

Success and not success at the DMV

When you think about the backlog of Oregonians waiting for an appointment at the DMV, success can be measured differently.

David House, an ODOT spokesman, told us about the successes the DMV has had and a program scheduled to debut in May that should bring more success. But if you want an appointment today to get your driver's license renewed or upgrade to a REAL ID, good luck. Is that success?

House is right — in a number of ways. And we aren't just saying that to be nice.

The DMV had to shut down its offices for weeks during the early days of the pandemic. And in a pre-COVID month, the DMV could get about 50,000 people looking for an in-person visit. Every day DMV offices were closed, a backlog grew. The backlog is still there. House said ODOT doesn't know how big it is.

The offices did open up again. Visits are now by appointment. For some people, the appointment system is success. It's more predictable than the lottery of showing up and hoping a herd of others didn't pick the same moment. The DMV plans to keep appointments even after the pandemic is over. That, for some people, is also success.

The DMV has a new computer system for its licensing and registration. It should enable it to get more done. It was able to process about 12,000 people to 13,000 people in a week in June. Two weeks ago, it hit 34,000. That is success.

And in May, the DMV is scheduled to launch a new system that will enable people to do a lot of things

remotely — without having to visit a DMV office. Lost your license? You can get a replacement. Want to renew your license? You can do that and much more. Certain things will still require an in-person visit such as getting a REAL ID. And the great thing about the online system is that every person who uses it will free up more opportunities for people who need to have in-person visits. Success.

ODOT requested some changes in state law this year from the Legislature. House Bill 2137 basically gives people more of a grace period if their license has expired. It also removes the Oregon requirement that people must take the written driver exam if they have a valid license and move into the state. Every time a person fails that test, it means another in-person visit. House said ODOT does not believe the requirement for the test in that situation actually improves safety. The bill does other things, as well. It seems to be on track to become law. That would be success.

Despite all those successes, try right now to get an in-person appointment at your local DMV. House said he did not have specific statistics, though he said it is generally much more difficult in more populated counties. We have checked for Deschutes County over the last week. No appointments available, at least when we checked. That may not be outright failure. It is not success.

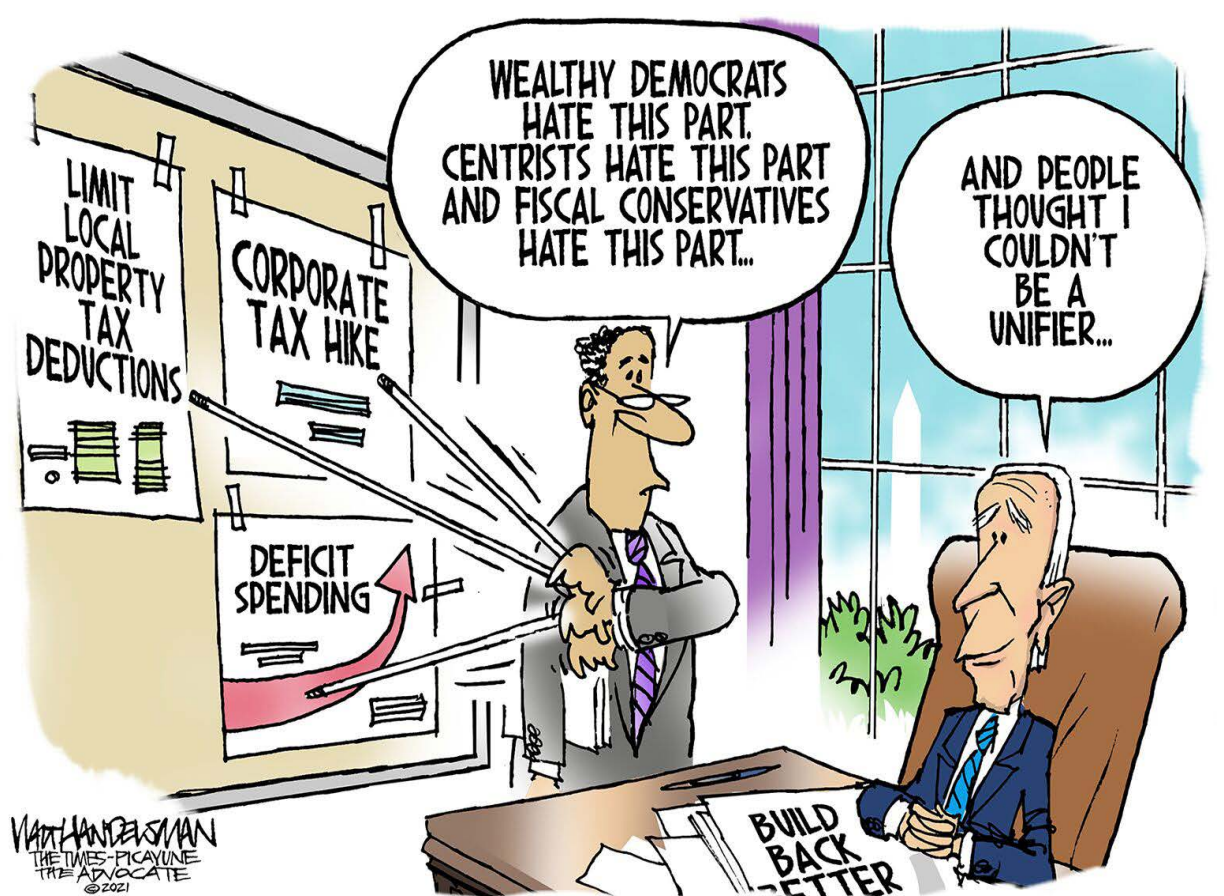
Worrying increase in calls to state's bias hotline

The stunning increase in attacks on people of Asian descent across the country is appalling. Oregon has its share. One way of looking at it: Oregon has seen an uptick in the number of reports of bias incidents or hate crimes to its Hate and Bias Crimes hotline.

In March, there were 182 reports to the hotline. There were 36 reports of anti-Asian bias with 15 classified as bias incidents and 21 as hate crimes. There were also 3 reports of anti-Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander bias. Compare that to 22 re-

ports total of anti-Asian bias to the hotline in February and 10 reports in January.

Calls into the hotline are an admittedly imperfect measure of the levels of bias and hate crimes. It surely undercounts. The hotline does do something well: It ensures victims have a place to reach out to for support and assistance. The people who answer are trauma-informed and trained in crisis intervention. You can report online at StandAgainstHate.Oregon.Gov, or by calling 1-844-924-BIAS (2427).



GUEST COLUMN

Oregon can make it easier for patients to receive care

BY CONOR NORRIS AND EDWARD TIMMONS

COVID-19 has shed light on the importance of making sure that patients have access to the health care they need. The Oregon Legislature is taking steps to expand the availability of health care that should help address this ongoing challenge.

Most of us have recognized the very real threat of overwhelming health care capacity during COVID-19, and just how harmful that could be. However, we have been suffering from a physician shortage for years. Even in normal times, too many have difficulties receiving primary care.

After COVID-19 is in the rearview mirror—these challenges will remain. Currently, part of every county in Oregon is considered a health care shortage area. These are primarily rural and low income urban areas.

People living in health care shortage areas across the state receive worse health care. Long wait times and choosing to delay care worsens health outcomes, having a long-term effect on Oregonians' health.

The Oregon Legislature has a chance to change that with a simple bill that expands access to care without compromising patient safety.

HB 3036 is currently in the House Health Care Committee. It would allow physician assistants to practice

with more independence from physicians. This independence will give PAs the flexibility to provide care in health care shortage areas where finding a physician to collaborate with is difficult.

How will this bill work? PAs perform many of the same tasks as physicians that provide primary care for patients. They can diagnose illnesses, conduct physicals and prescribe medication. PAs are an important component of health care. While they don't have the lengthy requirements that physicians do, they undergo rigorous training and education and do 2,000 hours of clinical rotations.

PAs can't do everything physicians are trained to do. HB 3036 harnesses that skill and allows PAs to work to their full potential. The current law requires PAs to enter into a collaborative agreement with a physician or physician group. This bill would expand a PA's options, allowing them to also sign an agreement with another PA with sufficient years of experience.

HB 3036 does not expand what PAs are allowed to do outside of their training. Instead, it allows them to continue to provide the same type of care they currently provide. The only change is making it easier.

Many health care shortage areas lack physicians, so allowing PAs to collaborate with an experienced PA will make it easier to practice in cur-

rently underserved locations. Helping them receive care more easily is a win for patients.

Even though it expands access, it does so safely, without risking patients' health. Oregon will still ensure that PAs are practicing with supervision, so that they provide only the care that they have the training for.

Oregon joins a growing number of states looking to expand PA autonomy. North Dakota and Utah have recently passed laws that allow PAs to practice with full independence as a way to solve their health care shortages. Oregon's HB 3036 does not go as far, but it is in the same spirit. It's an attempt to expand access for patients by using the professionals we already have.

Health care shortages have plagued Oregon for too long, but it doesn't have to be this way. Giving PAs more independence in collaborative agreements isn't the cure for all ills, but it will expand access to care by making it easier for PAs to practice in health care shortage areas. Ensuring that all patients in Oregon have access to health care is important, and right now we have the chance to make it a reality.

■ *Conor Norris is a research analyst and Edward Timmons is director of the Knee Center for the Study of Occupational Regulation. Timmons is also professor of economics at Saint Francis University in Loretto, Pennsylvania.*

GUEST COLUMN

Urban, younger Oregonians believe they can have more impact

BY KEVIN FRAZIER

A large percentage (43%) of Oregonians do not believe they can make their community a better place to live, according to a recent Oregon Values and Beliefs Center survey. That figure becomes a majority among Oregonians ages 65+; just 62% do not believe they can have a big or moderate effect on their community. That percentage is also a majority among rural Oregonians (54%).

Comparatively, urban (64%) and younger (66%) Oregonians feel much more capable of having a positive effect.

What explains these differences?

There's no one answer. Instead a variety of factors have convinced some Oregonians that the system is just too stacked against them to be able to turn the gears in their favor.

One explanatory factor: access to

information. Nearly 6 in 10 urban Oregonians have a high degree of trust in the people who publish the news about their community; whereas just 4 in 10 rural Oregonians share that view. There's also a 10 percentage point gap in how much Oregonians in the tricity area trust broadcast news when compared to Oregonians in the rest of the state (57% versus 47%).

The connection between faith in local news and faith in capacity to incite change makes sense. If you feel confident that you know what's going on in your neck of the woods, then you likely feel capable of getting involved or at least staying informed about major changes in your community.

Another factor impacting the impact gap: personal security. Oregonians 65+ seem to feel more in control over their personal wellbeing. A full 85% of these older Oregonians

reported that they feel able to control what is important in their lives on a majority of days. That number plummets to 65% for Oregonians between 18- and 29-years old. Perhaps insecurity about their own lives spurs younger Oregonians to feel as though it's only through communitywide changes that they can improve their own well-being.

One final factor and more evidence for the thesis: disparities in how much people feel as though community leaders care about their needs. Almost 60% of younger Oregonians agree that "[t]he people running my community don't really care much about what happens to me." On the opposite side of the spectrum, only 44% of older Oregonians doubt the responsiveness of their community leaders.

Why these gaps matter

Our democracy hinges on its perceived legitimacy. If people don't feel as though the levers of change are

responsive to their efforts to make their community better, then faith and participation in our democracy understandably decreases. Consider that around half of Oregonians in the tricity area are somewhat or very satisfied with the way our democracy works, but only 39% of Oregonians in the rest of the state share that level of satisfaction.

The aforementioned factors suggest that we've got a lot of work to do when it comes to giving Oregonians the information and leaders they deserve.

What are some ways to chip away at this impact gap?

First, address news deserts. Oregonians in every community deserve news that's well-funded and well-sourced so that they can keep local officials accountable and share opportunities about how and when to get involved.

Second, make our elected officials more accountable to voters, not spe-

cial interests. One way this is happening is through campaign finance reform. This will help give all Oregonians a chance to impact an election, while also reducing the extreme sway wealthy individuals and organizations hold over candidates.

Third, we can end the idea of Oregon exceptionalism when it comes to good governance. This may sound harsh, but Oregon is not living up to its own standards when it comes to being a leader in democracy. Across the urban/rural divide and age spectrum, only 1 out of every 4 Oregonians think the state's democracy has gotten stronger in the last four years. That's abysmal.

To improve our democracy here in Oregon, we have to be more open about the fact that it's flawed and more intentional about instituting meaningful reforms.

■ *Kevin Frazier was raised in Washington County, Oregon. He is pursuing a law degree at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law.*

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