the Pennsylvania legislature passed a vague act requiring schools to give one civics test between grades 7-12 that could be based on the citizenship test for immigrants.)

Led by Judge Marjorie Rendell, Philadelphia's Rendell Center has had the brilliant idea of holding mock trials in elementary classrooms based on characters in the literature the kids are reading; the students play lawyers, judge, and jury. A great way for youngsters to learn the meaning of rule of law, but dependent on teachers having the will and time to integrate the trials into their curriculum.

To go wider, there needs to be political consensus and funding for civic education that teaches kids about the meaning and value of democratic institutions — with all their warts and historic baggage.

And that hopefully incorporates the German approach of letting kids debate the controversies.

If Sens. Coons and Cornyn (with White House backing) can convince the public that civic ed is possible, without partisan hysteria, they will truly deserve the country's thanks.

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## OTHER VIEWS

## U.S. Capitol security must project strength, not fear

**Editorial from Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:**

The sanctity and security of the U.S. Capitol has not been breached since that woeful day in January. But whispers and threats circulate in dark corners of the internet, and a nation remains on edge.

Lawmakers, Capitol Police, the National Guard, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, all are vigilant. Security fencing and razor wire continue to slash across this country's seat of democracy. A clear message has been sent: "We are ready for the next attack."

This message does not quite hit the mark. Rather, our country should exemplify the words of President Theodore Roosevelt: "Speak softly and carry a big stick."

We must encourage the appearance of business as usual, all the while preparing — being

prepared — to intervene in any further disruptions to and within our seat of government.

The events of Jan. 6 will remain etched in this country's memory forever. It is part of our history now. Lawmakers and citizens are understandably shaken.

Nonetheless, we are called to be mindful of the fact that the Capitol is not under siege. Two months after the fact, the Capitol should not continue to look like an armed encampment. Playing literal and symbolic defense every day unwittingly plays into the hands of those who thought they could influence politics and policy with violence. To change the look and feel of our nation's capital is to the detriment of our ideals. The obvious physical presence of heightened security measures — heightened fear — does not mesh with the

aura we want to emanate from the heart of our country.

A bulking up of security is justifiable, especially given the spike in threats against lawmakers, as reported by Capitol Police. And Jan. 6 response protocols required review and revision. Indeed, intelligence and security leaders have combed through the flawed decision-making processes that left the Capitol vulnerable. The Capitol Police's chief during the riots resigned on Jan. 7. The acting chief, Yogananda Pittman, has called for an increase in the number of analysts and officers on staff and the creation of a dedicated "stand-ready" force, 80 officers strong, equipped to respond to emergencies at any time. The department has ordered additional protective gear.

What's more, the delays that prevented

National Guard troops from arriving on-scene quickly enough to assist the overwhelmed Capitol Police are (rightly) under sharp scrutiny. And communications issues that kept the FBI's warnings about the mob's potential for violence from being properly disseminated are certainly being intensely examined, as well.

Evaluation and adjustment: These are commonsense moves. An ever-present show of force is too much. The goal should be to be "prepared" but "behind the scenes."

Roosevelt was speaking about foreign policy when he coined the "big stick" approach, but the general idea is applicable. His figurative "big stick" was quiet and invisible strength. Not security fences. Not armed officers. Not a uniformed military force. We want solid security at the ready, not in plain sight.