

EDITORIAL

Shedding light
on new drug law

Canceled. Canceled. Canceled. Canceled. Canceled. Canceled.

That's what the meeting schedule looks like for a committee that is supposed to decide how to distribute state money for drug addiction treatment under Measure 110.

It means that there's another aspect of Measure 110 implementation that is not working. You could add "yet" to that sentence. We didn't because we're not sure it's going to get there, yet.

Oregon voters approved Measure 110 on Nov. 3, 2020. It changed two main things about how the state deals with illegal drugs. First, much drug possession was decriminalized. Not legalized, decriminalized.

For instance, possession of what is defined under the measure as personal amounts of meth, heroin, LSD and more became a new level of crime. It was a criminal misdemeanor, now it's a Class E misdemeanor. A Class E misdemeanor is punishable by a \$100 fine. Instead of that fine, a person can seek treatment at an addiction recovery center.

The second thing Measure 110 did was to channel money from marijuana revenue sales and from the anticipated savings in enforcement of criminal drug possession into addiction recovery and treatment.

The whole idea was to shift Oregon from criminalizing addiction to treating addiction. An appealing message. We'd guess that's why Oregonians voted to change the law.

One problem has been thoroughly reported and discussed by the Legislature. The measure hasn't been shifting people into treatment. There's a lack of teeth. People who get charged with Class E violations just don't show up for court or make efforts to begin treatment. The measure said there would be no additional charges for not showing up for court or not paying the fine.

Treatment options must also ramp up across the state if people with addictions are going to get help. Oregon had ranked nearly last in the availability of such treatment. Grant money has gone out to kick start that.

Since February, it's been up to the state Measure 110 Oversight and Accountability Council to decide how to distribute grant funding. That council has a subcommittee called the Behavioral Health Resource Network Subcommittee. That committee is supposed to make recommendations to the full committee.

This is a new thing, though. It's new for the committee members and new for the Oregon Health Authority. There's been confusion — you could call it a learning curve — about how decisions will be made. The last meeting of the subcommittee on March 21 actually seemed to go well, from our limited perspective. Recommendations seemed to be made about organizations that should receive money in Baker, Morrow and Umatilla counties.

But after that meeting, the next six scheduled meetings of the subcommittee were canceled. Main council meetings were also canceled. There are apparently some 300 applications for addiction recovery programs to go through and make decisions on.

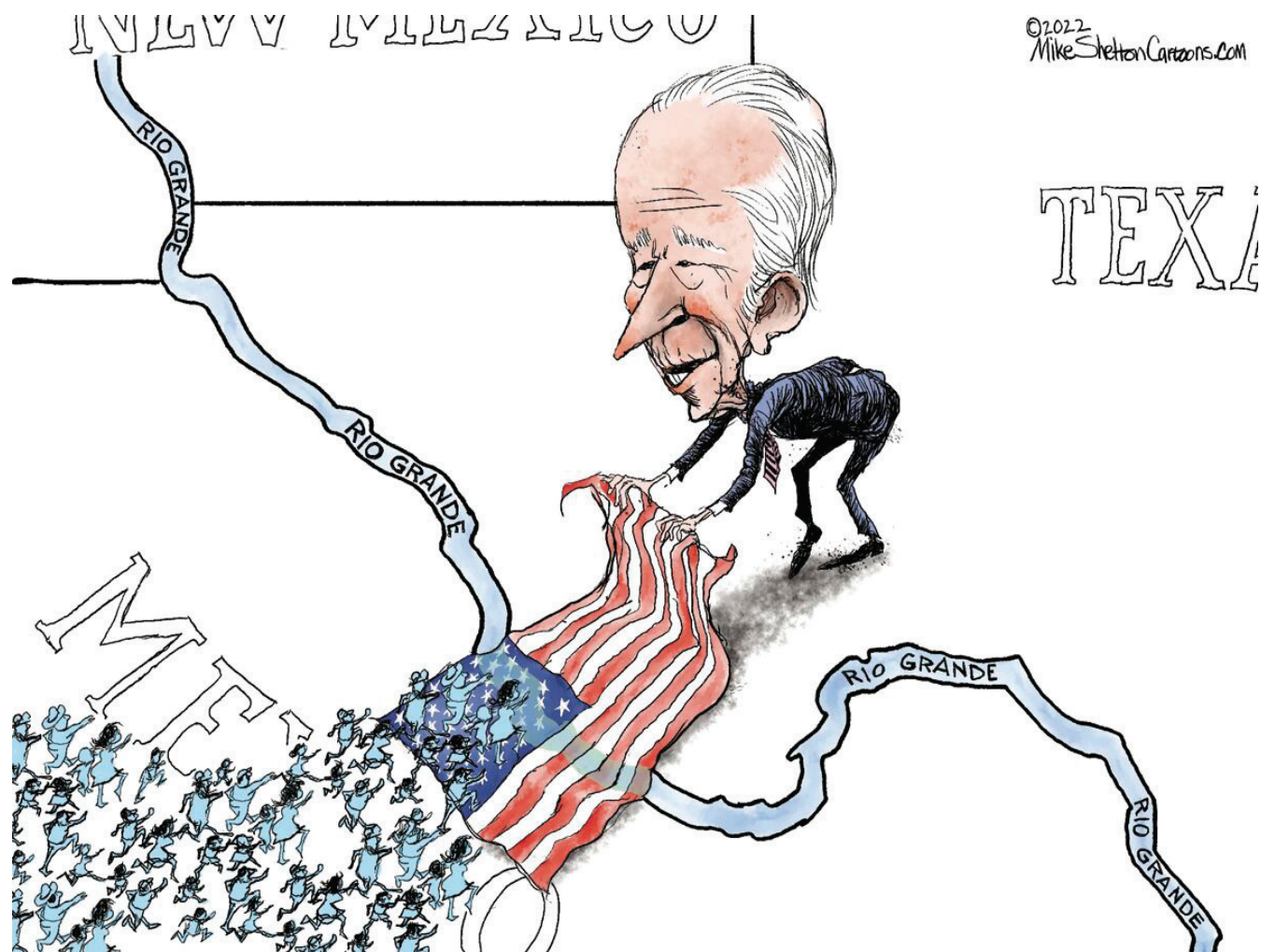
We asked the Oregon Health Authority what was going on, how many more applications need to be evaluated, how much money has been sent out and more. The OHA told us there would be an executive session on April 6 and the questions would be answered in that meeting.

The notice for the meeting says it is to "discuss attorney-client privileged legal advice and discuss documents that are confidential with the Oregon Department of Justice." We don't know what that's about. When we do know, we won't be able to tell you. That's because members of the media are allowed to attend executive sessions but not report directly on what happens.

From what we have seen in the public meetings and the language of the notice, we would guess the executive session may be about procedure, to clearly outline what are valid reasons to approve or reject grant applications, or to discuss conflicts of interest. Who knows. Probably not a good idea to guess.

Oregonians deserve to know where, if anywhere, Measure 110 is going right and where it is going wrong. The Oregon Health Authority and the Measure 110 Oversight and Accountability Council need to be open with Oregonians about it.

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.



YOUR VIEWS

Enough is enough: Time to change
country's direction

I try to keep up with what happens in the legislature. One thing that caught my eye was an item that said in their last short session that the legislature appropriated 12 million dollars to provide lawyers for the 108,000 illegal aliens in Oregon to hire lawyers to fight deportation. I went to see state senator Findley when he was in Baker City. He said that it was \$15 million. Oregon being a sanctuary blue state has even passed a law that makes it illegal to report illegals to ICE. I forget which county, maybe Yamhill, where the district attorney wrote a letter saying that he had three felons that the judge had to release because there was no public defender. This has been a problem for some time, a lack of public defenders. I wonder how long it has to go before we say enough is enough. If there is money for illegals defense there should be money for our justice system. We have 7,500 per day illegals invading

our country every day and that will soon increase to 18,000 a day.

When a president, a commander in chief, on his first day in office, tells the world in effect to come on in and there will be no consequences, that in my opinion can only be described as treason. The open borders has been a godsend for the cartels, drugs come in by the ton and over 100,000 Americans have been killed by fentanyl that the Chinese send over to the cartels which use our gangs to distribute it as subcontractors. They shoot up the inner cities and of course the Democrats call that gun violence instead of gang violence and push to disarm Americans while understanding that Ukraine needs weapons to fight a dictator. Being short on history the replay of history and the fall of the Roman empire by barbarian invasions across the Rhine is now replayed on our Rio Grande.

I don't look for much action from Congress. The Democrats want to change America by importing future Democratic

voters and Republicans like that cheap labor, more taxpayers, customers, consumers and soldiers for the empire. But things are changing. The war in Ukraine means that one-third of the world's wheat probably won't get planted. The possibility of food shortages because of that is on the news but that might be looked at as short term. I won't use the word global warming but drought is closer to home. Most can see empty reservoirs locally. This drought is not local. It means the West and Midwest. It appears that it is permanent and that means less food. Numbers do matter. It is not the time to add millions more people but that is exactly what uncle Joe Gaffe is doing. At the same rate of invasion there will be 10 million more mouths to feed when his term is done. This fall it looks like there could be a blood bath for Democrats at the polls. Let's hope so. Google Gallup poll: "likelihood of another civil war." Time to change direction.

Steve Culley
La Grande

COLUMN

Why Sen. Merkley cares what you flush

I'm as worried as the next guy about clogged sewer pipes. Which apparently is not nearly worried enough.

Not according to Sen. Jeff Merkley, anyway.

Lest you be laboring under the mistaken belief that there exists a topic which is either too inane or too distasteful for lawmakers to stick their noses into, figuratively speaking, I submit, as evidence of your error, the WIPPES Act.

(This is equally compelling proof that there also is no topic for which legislators will not stoop, so to speak, to mangling our language to contrive a snappy acronym to insert at the top of a bill.)

It's not that I dismiss sewer blockages as irrelevant.

They can be quite troublesome.

Especially if you're on the upstream side when the flow is interrupted and a formerly smooth stream becomes an unpleasant and fetid pond.

Or worse, a fountain.

But I had also thought of clogs as a strictly local matter, best handled by the city or utility district or other agency responsible for such necessary, but not especially complicated, systems.

It did not occur to me that, like Russian invasions and Supreme Court confirmations, this issue might fall under congressional purview.

But then I received an email from Merkley's office that set me straight.

Merkley, Oregon's junior senator, is joining with Sen. Susan Collins of Maine to sponsor the Wastewater Infrastructure Pollution Prevention and Environmental Safety Act.

Like most legislation, this sounds pretty vital — at least if you ignore that sophomoric, and slightly scatological, acronym.

But the pollution in this case isn't a carcinogenic compound that can also cause you to sprout new appendages even if you manage to avoid cancer.

It's wet wipes.

You know the kind I mean — nicely



Jayson
Jacoby

moistened (pre-moistened, that is) tissues that you might employ when plain old toilet paper isn't quite up to the task.

These products are particularly popular with parents whose children are in diapers, the moisture making for a smoother glide and, as with a new squeegee on a windshield, a more thorough cleaning.

The problem, as Merkley's emailed press release explains in considerable detail, is that these wipes frequently are flushed even though the types made of plastic or other synthetic fibers aren't intended to be treated like toilet paper.

It happens that I've had a few conversations over the years about this topic — the flushability factor, I suppose you could call it — with officials from the Baker City Public Works Department.

(Nothing enlivens an ordinary day quite like a discussion about the myriad items that make the journey from the toilet bowl to the sewer system. This is a longer list than you might expect it to be.)

Michelle Owen, the city's public works director, told me in 2020 that wipes — some of which are branded as "flushable" — have made up significant chunks of clogs that have blocked sewer pipes in town.

Although she also said that wipes are more likely to plug the smaller-diameter pipes that connect homes to the city's sewer mains — and those smaller pipes are the homeowner's responsibility, not the city's.

Merkley and Collins aren't pioneers in the legislative campaign to combat the threat posed by disposable wipes.

On June 8, 2021, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown signed into law House Bill 2344. It made Oregon the second state — Washington is the true innovator, with a law passed in 2020 — to require packages of wipes to include a "do not flush" label.

This seems to me reasonable, even though I generally disdain the creation of new laws that deal with issues which hardly constitute an existential threat to the public.

I wonder, though, whether a public awareness campaign — you can imagine the possibilities with billboards, although you might not want to — wouldn't be at least as effective as a labeling law.

And probably more effective. Food packages are already festooned with federally mandated labels showing the egregious tallies of calories, after all, yet those blatant reminders haven't made a dent in our nation's collective corpulence.

(Of course it's also possible to grab a handful of chips with your eyes closed, so as to avoid seeing those shameful measurements of saturated fat and milligrams of salt.)

Merkley and Collins' bill includes both labeling and publicity — the latter including \$5 million in grants "to support and expand education and outreach activities" with the basic message, as I understand it, of telling people to quit flushing wipes.

(Not that federal officials could ever be satisfied with such straightforward advice.)

I'm not so sanguine, though, about Congress mucking around in this matter after reading, again from Merkley's press release, about what the bill calls for.

Specifically, the legislation "directs the Federal Trade Commission, in consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency to issue regulations on "Do Not Flush" labeling requirements."

I can scarcely conceive of the piles of paperwork, and the terabytes of data, that will be generated when two massive federal agencies get together to hash out anything. I daresay the environmental effects from the paper alone would offset any benefits to be derived from keeping wet wipes out of our nation's sewer pipes.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the
Baker City Herald.

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 97504; 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., H-475, 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