

# Raising alcohol tax in Oregon has pros, cons

Raise your glass for mental health. Alcohol drinkers could be contributing \$746 million in new taxes every year to raise money for mental health.

The Oregon Health Authority had proposed a similar tax in its plans, but Gov. Kate Brown declined to include it in her budget. The nonprofit Oregon Recovers has teamed up with legislators to work up a tax bill anyway. Is it what Oregon needs?

Suggesting higher taxes on alcohol might not make you popular at parties, but it makes sense on some levels. Higher taxes can reduce consumption and raise money. As the price goes up, some problems might go down. The state can also raise taxes without creating a whole new bureaucracy because the bureaucracy is already there. The concept under consideration would take the money raised and use it to help Oregonians with mental health problems.

And there is a need. Relatively speaking, the state of Oregon has one of the highest rates of need for mental health care and the lowest rates of access, according to Mental Health America, a nonprofit dedicated to mental health.

We haven't seen the exact proposal, but according to the Willamette Week, it would "compel the Oregon Liquor Control Commis-

sion to raise prices 20% on hard alcohol. The rest of the money would be raised by increasing taxes on beer and wine. It's not clear what that would mean to prices for a six-pack or a bottle of wine.

Are Oregon's taxes on alcohol too high or too low now? The Tax Foundation regularly puts out maps that show relative rates among the states. Beer taxes in Oregon in 2020 were about 8 cents a gallon, giving it one of the lowest rates in the country, 45th. Wine taxes were about 67 cents a gallon, making it 31st in the country. And Oregon was No. 2 in taxes for distilled spirits at \$21.95 a gallon, though that takes into consideration an implied rate because the state of Oregon controls hard liquor sales.

Of course higher taxes could mean lower sales, and that could mean jobs. Oregon has some 900 wineries, 400 breweries, 100 cideries and 73 distributors. You can't walk far around Bend without bumping into a brewer or distiller. And many of those businesses have been slammed by the pandemic.

No matter how you feel about this tax proposal, you can let your legislator know.

# Bills would change child care, ban box

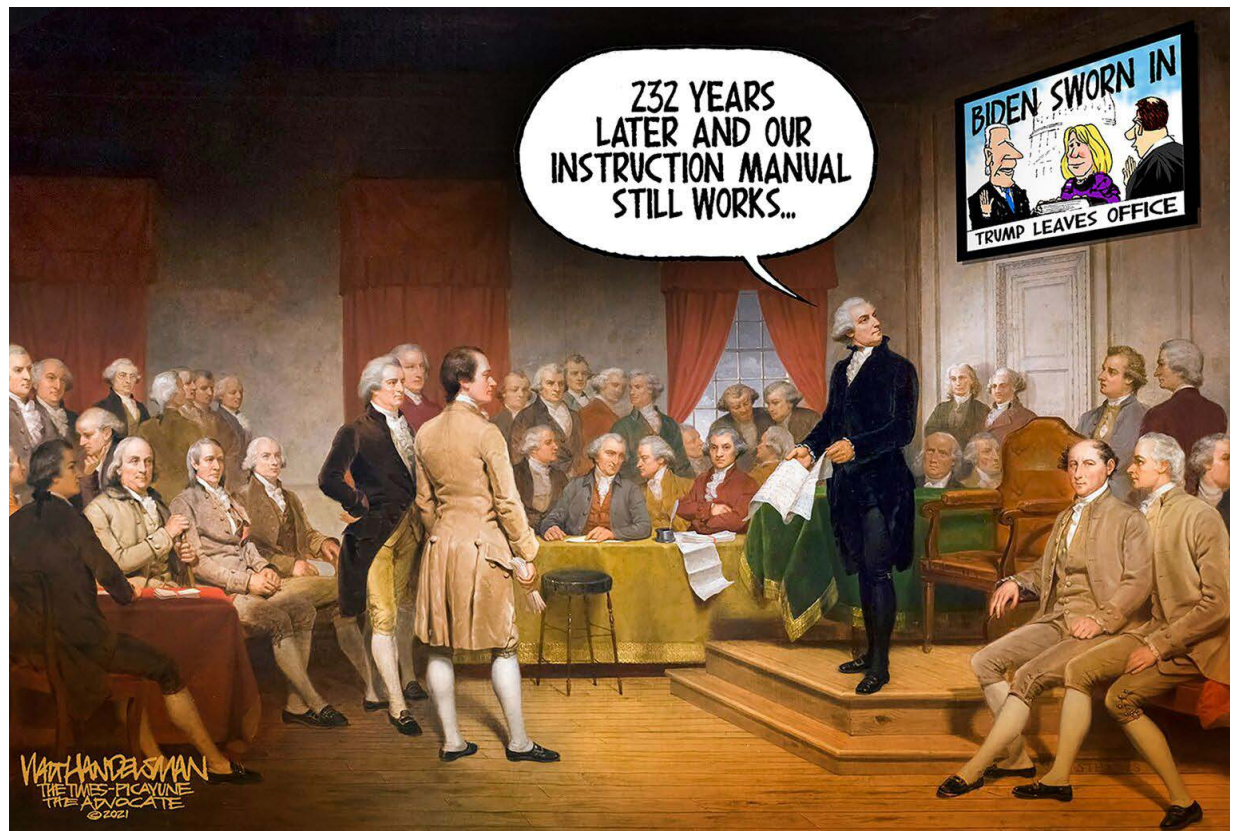
Hundreds of bills are introduced before the Legislature begins, but more are added and updated almost daily. We noticed quite a few interesting ones added to the legislative hopper late last week.

Affordable child care is simply too hard for too many families to find in Oregon. A state task force has been working on the problem. But one solid change to child care proposed is in Senate Bill 716. Employers would be required to "reasonably accommodate" an employee's work schedule request as a result of the availability of child care. What is reasonable? That is not defined. That could be a lawsuit-sized headache for employers, but let's hope everyone is indeed reasonable. Passage of this bill may mean employees without children or with more flexible child care schedules get their schedules shifted.

Transit workers in Oregon cannot strike according to state law. Senate Bill 690 would repeal that section of the law. Good news, perhaps, for transit workers. It could tilt the

balance toward more benefits and wages for them. People who ride the bus might not be so happy, if it comes to a strike.

Should people be required to disclose criminal convictions in college applications? Senate Bill 713 would prohibit private and public post-secondary institutions in Oregon from requiring applicants to make any such disclosure before a decision was made on admission. There is an exception carved out for law enforcement programs and professional degree programs. This bill can be seen as an extension of the "ban the box" movement, which strives to eliminate barriers that convicted criminals face. Most colleges across the country did require that such information be disclosed, according to a 2019 study. Disclosing a conviction may not bar a student. Lying about it might. But many believe having the question on an application at all creates a chilling effect, destroying opportunities for people to turn their lives around. Should Oregon ban the box for higher education?



# My Nickel's Worth

## Thank you for the shot

When I got my first dose of COVID-19 vaccine recently, I was positively giddy. Thank you to all the workers at the fairgrounds who work like a well-oiled machine. It was painless and efficient.

Thank you Gov. Kate Brown for making educators a priority as we return to the classroom with multiple opportunities for exposure to infection. Thank you to the over-60 citizens who have been so gracious. It is unfortunate that difficult decisions have to be made. I promise not to squander the gift I have been given. I have pages of notes and plans of how I am going to meet the needs of my students.

Thank you to the families who have worked so hard with their children during comprehensive distance learning. Your efforts were not in vain. I will continue to wear a mask, socially distance and wash my hands at every opportunity. Those are still important tools to keep everyone as safe as possible. The vaccine is not a panacea but it is beacon of hope. Thank you!

— Torree Abrams works for Bend-La Pine Schools.

## Results were reliable

With so many judicial comments, including from the Supreme Court of the United States, so many recounts of the ballot results, we ended up with the most reliable results ever from a national election. In spite of this, letter writer Jared Black wants an asterisk next to Biden's name. How do we rate Trump's four-year reign in office: @#%&\*!

— Tom Gunn, Bend

## Letters policy

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

## Gorman was an inspiration

Thank you for publishing the text of "The Hill We Climb" by the Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman, which she read at President Joe Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20.

Her composure and delivery were remarkable for a 22-year-old on such an auspicious occasion. But her words were even more impressive: eloquent, uplifting, and inspirational.

— Laurie Henberg, Sunriver

## Bad vaccination policy

Juxtaposed on Saturday's front page were three stories about COVID-19: one in which Redmond schools announced a delay of in-person learning (which I applaud) and two regarding Oregon's current vaccine priorities (which I disagree with).

Gov. Kate Brown has embarked on a program with hypothetical benefits (returning students to schools) at the expense of a known outcome (excess COVID-19 mortalities for Oregon seniors). In doing so, she repeats the same mistakes she regularly castigated the Trump administration for: ignoring the science.

She misses the point that the only way schools will return to normal is when the pandemic has ended — and the only way to end the pandemic is to follow the science as well as the recommendations of medical professionals.

Dozens — if not hundreds — of Oregon seniors will pay the ultimate price for delaying their vaccinations.

If the governor wants to demonstrate empathy and leadership, she should defer her personal vaccination until all Oregon seniors have had the opportunity to receive theirs; or, better yet, until all Oregon residents have had their turn. Nothing beats leadership by example!

— Kent McLean, Redmond

## Brown made the right choice

These trying times force tough decisions. I approve of Gov. Kate Brown's decision to vaccinate teachers before seniors. All children, especially in the K-3 group, will benefit significantly from in-person learning, not only educationally but socially as well. It has been well-documented that not only do schools teach and provide needed social interactions, but they also ensure access to meals and visibility to child abuse for some.

It is not just children that will benefit when schools reopen, but parents (mostly women) who have had to forgo working and can return if their work environment is available and safe.

How then to respond to the concern of 300 additional senior deaths if vaccinations are delayed by two weeks? Communities can help ensure that these numbers are not realized by making grocery runs for seniors, by staying in touch with their senior relatives, not with indoor gatherings, but by phone or electronic means, and following mask and social distancing rules.

At age 73, I can wait a few more weeks.

— Kay Korzun, Bend

## How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

Email: letters@bendbulletin.com

Write: My Nickel's Worth/Guest Column  
P.O. Box 6020  
Bend, OR 97708

Fax: 541-385-5804

Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.

# Biden's foreign policy must start with strength, unity at home

BY DANIEL DREZNER

Special to The Washington Post

Every U.S. president elected in this century has started his presidency by prioritizing problems at home rather than abroad. George W. Bush ran on a foreign policy platform grounded in humility, devoting his inaugural address to themes of restoring civility and reducing poverty in this country. Amid economic crisis and war, Barack Obama stressed the need for nation-building at home to "begin again the work of remaking America." Donald Trump echoed Obama's theme, declaring the need to repair American carnage and subordinate all foreign policy principles to domestic economic interests. Joe Biden continued that tradition in talking about the need "to restore the soul and to secure the future of America."

Seasoned U.S. foreign policy observers reacted to these words with a mixture of fervor and cynicism. Fervor, because there is a legitimate, ongoing debate within the foreign policy com-

munity of just how much an incoming administration should try to exercise global leadership. For some, this is because of debates about the utility of retrenchment or engagement relative to the status quo. For others, it is the content of the liberal international order that they think should be debated.

The cynicism is because national security advocates across the spectrum treat the words of an inaugural address as fleeting. Sometimes events, such as the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, force a president's hand. Sometimes, advocacy, such as those who called for humanitarian interventions or targeted assassinations, bring an issue to the front of a president's queue.

As Biden's inaugural address fades from view, it will be easy for the standard retrenchment vs. engagement debate to emerge. Traditionally, I have been on the engagement side of that argument.

This time is different. For Biden, foreign policy really has to start at home. This is not to say that the Biden

administration should be isolationist. Far from it. Biden has put together a stellar foreign policy and national security team dedicated to restoration. Whatever qualms I have about the defense secretary, the Democrats now have a much deeper foreign policy bench than Republicans, a remarkable reversal of fortune from a generation ago.

My point is that Biden should let that team take the lead on as many foreign policy questions as possible for the rest of the year.

This is not only because these problems are paramount, although they clearly are. Nor is it only because it is Biden's first year in office and he should maximize his policymaking ability while his party controls both chambers of Congress, although that is also a good reason. It is that right now, Biden's ability to address what ails the nation will help the United States overseas the most.

Read the first inaugural addresses of Bush, Obama, Trump and Biden in

sequence and a pattern emerges: The crises facing each new leader are described in progressively more apocalyptic terms. Look at polling across the world and a similar pattern emerges: Foreign attitudes toward the United States have worsened because of the country's inability to get a grip on the coronavirus pandemic. The aftermath of a Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol does not help either. Allies look at the United States and doubt its ability to credibly commit; adversaries look and see every reason to trumpet their own models as inherently superior in coping with 21st-century challenges.

The Biden administration has the capacity to shift this narrative. It can improve the testing and tracing regime. Most important, it can accelerate the vaccination of Americans well past 1 million doses a day. Given the emergence of more-infectious strains of the coronavirus, the quicker the vaccinations proceed, the better.

The more the United States displays policy competency, the greater U.S. in-

fluence will be globally.

Polls suggest that in taking office and implementing the first-day actions that eliminate the previous administration's dumbest, most counterproductive policies, Biden has already ramped up the nation's image among key allies.

Biden's foreign policy team has a lot of work to do on how to handle China, Russia, the Middle East and other global challenges. The president should let them get to it and get out of the way for 2021. His experience means they are less likely to freelance and more likely to pursue his overarching restorationist vision.

Time is a president's scarcest resource. The overwhelming bulk of Biden's time this year should be devoted to restoring Americans' trust in their own system. On this, let us hope, all stripes of the foreign policy community will agree.

■ Daniel Drezner is a professor of international politics at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.