

## EDITORIALS &amp; OPINIONS

The Bulletin  
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## Legislators shouldn't make the call on the kicker; voters should

It happened fast. Almost as soon as it was announced that state revenues were up and might trigger a \$570 million kicker tax rebate, there were calls to suspend the taxpayer rebates or do away with the kicker.

Oregon has made policy innovations that most people look on with pride — the Bottle Bill and vote by mail are two. Then there's the kicker: beloved by some, despised by others and politically prickly.

The kicker is unique to Oregon. It requires the return of income tax surpluses to taxpayers in two-year state budgets where actual collections exceed forecasted revenues by 2% or more. In other words, if more money comes in than the state guesses, it might have to send the money back to taxpayers.

Forecasting state revenue is inexact. And so the kicker kicks. The state's Legislative Fiscal Office said last year that about \$5.1 billion in personal income taxes and half a billion dollars in corporate taxes have been returned to taxpayers over the kicker's history.

Perhaps nobody criticizes the law more crisply than the Oregon Center for Public Policy. It says:

1) It's wrong that Oregonians should expect state government to be able to guess accurately or within 2% how much revenue the state will have. When the kicker kicks, it doesn't mean Oregonians have overpaid taxes. The state guessed wrong making a difficult guess.

2) The kicker makes it more challenging for the state to build up reserves.

*Some people want the Legislature to suspend the kicker, if it indeed kicks. Legislators can vote to do so with a two-thirds vote. That's difficult to do politically. Oregonians have shown a willingness to support some statewide tax increases. But it was also voters who approved the kicker tax rebate.*

3) And it says the kicker can benefit the rich more.

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The kicker serves as an awkward, imperfect check on the increase in state government spending. If legislators want the kicker money, they should put the decision in front of voters to end the kicker. Too many families have struggled during the pandemic to suspend it.

## Is Bend going to get a good deal on lawsuits?

Something relatively unusual happened at the last Bend City Council meeting. Councilor Anthony Broadman voted against the proposed legal settlements in two cases.

It's not unheard of for councilors to disagree. This got our attention because it's on a sensitive issue: condemnation lawsuits. The discussion about the settlements was in executive session. And there was also no explanation during the meeting of why Broadman voted "no."

Condemnation is when the government can take the public's land for a public purpose. Under the U.S. Constitution there must be just compensation. But when the government can take public land and what is just compensation get debated. For instance, people can have wildly different appraisal of land value.

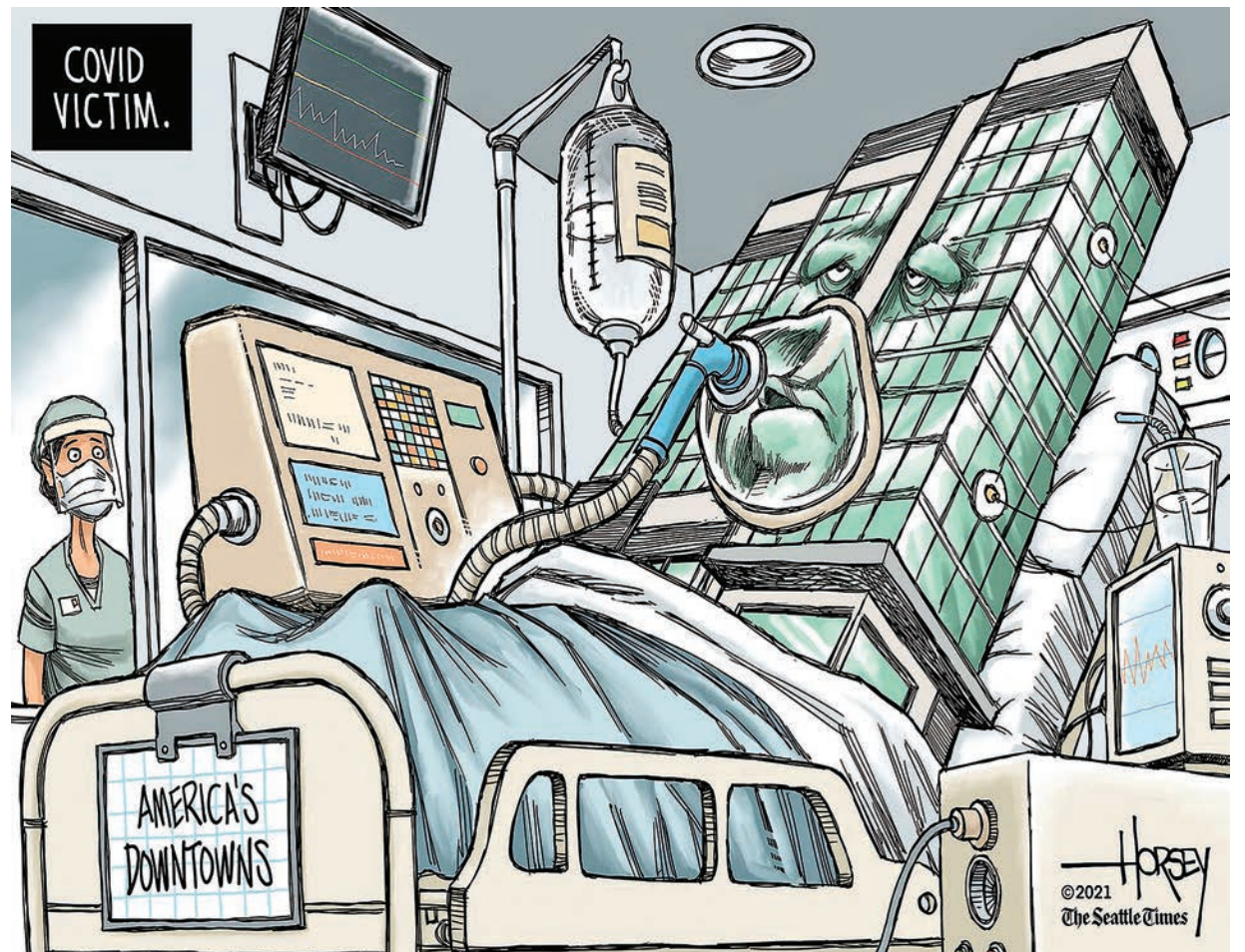
The explanation during the open session was that the city is engaged in two condemnation lawsuits to acquire easements for the north interceptor sewer project. Councilor

Barb Campbell moved to authorize the city manager to settle the lawsuits on the terms discussed in executive session. Councilors approved that motion. Broadman voted against it.

We asked him in an email after the meeting why he did. Broadman wrote: "I didn't agree with the terms of the proposed settlements in these cases. That said, it was the decision of Council and therefore I support it. I'll keep working to make sure we get the best deal for taxpayers in these and other transactions."

Is there something wrong with the city's proposed settlements? Broadman believes so, and he is an attorney. How wrong? He didn't say.

It does raise the question, though, if councilors are being careful enough when spending taxpayer money when people can't see what they are doing. From his response, at least, Broadman didn't seem to signal the city was making a terrible mistake — in his opinion. Just a mistake.



## My hero of Black History Month

BY MICHAEL PRITCHARD

This month is Black History Month. I've been listening to different people on TV talking about their Black hero. The most frequently mentioned are famous and familiar names, all worthy: MLK, Harriet Tubman, Medgar Evers, Rosa Parks, Elijah Cummings, the late John Lewis and either Obama. My Black hero is an unknown man.

My mother, who came from a fairly conservative Italian family in Boston, was a bit of a radical activist housewife. She raised us to see every human being — gay, straight, liberal, conservative, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American — as equals and, as such, deserving of the same rights and opportunities we as heterosexual whites enjoyed.

Later in life, I wondered how she evolved to this position, bringing us to protest marches on just about every social issue there was.

Growing up, I naively believed that is how the world was since the people we socialized with shared the same beliefs.

The year was 1964, and we were attending a rally for President Lyndon B. Johnson. We arrived early at Union Plaza in San Francisco so we could be in the front. My mother's goal was to let LBJ know that she supported his efforts for civil rights. Say what you will about President Johnson but, other than Abraham Lincoln and not Donald Trump, no other president did as much for the rights of Blacks,

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*When we cleared the crowd, the tall man put me down. My mother, still in tears, thanked him for putting his life in danger to save me. I didn't realize at the time what she was talking about. To me, he was an adult saving a kid, which is what adults do. To the world, he was a black man in the 1960s pushing a white cop. I later learned watching TV that in the southern states, there had been beatings and lynchings for much less.*

doing so at great risk to himself and the Democratic Party.

Just before the president arrived, the police formed a line around the stage. As the president exited the car, the police locked arms, forming a human chain. When the president stepped up to the podium, the crowd surged forward. My neck was at the height of the locked arms, and I was being strangled.

My mother was in a panic trying to push the police backwards while pulling me away, but she was unable to.

My mother started yelling at the cop to help.

The officer shrugged his shoulders and said he could not break the arm lock, that the president's safety had priority. I remember gagging and struggling for breath.

As I was passing out, I saw the officer knocked backwards. I was suddenly lifted high off the ground and placed on the shoulders of someone who was carrying me away from crowd, my mother running behind and crying, repeating "thank you, thank you for saving my baby." I remember thinking: "I am not a baby; I'm 8."

When we cleared the crowd, the tall man put me down. My mother, still in tears, thanked him for putting his life in danger to save me. I didn't realize at the time what she was talking about. To me, he was an adult saving a kid, which is what adults do. To the world, he was a Black man in the 1960s pushing a white cop. I later learned watching TV that in the Southern states, there had been beatings and lynchings for much less.

Without this man, I wouldn't have enjoyed the life I've been fortunate enough to experience with all of the privileges a white kid possesses. I'll never know why this total stranger saved a young white boy putting himself at risk unless, like my family, he didn't see us as different races, but members of the same race: the human race.

■ Michael Pritchard lives in 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.

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Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

## 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.

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## DMD Act offers solutions for access to dental care for Oregonians

BY BRAD HESTER

At the core of dentistry is a desire to take care of people — a role that has become all the more important during the pandemic. We know that access to dental care reduces the number of people who may otherwise seek treatment in emergency rooms and urgent care facilities, freeing our overburdened hospitals to focus on treating COVID-19 and saving lives.

Over the past year, Oregon dentists have embraced new ways of connecting with patients to ensure access to care, including through teledentistry, and new ways of supporting the state, such as by donating vast amounts of personal protective equipment to protect front-line health care workers. Gov. Kate Brown noted in a March 2020 press release that dentists led efforts to gather and donate their practices' masks, gloves and face shields for hospital workers and emergency

responders across the state.

Dentists have also been helping to administer the lifesaving COVID-19 vaccine in Oregon, thanks to legislation the Oregon Dental Association spearheaded in partnership with Oregon Health and Science University in 2019.

But while we have expanded our abilities to meet Oregonians' needs in this challenging time, there's much more to be done.

At a time when access to health care is more critical than ever, our state suffered funding cuts to Medicaid dental benefits, a crucial safety net for vulnerable Oregonians. With limited resources, our state leaders must now focus on proven solutions providing Oregonians with equitable, high-quality care, such as integrated and school-based services, and support health care providers who accept Medicaid patients or

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operate in remote, rural and other underserved communities.

That's why Oregon dentists and our partners are supporting comprehensive legislation in 2021 that will begin to address these challenges while laying the foundation for stronger, more efficient and equitable care for decades to come.

The bipartisan Dental Management and Delivery Act, or DMD Act, would expand Oregon's Cover All Kids program, adding dental benefits to free health coverage for many children in the state. It would also continue removing obstacles to

make access to care more convenient for Oregonians, offering additional support to make sure dentists can afford to operate in remote areas and treat as many Medicaid patients as possible. And it would initiate an analysis of Oregon's Medicaid reimbursement system, helping future legislators understand some of the biggest obstacles to ensuring Medicaid-eligible Oregonians receive regular dental care.

Underlying all of these initiatives is a focus on health equity.

Health equity, according to the Institute of Medicine, means providing care that "does not vary in quality because of personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, geographic location, and socioeconomic status." This means programs targeting health equity should not simply focus on access to care, but must also ensure equity in the quality of that

care for all Oregonians, including Black, Indigenous, people of color and rural communities.

Oregon dentists support the Tribal Scholarship for Equity in Dental and Medical Education as a step toward achieving this goal.

This bill would help members of Oregon tribes attend OHSU tuition-free and join the next generation of dentists and medical doctors in our state.

Legislators have an opportunity to create a new, stronger foundation for dental care by supporting the DMD Act in the 2021 session. Together, we're making great strides in unprecedented times, and together we can ensure all Oregonians have access to equitable health care when they need it most.

■ Dr. Brad Hester, DMD, is president of the Oregon Dental Association and practices family dentistry in Bend.