

EDITORIAL

Pump your own idea out of gas

California may have its Silicon Valley and Hollywood. Ohio gets all those new high-paying computer chip manufacturing jobs for Intel. Washington state may have no income tax. But here in Oregon we don't have to pump our own gas.

Those aren't fair comparisons. We are not of a mind to be fair, hearing that once again a bill to let Oregonians pump their own gas is dead.

We get it if you don't want to pump your own. Most of us do these days in Baker County and other rural counties with smaller populations. If you appreciate the bond Oregon has with the only other no self-service state, New Jersey, so be it. If you worry about people who would find pumping their own difficult, if you worry about safety, if you want another opportunity for jobs in Oregon, those are all real concerns.

But remember the bill as it was written, House Bill 4151, would not have removed the requirement to have attendants ready to pump gas. It would have made it optional for people who want to pump their own gas.

Is that so bad? We don't think so.

The undoing of HB 4151 was the need for some \$543,000 for the Oregon Fire Marshal to regulate consumer pumping. Time became too short to come up with that in this session.

We think the fire marshal may need even more money, if we understand the concerns. The worries about people pumping their own transfer to people plugging in their own electric cars, right? Especially those higher voltage charging ports.

In the 2023 Legislature shouldn't there be a bill to require Oregonians to be assisted with a paid professional when plugging in their electric vehicles?

We can't claim it as our idea. It would, though, create jobs. It would be very helpful for whom such effort can be difficult. It would be safer. And just because Oregon would be the only state to make this requirement, shouldn't be a reason to stop us. Maybe New Jersey would join in.

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YOUR VIEWS

We have an obligation to come to the aid of Ukraine

Editor's note: The writer's late husband was a Ukrainian immigrant.

"To whom much is given, much is expected." Luke: 12:48

We here in the United States have been richly blessed for centuries now; at least most of us have. Exceptions can be noted. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that we owe the world a lot. The freedoms that were nurtured and rooted here on our soil have taken seed across the globe and become the yardstick for successful democracies already established and some still struggling throughout the "civilized" world.

Our duty to promote and protect other like nations goes without saying. It is not for us to just take ours and ignore the rest. We must now pay it forward in every conceivable way. Ukraine is just such an example.

We have watched in horror over the last two weeks as brave Ukrainians stood tall and strong against the great bear of Russia. They have given the world a refresher course in what it means to truly be patriotic; to love one's country; to rise to the challenge, to be brave, to live with honor, to take up arms against their invaders, and so far, they have proven to be a united force to contend with.

This country, America, as well as our NATO allies have proceeded with extreme caution with our as yet limited aid to this peaceful country of Ukraine for fear of Putin's threats to spark WWII, a nuclear war that no one would win. Putin will find a way to escalate no matter what the rest of the world does. You can believe that.

Ukraine has not only pleaded with western powers for more help and support against this Goliath, but have proven themselves over and over again to be worthy of NATO support by virtue of their shared ideals and steadfast resistance to Putin's evils. How much more must they take before our country, the only democratic country on the planet capable of delivering the lifesaving support that will

save Ukraine, say "enough is enough" and do what we must do to help them? Just last week, Biden announced another sanction; this time against all imports of Russian oil, gas and coal.

These sanctions are causing the Russian people some real pain and it will get worse over time. But sanctions alone are not enough. Zelenskyy has asked over and over and over again for planes and other air support so that they at least have an equal chance in the air. I, for one say, to hell with what Putin says, let's go kick some a__! We cannot prevent a nuclear war by kowtowing to this monster! He has shown that already. Let's get 'er done!

Whether or not we want to admit this, WWII has already started. It started the first day that Russia shot a missile into Ukraine. Our total involvement in this savage attack is not a matter of "if," it is a matter of "when."

I remember the stories my parents and grandparents told of surviving WWII and even WWI right here in America. The food stamps; the gas rationing, the metal recycling; Rosie the riveter; the draft! I know they never wanted their children or grandchildren to ever have to go through what they went through. But you know what? Here we are. It's coming just as sure as the sun will rise in the east. We will be in this up to our eyeballs.

It is my sincerest hope and prayer that we really don't get into another world war, but the handwriting is on the wall. This is not a time to be burying our heads in the sand and pretend like it's not our problem. As the strongest military force in the free world, we are obliged by that gift to pay it forward to the millions of refugees, the volunteer soldiers, those everyday decent folks fighting for their very homes and step up to the plate and go all-in to defend Ukraine in their hour of need. They are not just fighting for Ukraine, but are fighting for democracy everywhere. If they lose, we all lose. Most assuredly, Putin will not stop at Ukraine.

Cindy Birko
Baker City

Homeless problem rolls down our street ... to stay

Outside of our home it sits. Docked on our street like some broken-down ship from a Mel Brook's space farce. A giant old RV with a tarp flapping over it. We no longer see the sunrise. It has been blocked by the Meth Star.

The Meth Star rolled in one night under the cover of darkness, its sudden arrival marked only by a low growl from our dog. We watched it for a while competing with the morning sun, growing more concerned, convinced that the RV had inhabitants. Then the screaming began ...

So following a brief debate, we called dispatch and reported the intergalactic-sized vehicle. Thinking no big deal, this isn't Portland, the police will give these guys a nudge and they'll move on within 72 hours. Right? Wrong!

Because what our friendly code enforcement officer told me was not at all what I, or you, might expect. I was told there was nothing legally that could be done about the Meth Star — because people are living in it. Sorry, our hands are tied — the homeless now trump the homeowner!

So we contacted our town council and two members were kind enough to respond and let us know that the police chief is currently working on a plan to address the homeless problem and give law enforcement a bit more control. Yet it has been over a month now and the wait for something to get codified continues ...

So this is why I am writing to all of you. We don't have lots of money — so yeah, we bought a house that may not be in the nicest part of town. But we pay our taxes (quite a bit of taxes actually). Yet our only return on our tax dollars seems to be having to scoop a human poop out of our driveway!

Laugh or cringe if you want, but if you live in Baker, it may behoove you to contact your local town council and try to get to the bottom of what is being done and when? Otherwise, the Meth Star 2 will be coming soon to a curb near you!

E. Kelley
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

How about a gas and groceries tax rebate?

Editorial from The Los Angeles Times:

California Gov. Gavin Newsom's promise of a gas tax rebate during his State of the State speech Tuesday night seems intended to show voters ahead of midterm elections that he and other Democratic lawmakers are doing something to help Californians with rising prices at the pump.

But why focus solely on gas prices and help for motorists? Price hikes are making practically everything more expensive, from a gallon of gasoline to a gallon of milk, and people clearly need relief from that financial strain. Newsom's administration has provided few details beyond his plan

to submit a proposal to "put money back in the pockets of Californians, to address rising gas prices." However, some of the specifics his aides shared are concerning.

Dee Dee Myers, Newsom's senior adviser, told reporters the rebate would probably total billions of dollars, occur as soon as this spring and be limited to people who have a car. That carless residents may be excluded is worrisome and raises serious questions about equity for low-income families that are among those hurting the most from inflation.

Prices in the Los Angeles area rose 7.5% between January 2021 and Jan-

uary 2022, the largest increase since 1982. Gas prices jumped nearly 40% over that period, but the cost of groceries, child care, clothing, natural gas and electricity all shot up dramatically too. The problem isn't just at the gas pump; it's everywhere you look, including the grocery store, your utility bill and shopping for a used car.

A tax rebate is a good idea, but must be applied broadly so that it helps all Californians who are struggling. Call it the gas and groceries rebate, and everyone should be able to get behind it.

Newsom has already proposed suspending a scheduled increase in the

state's gas tax — a bad idea that will save motorists only a few cents a gallon at the pump but cost half a billion dollars in transportation funding. His framing of this new proposed rebate around spiking gas prices is, like that proposal, a political calculation.

State Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins (D-San Diego) and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon (D-Lakewood) said in a joint statement that the Legislature would "seek tax relief from the General Fund" to avoid taking funding for roads and schools, rather than focusing on a "small cut to the gas tax that might not get passed on to consumers."

California has such a massive bud-

get surplus that under the state's constitutional limit on spending, known as the Gann limit, a tax rebate may be required anyway. Last year the state worked around that restriction by sending millions of stimulus checks to Californians with annual incomes of \$75,000 or less to help them cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's understandable that Newsom and other politicians, including those in swing districts where rising gas prices are a political liability, want something concrete to point to and spin to their political advantage. But that should not skew their priorities or distract from the need to extend relief to all Californians who need it.

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.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District): D.C. office: 1239 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97500; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. bentz.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541;

fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Councilors Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Duby, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

Baker School District: 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Chris Hawkins, Andrew Bryan, Travis Cook, Jessica Dougherty, Julie Huntington.