

# Road tax must be fair for rural drivers, too

Starting July 1, Oregon will begin testing a new twist on highway funding — one that taxes vehicles based on the miles they travel rather than the fuel they consume.

At first glance, this seems a more realistic way to pay for our highway system. It comes against a backdrop of change, with gas prices relatively low — for the time being — and more drivers buying hybrid and electric cars that use less gas and thus pay less tax. Those trends increasingly limit the revenue source for needed repairs and construction.

Yet the mileage tax also raises serious issues — particularly for rural residents — that must be addressed.

The basic scheme is to replace fuel taxes paid at the pump with a flat 1.5 cent per mile charge for use of public roads in Oregon. Up to 5,000 volunteers will start testing the concept next week, using small digital devices to track their mileage. California, Washington and Indiana all are at earlier stages of considering the concept.

U.S. drivers, especially those who don't live in the Northeast where there are more toll highways, are pretty spoiled when it comes to transportation costs. Generally, our gasoline is taxed at far lower rates than is the case in the rest of the developed world, and we have fewer toll roads.

It's safe to say nobody relishes having to pay either taxes or tolls, but expensive public infrastructure like highways and bridges is one of the best examples of government providing something private citizens need but are unable to accomplish on our own.

Considering the systemic changes underway in oil markets

and automobiles, fuel taxes simply can't keep up. Only in recent years has technology come along that will allow accurate monitoring of actual miles driven, giving a new option for transportation funding.

Civil liberties activists see the monitoring devices as a potential intrusion on privacy. Oregon has responded by designing one option that uses global positioning satellite tracking and another option that relies on a simple odometer that counts passing miles. Any records that are collected are supposed to be carefully controlled and then destroyed after they have served their revenue purpose.

In any event, such privacy worries may be pointless in a nation where smart phones can already be tracked anywhere and cameras watch over many streets and highways.

Owners and dealers of hybrid and electric cars also worry they'll lose the tax advantage they gained from buying less gasoline or diesel. But fair's fair — as long as they use the roads, they should be helping pay to maintain them.

Of more concern locally is the impact this could have on rural drivers. Residents of remote areas like Grant County must travel significant mileage to take care of business city-dwellers take for granted: grocery shopping, doctor appointments, going to and from the office and more. They don't have a choice in that.

The new program will provide credits when the gas tax paid at the pump exceeds the road tax, one way the state hopes to equalize the burden. Still, it will bear watching to make certain the system plays out fairly, without burdening rural drivers more than they already are by fuel taxes.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Climate Kool-Aid?

To the Editor:

This letter is in response to global warming. I agree with the global warming proponents to a point; we have come a long way in controlling pollution. Our pollution expertise 50 years ago was leading the charge on polluting our planet. That is until the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act, which stopped this insane practice of spewing nitrous oxide, sulfur dioxide and other polluting gases that hung over the cities and industrial centers like a fog.

But it seems now it is fossil fuel, oil and natural gas that contribute to carbon dioxide gas. We as humans contribute by the air we inhale, removing the oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide. The trees and the vegetation love us because they need it to survive and thrive, and they give out oxygen so that we may survive and thrive, also. Al Gore's thinking on global warming could be self-serving because Al owns businesses building green energy equipment.

The Al Gores of the world want us to quit using carbon-polluting oil and natural gas to cut down on the nasty old carbon dioxide. But even Al Gore is at a loss for words when you mention the volcanic fire chain in the South Pacific erupting several hundred times a year, spewing out tons of carbon dioxide. Just the eruption in Iceland alone wiped out all of Al Gore's hard work and put more carbon dioxide in the air than we have since we started cutting back on carbon dioxide; that isn't even counting the hundreds of eruptions a year.

Not only that, when a forest or even a grass fire burns, it gives up to the atmosphere all of the carbon dioxide it has consumed in its entire lifetime.

Back when Oregon was just an inland sea, volcanic eruptions, lava flows and mountain building were prevalent in Oregon. So much so, that the carbon dioxide levels were so high they super-saturated the inland sea with carbon dioxide. This super-saturation settled to the sea bottom and contributed to the limestone deposits that Ash Grove is mining today that are thousands of feet thick.

I deal with fact, and quit drinking Kool-Aid and believing in fairy stories when I was a kid.

Chuck Chase  
Baker City

### A thousand times no!

To the Editor:

Recently the Forest Service came forth with the Magone Lake project. In reading over the projected work, you will find that a bicycle trail, horse

trail, hiking trail combo has been proposed in the Nipple Butte Wildlife area. It has been reported that this was introduced by a group of mountain bicycle riders.

This proposal in the Nipple Butte area is totally out of order. The Nipple Butte wildlife area is one of the few sanctuaries north of the John Day River where animals can go to get away from the disturbance of man's activity.

There are plenty of places for the bicycle rider, horse rider, or hikers to enjoy without opening up intrusion into this area. In the past I have proposed that instead of closing some of the minimally used roads, make bike trails, horse trails, and hiking trails out of them. Wouldn't that create a win-win situation? Some of the bicycle folks have backed out of their initial support of this request after they realized what it would do.

The Forest Service says that one of the reasons to take roads out of service is to protect wildlife habitat and lessen the disturbance of animals. Well, isn't it like talking out of both sides of your mouth to say that and then entail some proposal to build trails that are going to be an intrusion into one of those very areas?

No, no, a thousand times no!

Dean Elliott  
Canyon City

### OCA event a hit

To the Editor:

A recent event at the Grant County Fairgrounds was the summer quarterly meeting of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and the Oregon Beef Council. Numerous comments mentioned the quality of the facility and the services available by the staff.

The Snaffle Bit dinner house catered several meals. The Friday lunch was a barbecue by the Prairie FFA group.

Attending from the County Court was Commissioner Boyd Britton, a member of the OCA and the Grant County Stockgrowers; his attendance was appreciated. The editor of the Blue Mountain Eagle was present for the session on wolves in Oregon and wrote an article for the local paper. Over 100 participants from the membership as well as representatives from several state agencies were in attendance.

An issue of concern to all of us is water, and a representative from the Board of Agriculture gave a good account of what is expected of land owners.

The local Les Schwab Tire Center was generous in sponsorship of the luncheon on Thursday. Other sponsors were listed in the agenda for the

meeting. The overall event was also a boon to the county economy as several motels were booked full.

Sharon Livingston  
Long Creek

### Secede or succumb

To the Editor:

Rural Oregonians in general and east Oregonians in particular are growing increasingly dismayed by the manner in which Oregon's legislature and urban dwellers have marginalized their valued, demonized their lifestyle, villainized their resource-based livelihoods and classified them as second-class citizens at best. All the while Oregon's most fertile and well watered farm ground has urban sprawl, gangs, illegal aliens, homeless camps, and touchy feely politics that add little or no value to rural lifestyles.

Oregon's rural residents carve out a resource-based living on marginal farm ground and the leftovers of Oregon's economic growth, infrastructure and tech innovation.

The Portland metro area is home to 47 percent of Oregon's voters and covers a mere 3,776.41 square miles of the state's 98,466 square miles — less than 4 percent of its land mass. Five of Oregon's 36 counties control 100 percent of Oregon's legislative activity. None are rural. None are east of the Cascades. None are outside the Willamette Valley.

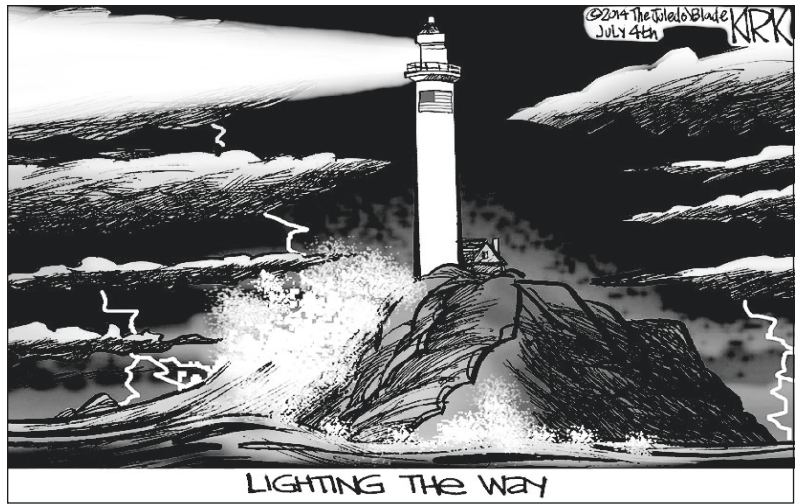
It would appear to a rural resident or outside observer that most of Oregon's urbanites view rural residents as nothing more than third-world inhabitants occupying their weekend and vacation playgrounds.

Since 1988 Oregon's urban dwellers have elected a group of individuals that represent an aristocracy of political power; switching their role in democracy from servant to lord. These people have disenfranchised and subjugated the people outside Portland or the Willamette Valley. They enact laws with little or no debate. They say they will fix admittedly flawed laws after they are enacted; this is backward legislative procedure designed to exclude and silence opposition, often with money from East Coast power brokers.

Time for a change. Time to organize. Time to secede or succumb. Thirty-one counties need to put an initiative on their ballots: "Should (my) county secede from the state of Oregon and seek a more perfect union elsewhere?"

Imagine Idaho's western border stretching to the Pacific, and the state of Oregon shrinking to less than 4,000 square miles of landlocked river view property.

Grant Darrow  
Elgin



LIGHTING THE WAY

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