

OUR VIEW

Tax by gallon
or by the mile?

In 1919, Oregon was the first state to charge a tax per gallon of gas. And the state could be one of the first to charge everyone by miles driven.

Oregon's gas tax is scheduled to climb from 36 cents a gallon up to 40 cents in 2024. But the state's gas tax revenue is almost certainly heading into a permanent swan dive. It won't be enough to keep up the state's roads and bridges. Vehicles are getting more and more miles to the gallon. And electric or other alternatives are going to slowly replace them.

The Oregon solution is pay as you go, not pay per gallon. You can sign up for it now. OReGO participants pay 1.8 cents a mile. They get fuel tax credits based on gas consumption. Very few Oregonians are enrolled — about 700 — because the immediate benefits are limited.

House Bill 2342 tries to hit the accelerator for OReGO. It imposes a mandatory per-mile road usage charge for registered owners and lessees of passenger vehicles of model year 2027 or later that have a rating of 30 miles per gallon or greater. It would begin on July 1, 2026.

That makes sense, in some ways. The question is: Does it provide the right incentives? What's the goal?

One goal is to ensure there is enough revenue to keep the state's roads and bridges repaired. This bill could help with that.

Another goal, for some, is to encourage Oregonians to drive more fuel efficient vehicles or more electric vehicles. Better for the environment.

The gas tax already does it. This bill doesn't really do much. There would be an added elimination of title registration fees under the bill. But if the goal is to give Oregonians a nudge, this bill adds a perverse incentive — new charges on more fuel efficient vehicles.

The bill could be altered so the pay as you go formula takes into account the fuel efficiency of the vehicle. That might encourage more Oregonians to go electric or pick a more fuel-efficient choice.

The complication is how that policy would impact lower-income Oregonians.

Want to buy an electric car? The long-term costs can have clear benefits. The upfront cost is usually more and that can be what people focus on.

The gas tax was never progressive. Should Oregon look to do more with a nudge for electric cars? If the Legislature simply opts to provide incentives for electric cars, it could be leaving some Oregonians behind.

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Your views

Encouraging our future
space explorers

Good news is always worth remarking upon. Monday, April 19 marks a significant event in the history of the human race. NASA's Mars helicopter made its first flight on the surface of our most explored neighboring planet. We, America, did it again! A monumental step forward in space and planetary exploration. Good news is always welcome and this achievement gives our coming generations an uplifting reason to concentrate on getting a proper education from the earliest grades on up through college science courses. Let us all agree on an educational process that gives each student the ability to excel in the real world sciences and mathematics required to succeed in their lives. To do anything less would be to cheat them of their future.

It is incumbent upon us, the taxpaying parents and grandparents, to demand that our school system provide a proper

education to the students without the destructive indoctrination mandated by the Oregon Department of Education. Our property taxes fund our school district and we have an obligation to supervise the process here. Many of our teachers are concerned for the students. Still, they received their full salary while working from home, leaving our children without classroom interactions. Worse yet, several also received unemployment money in addition to their salary! That is outrageous.

Our latest school superintendent has failed to create an alternative learning process to raise the educational outcomes when he had a chance to prove his worth to our community. Instead he wants to spend millions of dollars with no history of satisfactory outcomes authored by him. His salary alone would fund at least two or three new teachers. Even more if the teachers' salaries were in line with local working folks' incomes.

That raises another question — do we really need a teacher's

union at all? Unions protect the entrenched incompetents at the expense of the communities and they support those movements seeking to destroy our historic way of life and culture. It is time for us to change things to ensure the children's futures. I have met so many of our young people and they are a great bunch. If we love our community and its children we need to stand up and demand the school provide the quality of education the coming generations need.

Somewhere in town, playing on the school playgrounds are the future explorers who may walk the sands of Mars, building towards a future we can only imagine. The fallout from the our space explorations has enriched our lives with technological and scientific wonders. Who can deny a child the opportunity to look out at the night skies and say, "We are out there and more of us are coming!"

Rick Rienks
Baker City

Criminal trials and irresponsible politicians

President Joe Biden incurred the wrath of some people earlier this week when he said he was "praying" that the jury in the Derek Chauvin murder trial would reach the "right verdict."

Biden's statement was even more conspicuous than the typical presidential musings because of when he made it.

At that moment, on Tuesday, April 20, the jury was still deliberating.

Biden didn't utter the word "guilty." But considering he had phoned George Floyd's family the day before to sympathize with their situation, it wasn't exactly a matter of conjecture that the president believed Chauvin had committed the crimes for which he was on trial.

The jury, of course, concurred.

The president's comments on Tuesday to reporters in the Oval Office strike me as a trifle strange in their lack of specificity.

"I'm praying the verdict is the right verdict, which is ..." Biden paused briefly then continued: "I think it's overwhelming, in my view."

Biden went on, as if to defend his decision to make any statement at that time, even a seemingly hedging one: "I wouldn't say that unless the jury was sequestered now, not hearing me say that."

The president couldn't know for certain, though, that the jurors wouldn't read or hear his statement before they reached a verdict.

"Sequestered" is supposed to mean that jurors are isolated, protected from possible outside influences that aren't part of the trial.

But as another high-profile criminal trial proved, even a sequestered jury can be exposed to potentially prejudicial comments from politicians.

And that trial happened half a century ago, when communication technology was crude compared with



**JAYSON
JACOBY**

today's interlocking wifi networks and the immediate, ubiquitous spread of information they make possible.

I watched a fair amount of news coverage of the Chauvin trial verdict, and in particular references to Biden's statements during the deliberations. I was surprised that none of the commentators, at least among those I sampled, referenced by way of comparison what was, at least until O.J. Simpson stepped into a Los Angeles courtroom in 1995, likely the most publicized criminal trial in U.S. history.

The trial I was thinking of also took place in L.A. The defendants were Charles Manson and three of his murderous acolytes — Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel and Leslie Van Houten.

They, along with Charles "Tex" Watson, were accused of committing the August 1969 Tate-LaBianca murders. Manson, though he didn't actually inflict any of the wounds, was the mastermind of the spree and thus equally culpable in a legal sense. The crimes spawned "Helter Skelter," the best-selling true-crime book co-written by Vincent Bugliosi, who prosecuted the Manson Family.

All were found guilty and sentenced to death, Watson being tried and convicted separately in a later trial.

Their death sentences were commuted to life in prison a year or so later when California temporarily abolished capital punishment. Although all were eligible for parole, none has been released. Atkins died in prison in 2009, Manson in 2017.

I expected to see multiple references

to the Manson trial if only because the comparison makes Biden's comments seem relatively tame. And it seems to me that the national media, generally speaking, are not averse to glossing over his statements that, had they been uttered by a previous president (his immediate predecessor, for instance), likely would have provoked horror, and perhaps tears, among many prominent pundits.

(Biden's hysterical claim that Georgia's new election law is worse than Jim Crow laws being a notable example. The outrage over that obnoxious comparison lasted ... well, it never really got started.)

Here's what happened in August 1970 while the Manson trial was underway — this was months before it went to the jury for deliberation:

President Richard Nixon, who like Biden was an attorney, and presumably should have known better, referenced the Manson trial while speaking at a conference of law enforcement officials.

Nixon, whose loathing for the press likely wasn't surpassed, among presidents, until Donald Trump was elected, talked about the incessant media coverage of the Manson trial. Nixon's most noteworthy statement was this, referring to Manson: "Here is a man who was guilty, directly or indirectly, of eight murders. Yet here is a man who, as far as the coverage is concerned, appeared to be a glamorous figure."

Nixon's press secretary tried to cover for his boss — this, along with headache-inducing feats of linguistic obfuscation, being the primary tasks of that unpleasant job — noting that the displeasantry to include the word "alleged" in his comments.

Nixon himself soon issued a statement that refuted his own earlier words without actually admitting that he fouled up.

Nixon's gaffe, as I mentioned,

is much more inappropriate than Biden's. The chief difference, of course, is that Nixon spoke while the trial was happening.

Yet I still find the comparison between these two premature presidential proclamations a compelling one — mainly because of Biden's flimsy attempt at justification based on the jury being sequestered during its deliberations.

Because the controversy over Nixon's comments didn't end with his belated semi-apology.

The Manson jury, unlike the Chauvin jury, was sequestered during the trial.

Yet the day after Nixon's statement, Manson leaped from his seat at the defense table in the courtroom and brandished, directly in front of the jury box, the front page of the Los Angeles Times bearing a headline in inch-high type of the sort usually reserved for moon landings and the beginnings and ends of wars: "Manson Guilty, Nixon Declares."

The jurors were questioned about what they had seen, and what they thought about the headline.

Several had read the entire headline.

And some of the jurors didn't appreciate the president presuming to inject his opinions into what was, after all, a matter that was their exclusive bailiwick.

"I think if the president declared that, it was pretty stupid of him," one juror said.

"Well, my first thought was, 'that's ridiculous,'" said another.

"No one does my thinking for me," was a third juror's response.

I've not seen evidence to suggest that any jurors in the Chauvin trial knew of Biden's comments while they were deliberating.

Certainly Chauvin wasn't cavorting about the jury room with a newspaper in his hand.

Yet it seems to me that although these two trials, separated by 50 years, are quite different, both illustrate the tendency for politicians to butt into matters before they ought to.

And Biden's comments were hardly the most inappropriate spoken by a politician this week.

Maxine Waters, a Democratic U.S. representative from the Los Angeles area, said during Chauvin's trial that were he acquitted, protests should "get more confrontational. We've got to stay on the street, and we've got to be more active. We've got to make sure that they know that we mean business."

Besides lacking enough respect for the judicial process to even wait for the jury to begin deliberating, as Biden did, Waters also included an implicit threat — make the right decision or you'll be responsible for more mayhem in the streets of American cities.

Waters also called for Chauvin to be convicted of first-degree murder.

Except he wasn't even charged with that crime.

Waters' comments were so egregiously inappropriate that they prompted criticism from Judge Peter Cahill, who presided over Chauvin's trial. Cahill called Waters' statements "abhorrent," and the judge said the comments could lead to the jury's verdict — unknown at that time — being reversed on appeal.

If nothing else would convince reckless politicians to resist the urge to comment until a jury has finished its work, this episode might.

Just imagine Chauvin, who might spend the rest of his life in prison for killing Floyd, instead being freed, and owing his freedom to Waters. Strange bedfellows indeed.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.