

## EDITORIAL

# We need to know cost of universal health care

The plan for universal health care in Oregon may sound great. We wonder if people are being given enough information to judge it.

The task force building the plan offers a long list of selling points for the plan:

- Everybody in Oregon would have health care.
- The health care benefits would be more generous than most current plans.
- There would be more benefits available for behavioral health treatment.
- Everyone would have dental benefits.
- Health coverage would not be related to your job.
- People wouldn't have to pay when getting care. No copays. No deductibles. People would pay based on how much they make.

The state board that runs it would have open public meetings and report to the governor and Legislature.

This week and in the weeks that follow the state's universal health care task force is holding meetings with the public, through Zoom. You can learn more about those [tinyurl.com/OR-healthmeetings](https://tinyurl.com/OR-healthmeetings).

In the background provided for these meetings, the possible benefits of the program are clearly spelled out. Some of the possible downsides, not so much.

For instance, this change means much of the private health care insurance industry in Oregon and any jobs associated with it would likely be wiped out. No need for them when the state is running the system. And the fact that it would be a transparent, government board running the system may not be such a plus if you don't like the prospect of the government taking over more of the private sector and attempting to manage it.

It would be nice to not have to worry about what treatment might cost when you go to the doctor or are wheeled into the emergency room. But what will people pay?

The rates of the new income taxes that families will pay are not in the background documents for the meetings. The rates of the payroll tax employers will pay are not there, either.

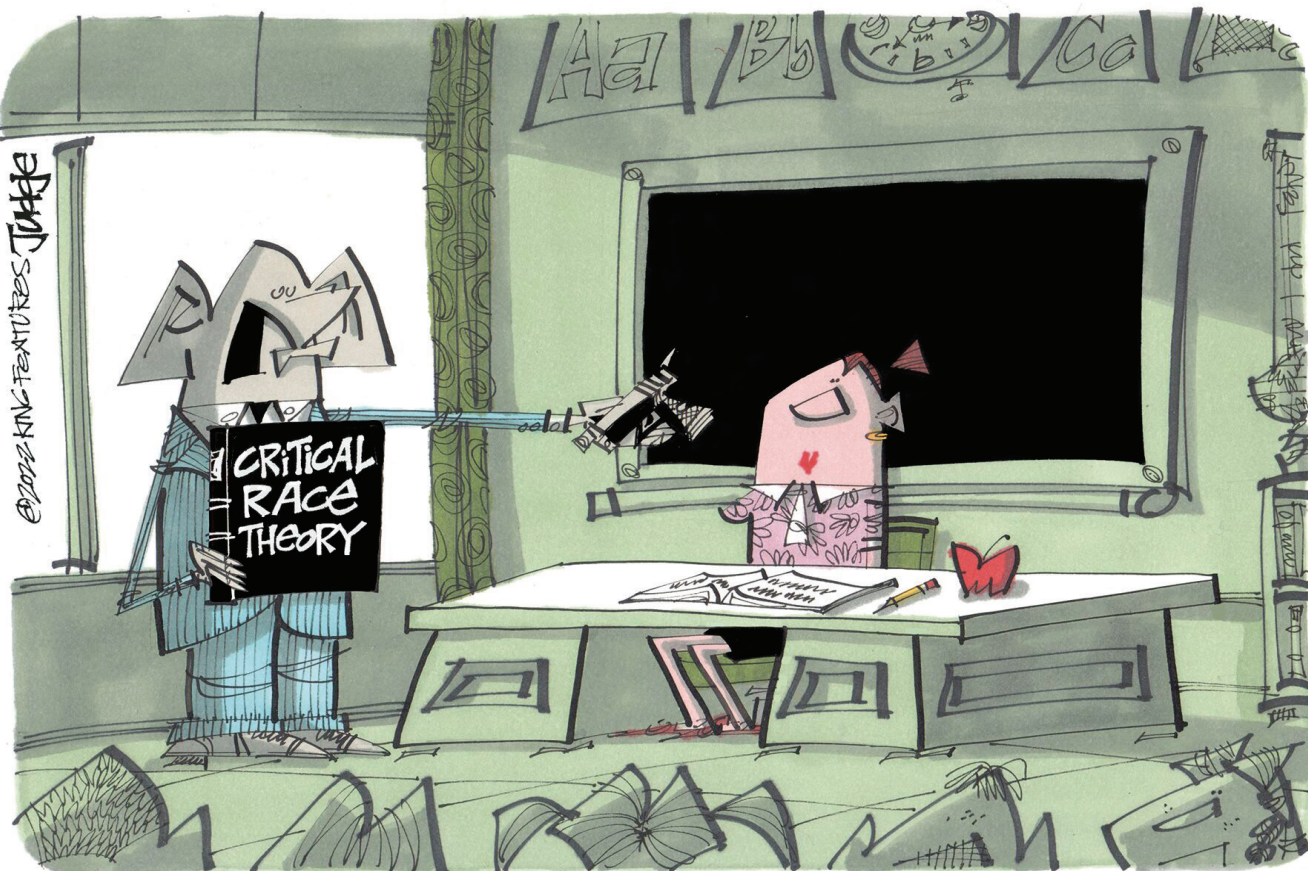
It's one thing to tell people that overall they would pay 13% less in premiums, deductibles and copays than they do now. It's one thing to tell employers that they would pay 11% less than they do now in premiums. They should be told upfront the expected rates for income and payroll taxes that those assumptions are based on.

At least according to some task force documents, households would pay income tax rates of up to 9.3% in addition to the income tax they already pay. There would be marginal rates based on the federal poverty level. The rates ramp up. For instance, households below 200% of the federal poverty level would pay zero. The line for a family of four to start paying would be just over \$55,000. A family of four would pay the highest marginal rate of 9.3% for income over \$110,000.

Employers would pay a payroll tax based on employee wages. Below \$160,000 a year an employer would pay a marginal rate of 7.25%, jumping up to 10.5% for income of \$160,000 or more.

A plan for universal health care in Oregon needs to be as frank with the costs as it is with the possible benefits.

*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.*



**"WE DON'T TRUST YOUR JUDGMENT WHEN IT COMES TO DECIDING WHAT TO TEACH IN YOUR CLASSROOM, BUT WANT YOU TO HAVE A DEADLY WEAPON."**

## YOUR VIEWS

### Residents gather to walk in peace, and against hate

On Friday June 10, a peaceful, all-ages group of LGBTQ+ folks and allies gathered for the 2nd-annual Baker Pride Walk. Colored balloons, rainbow flags, and "Love Wins" T-shirts were plentiful. We walked from Central Park to Geiser-Pollman Park with beaming faces and joyous laughter. It felt wonderful to feel the love of our community and hear cars honking in support.

Why didn't more people know about this Baker City event and that it had happened before? All you have to do is read a June 14 Herald article to understand. The arrest of 31 Patriot Front members in riot gear near the Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, Pride festival occurred the day after our happy parade strolled along the Powder River pathway. Patriot Front is a white nationalist hate group and the arrested members came from at least 11 states including Oregon. Groups and individuals who threaten violence to others promote hate and rob law-abiding citizens of their rights to assemble peacefully and without fear.

If you want to build community and stand against hate in Baker, there are many opportunities to become involved

locally. To join us for the 3rd-annual Baker Pride Walk, watch for posters and event announcements next June or contact the event organizer, Baker County Safe Communities Coalition, or the event funder, Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization.

Gretchen Stadler  
Corvallis

### Today's green foliage is tomorrow's fire tinder

As I sit looking out my window on this early morn, I am captivated by the sight of the luxurious, nay, rampant growth of every green thing known to man. Some welcome, others not at all. Our rainy season has settled in to encourage rainforest-like growth. The human eye has a sensitivity to green light. Perhaps a holdover from our ancient past as free range tenants of forests and grasslands. The color offers a sense of well being and calm. It is a good way to begin the day, turmoil forgotten.

Then my thoughts turn to our surrounding miles of grasslands and forests. Now we see verdant growth replacing images of the dry brown ruin left by the winter months. Yet our traditional weather patterns foretell summer droughts and all the tall greenery turning to flammable,

dried fuel for potential wildfires. Other areas across the West have suffered fires of amazing ferocity, even early in the season. Homes and business districts burned out. Could this portend a similar fate for us?

Looking eastward, I can see a large, well-weathered wooden structure wrapped with vegetation on two walls, nearly to the eaves. Then I imagine the lush foliage dry, desiccated, no longer an eye-pleasing green, rather the tan color of prime tinder. Just like the bare wood walls. Is this why fires, once limited to fuel-filled forests, invade cities? Homes and businesses are more vulnerable when the in-town areas contain such structures as I see across the street from my window. How many others are dotted around our community? Could we be vulnerable? What about a neighbor's stand of tall grasses? Have I any that need trimming down? How much is too much?

Should the drought cycle descend upon us, the outlying areas could be at risk. From there a wildfire combined with high winds could bring unwelcome visitors in the form of embers. I now look at overgrowth with a different perspective. Time to dress and get outside, to tour the property. Cut it back while it is still green.

Rick Rienks  
Baker City

## COLUMN

# A curiously damp drive through an arid land

This spring has been so soggy it even defied one of the world's great rain shadows.

On one day, anyway.

It was June 12. This happened to be the day I was driving from Mill City across the Cascade Mountains and back to Baker City. I had been in Mill City for the weekend to watch my nephew, Jonathan Pennick, graduate from Santiam High School, and to visit my parents, who live in Mill City.

In common with quite a lot of days over the past two months, June 12, a Sunday, was decidedly damp.

This was not surprising — and not only because so many recent days were also moist.

The National Weather Service — besides the Defense Department the most vital federal agency, in my estimation — had, or so it seemed to me, been implying for the preceding week or so that the construction of an ark might be a reasonable precaution against the impending storm.

I was traveling by more conventional, landbound means — an eight-year-old Mazda 6 sedan that, though far from seaworthy, can go about 40 miles on a gallon of gas.

My route followed Highway 20 over Santiam Pass, one of the major gaps in the volcanic crest of the Cascades, which span Oregon.

Although the Cascades are a middling range by the elevated standards of the Andes or the Alps, they create one of the world's most formidable barriers against precipitation.

Which is to say, a rain shadow.

(Also, for about half the year, an equally effective snow shadow.)

The way in which the crest of the Cascades cleaves Oregon's climate is dramatic, and in more than one way.

The difference in the amount of rain and snow that falls at the summit of Santiam Pass and at, say, Redmond, in the lee of the Cascades, is significant. The pass frequently gets more than 100 inches of total precipitation in a year, while Redmond rarely reaches even a dozen inches.

But even more noteworthy, I think, is that this transition from rainforest to desert happens over such a short distance. Redmond, as the crow flies, is only about 45 miles from the summit.

Yet even that figure understates the rapidity of the change. The shift from moss-draped firs and hemlocks to ponderosa pines and junipers happens in just a mile or so as the highway descends from the 4,817-



Jayson Jacoby

foot summit.

The weather, too, frequently undergoes a similarly sudden change. Several times I've driven through a squall of rain or snow on the west side of the pass, windshield wipers frantically skimming the glass as I tried to peer through the gloom, only to have sunshine dry the pavement while liquid still dripped from my fenders as I started down the east slope.

These effects of the Cascades, botanically and climatologically, are so efficient that I have come to expect that however nasty the conditions on the west side or at the pass itself, I can rely on relief before I've had my first view of Suttle Lake, just four miles or so east of the summit.

I was anticipating just such an experience on June 12.

Rain fell almost incessantly after my daughter, Olivia, and I left Mill City. Sometimes it slackened to a sprinkle, and sometimes the rain sluiced down, prompting me to tinker frequently with the interval switch for the wipers. But there wasn't even a brief stretch of dry asphalt.

As we crested the pass and began the long downgrade, I waited for the rain to subside.

Perversely, or so it seemed to me given my expectations, the steady rain turned torrential. Water filled lane ruts I wouldn't otherwise have noticed. I noticed them when they were inundated; noticed them all too well. I gripped the steering wheel more tightly and concentrated on detecting the telltale sensation — a sort of floating feeling which is quite unpleasant at 55 mph — that betrays incipient hydroplaning.

The windshield wipers struggled to clear the glass. Each encounter with an oncoming vehicle — and especially when it was a commercial truck — was akin to the rinse cycle at a drive-thru car wash. Except without fragrant suds.

It was a curious experience.

I've driven this route, a corridor between stands of thick-trunked ponderosa pines, dozens of times, and almost always in fair weather, no matter the season.

But I don't recall ever making the trip during a downpour. It felt passing strange to see a deluge in a forest that epitomizes the arid east side of the Cascades. I suspect I would feel much the same if I saw snow

falling in a tropical rainforest or something similarly incongruent.

The rain dissipated to the lightest of showers near Redmond. There were sections of dry pavement between Redmond and Prineville, although the highway shoulders, strewn with the ubiquitous red cinders of Central Oregon, were speckled with frequent puddles.

The respite was brief.

As we climbed into the Ochocos east of Prineville the rain resumed. It wasn't quite so copious as through the Cascades, and there were a few interludes when I switched off the wipers. The Ochocos cast a much more modest rain shadow compared with the Cascades, but the effect is noticeable around Mitchell, where I've rarely seen water streaming off Highway 26.

(Which is not to suggest Mitchell doesn't know of high water. Bridge Creek, the usually placid stream that flows through town, has spawned damaging flash floods multiple times, the result of cloudbursts upstream.)

Heavy rain returned as we ascended to Keyes Creek Summit east of Mitchell, and it continued through the meadows and into Picture Gorge, where both Mountain Creek and the John Day River barreled down their channels, the water the approximate shade of chocolate milk.

We stopped for lunch in John Day and saw there the first patches of blue sky all day. I braced for a damp conclusion to the trip — it looked as though storm clouds had congealed over the Blue Mountains northeast of Prairie City. But the final 80 miles were by a wide margin the most tranquil, with only a couple spatterings of rain.

It was altogether a queer journey.

I don't believe I've seen so much precipitation along the familiar route, and especially in places, such as the lee of the Cascades and the juniper country of Wheeler and western Grant counties, where rain is exceedingly rare.

The moisture, of course, is welcome in this drought year. And as I pondered the drive, in that slightly hallucinogenic state that follows a long trip by car (a sort of junior varsity version of jet lag), I recalled not only the rain ponding against the windshield and the malevolent pools in the ruts, but also the soft green of the meadows, the splashes of color from the balsamroot and the lupine, the sudden and strange lushness in a land where moisture is conspicuous by its absence.