

EDITORIAL

State failing on drug treatment initiative

Some Oregonians who voted for Measure 110 in November 2020, which made possession of small amounts of heroin, cocaine, meth and other drugs the equivalent of a traffic ticket, might be having buyer's remorse.

At least among voters who were persuaded by the measure's promise to bolster the state's drug treatment system.

(Although the measure passed statewide with 58.5% of voters in favor, it fared comparatively poorly in Baker County, where 62.4% of voters were opposed.)

The glaring problem might seem counterintuitive — the state government can't seem to figure out how to spend money.

Measure 110 diverted hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes from the state's legal marijuana industry to drug treatment.

Yet a year and a half after voters approved the measure, the state has about \$265 million for treatment efforts that hasn't been disbursed, according to a recent story by The Associated Press. The Oregon Health Authority has given out just \$40 million to treatment providers.

According to the AP's reporting, state officials underestimated the interest that treatment centers would have in the money. As a result, many applications for the money are pending, according to testimony before the state House Interim Committee on Behavioral Health on June 2.

"So clearly, if we were to do it over again, I would have asked for many more staff much quicker in the process," said Steve Allen, the state's behavioral health director. "We were just under-resourced to be able to support this effort, and underestimated the work that was involved in supporting something that looked like this and partly we didn't fully understand it until we were in the middle of it."

It's mystifying that state health officials would underestimate the demand for drug treatment in an era when overdose deaths are increasing.

Some of the explanations that state officials offered for botching the rollout of this part of the voter-approved measure are hardly compelling.

Ian Green, an audits manager for the state, said the ballot measure didn't specify the roles of the Oregon Health Authority and the Measure 110 Oversight and Accountability Council.

That lack of clarity, Green said, "contributed to delays, confusions and strained relations."

This ought not be complicated.

The state shouldn't need to create a new entity — the Oversight and Accountability Council — to decide whether an applicant is capable of helping people overcome drug addictions.

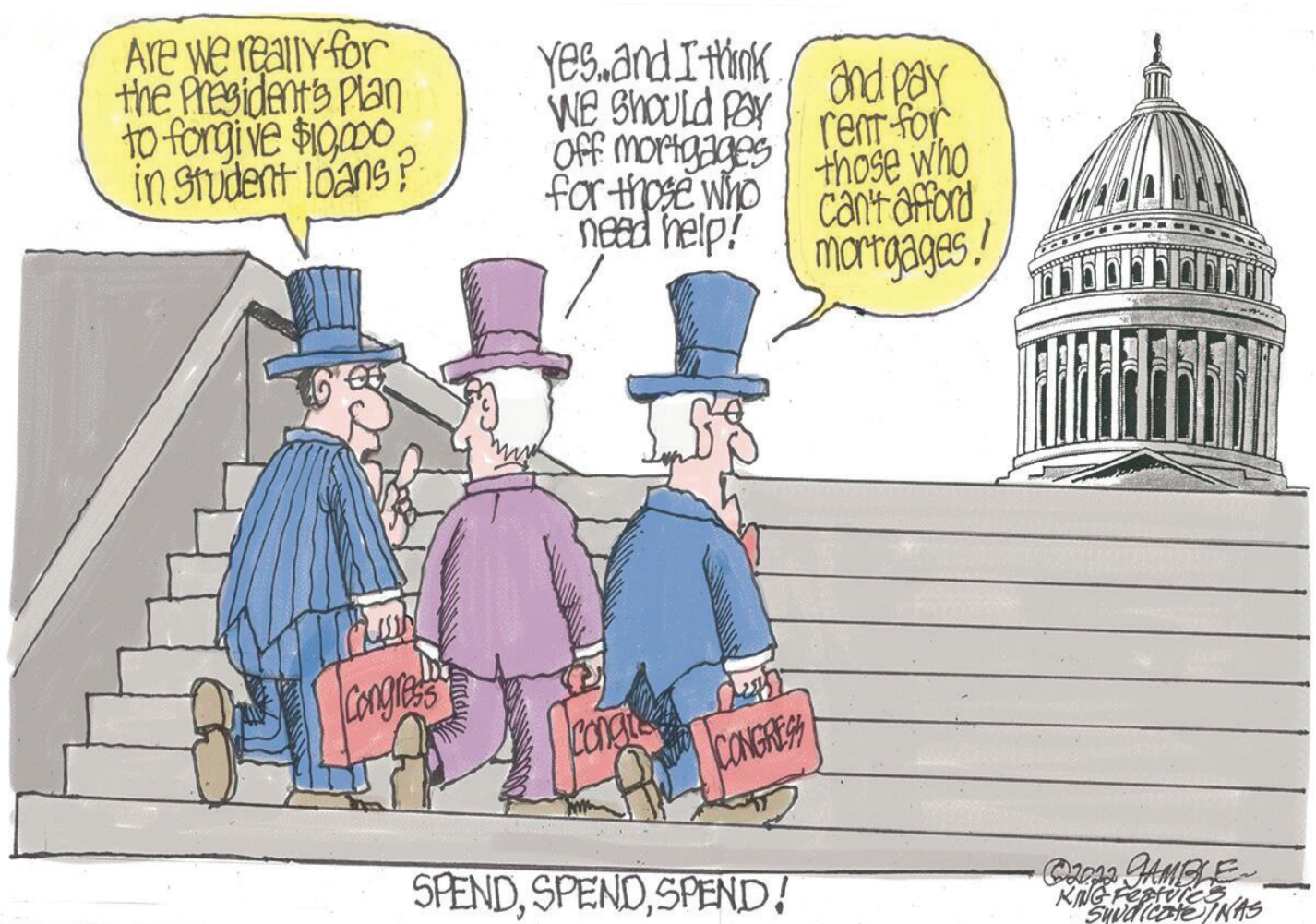
Ultimately, "strained relations" between groups that themselves depend on public dollars is a pathetic excuse for the failure to make timely use of tens of millions of dollars that could literally save lives.

The state has a demonstrated need for boosting its drug treatment options.

And thanks the Measure 110, it has the money to do so.

State officials shouldn't need a guidebook to figure out what to do now.

— Jayson Jacoby,
Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

Gun violence is a crisis we can solve

Editorial from the Dallas Morning News:

As the murdered children of Uvalde are laid to rest, our nation needs to muster the courage and political will to treat rising gun violence and mass shootings as an acute public health crisis.

When auto accidents claimed a large number of lives, government and industry dollars funded research to make cars safer, leading to seat belts, airbags and other now standard safety features. Public health studies that linked smoking to cancer, lung disease and other health risks changed smoking habits. Subsequent legal action held tobacco companies responsible for having hidden the health risks associated with their products.

The Second Amendment protects gun ownership in America. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the individual right to own guns in the Heller decision. In that same ruling, Justice Antonin Scalia also noted that "like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited" and that "the right was not a right to keep and

carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose."

Federal dollars are slowly returning to gun violence research after more than two decades on the sidelines due to fears that scientific study would lead to gun control. But gun violence research is funded at about \$63 per life lost, making it the second-most-neglected major cause of death, according to a 2017 estimate in the Journal of the American Medical Association. While mass shootings at schools rightly spotlight the need for school security, more young people have died from gun violence of all kinds than car crashes, which are second, and drug overdoses, which are third.

But as a nation, we need to know more about gun violence. A research letter in the New England Journal of Medicine concluded that firearm-related deaths increased 13% between 2019 and 2020, with the biggest jump — a stunning 30% — occurring among those under 19 years of age. And of the 45,222 deaths from gun vio-

lence in 2020, roughly 10% were children and teenagers.

But here's the shocker. Roughly 65% of gun deaths among adults were suicides and 30% were homicides. However, among teens and younger Americans, those percentages are roughly flipped, the statistics show.

The nation needs to increase mental health investments and pass sensible gun safety regulations at the federal and state levels. Public support exists for background checks, age limits on weapons purchases, red flag laws and mandatory training for firearm owners. Most of all, the nation has to break the cycle of violence, and a more rigorous examination of gun deaths and injuries as a public health crisis will allow researchers to better determine how to prevent such deaths.

Families and communities wracked by gun violence are forever broken, and the rest of us share their grief and fear that a gunman could mete out carnage on our families and friends. As a society, we must not allow this carnage to persist.

YOUR VIEWS

Contrary to letter, God is mentioned in the U.S. Constitution

Mike Meyer stated in the Tuesday May 31 edition of the Baker City Herald that "There is no mention of God in our Constitution. ..." Actually Article VII, second paragraph of the Constitution mentions God. Also, incidentally, God is mentioned four times in the Declaration of Independence. And it is for a very good reason.

Neal Jacobson
Baker City

Union chief should lead negotiations on ambulance service

For someone who is as staunchly anti-union as I, it pains me to say this but firefighter's union leader Casey Johnson seems to have the best understanding of the fire department and ambulance issues and should be given a lead position in negotiating with the County Commission. The City Council should authorize his negotiating position immediately, before it is too late. As part of the two-thirds of the county currently served by the city ambulance service, I can't take my case directly to the City Council but ambulance service is vitally important to all of us affected. Is it too much to ask the Council to do the right thing?

For starters, city manager Jon Cannon should be spanked for his simplistic attitude of avoiding service, and associated cost, by simply suggesting it's not the City's concern. A juvenile attitude of "I don't want to and you can't make me!" is not appropriate for what should be adult discussion. A more mature approach would have been to identify the cost/funding problem, discuss it first with the Council, then go to the Commission and start working on a solution instead of just giving up as his first option.

Then, based on the last City Council report, the Council is following his lack of leadership by also giving up before they even start in voting to forego submittal of

a proposal for ambulance service. Doesn't it seem foolhardy to give up half your fire-fighting personnel, who double as EMTs, without trying to find a solution? Giving up without even trying is not in any definition of leadership! If City and County have to raise taxes, then do it. The police department is not a money maker either. Is Cannon going to suggest getting rid of it? Figure out the proportion cost between city and county area service and calculate the numbers. The right heads working together should be able to do the math. The County Commission is doing what it has to do. City Council needs to proceed with what they should do. Hand the ball off to Casey Johnson and let him run with it. At least with that approach there is hope the issue can be resolved.

Jim Carnahan
Baker County

Vietnam veteran's perspective on school shootings

Back in 1967 I was a 19-year-old Marine rifleman in Vietnam. I saw a few gunfights and some other things. I guess in the modern USA lexicon it was mass shootings or active shooters. I never knew for sure in some situations if I killed anybody. Fog of war and all that stuff.

I think maybe what was and is more confusing is the fog of coming home. I got knocked out with an explosion and was eventually sent to Oak Knoll Naval hospital for discharge. I had to wait on paperwork, so I ended up having to deliver mail between the wards. There were three amputee wards with a lot of different situations, some with multiple limb loss. On the weekends I could get a pass from the hospital to go into San Francisco.

August 1967, the Summer of Love in San Francisco, Haight and Ashbury, hippies, drugs. If you're going to San Francisco be sure to wear a flower in your hair. Definitely a different kind of America than was back at the hospital.

I think the recent school shootings show that the different Americas that was then is now. It seems that the flower children's children get quite emotional when school kids are slaughtered and can't really offer any solutions other than trying to disarm those who did the fighting in our wars. Ban this, ban that, no guns here and all that. What the real tragedy is the most towns and cities where these terrible things happen have many veterans who are fathers, grandfathers, uncles and aunts, some who have had combat experience, been there done that and could stop all the school shootings but it seems that the vocal, never-been-shot-at violence virgins, end up in charge of security. Why in God's name are those with bronze stars, silver stars, purple hearts, combat action ribbons, combat infantry badges, passed over in favor of those who would put teddy bears and balloons on makeshift memorials where a dozen or more died when a vet donating his time could have made sure only one grave needed to be dug. That of the would-be shooter.

Ah, I guess the fog of the political war will be around for quite a while. Fifty-some years ago draft dodgers like Bill Clinton and Joe Biden didn't like gun violence and found a way to get a deferment and advance their political careers. It goes on. As a mental exercise try to imagine Chuck Schumer, Beto O'Rourke, Elon Musk, Whoopie Goldberg, Don Lemon, AOC, my Oregon Senators Wyden and Merkley, and the Oregon congressional house. Imagine an endless list of politicians, celebrities, sports stars and professional BSers on cable news and talk radio actually standing up and facing violence. No way, they hire men with guns to protect them.

A lot more than 20 young people were lost at the Texas school shooting. Battle lines have been drawn. The Second Amendment is under attack. It is designed to be a barrier to tyranny. Sending men with guns to disarm men with guns who believe that won't end well.

In the meantime let's make the schools a hard target. Defend them.

Steve Culley
La Grande

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: ost.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): Leg 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, Kenyon Damschen, Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.