

Trump right on tariffs for Canadian lumber

It isn't often that an international argument has a direct impact on a local industry, but such may be the case with President Donald Trump's move to impose a tariff of between 3 and 24.1 percent on softwood lumber imported from Canada.

In effect a tax, tariffs are intended to provide a competitive advantage for U.S. goods or to counteract an unfair disadvantage such as might result from a foreign government subsidizing its own industries. Efforts to level the playing field in this way are common but hazardous, in the sense that they can incite foreign governments to retaliate against U.S. products.

Canada currently controls about one-third of the U.S. market share for softwood lumber, which is used for framing houses and some other purposes, such as building mattress box springs.

This particular fight has gone on since at least the early 1980s, and even farther back in other forms. U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, the Oregon Democrat, recently called it the "longest-running battle since the Trojan War."

As explained by the business journal BloombergPolitics, "Most of the softwood in Canada is owned by provincial governments, which set prices to cut trees on their land, while in the U.S. it's generally harvested from private property. The fees charged by Canadian governments are below market rates, creating an unfair advantage, U.S. producers say. Canada disputes that." The U.S. Department of Commerce alleges the Canadian government provides up to 32 additional types of subsidies to keep its lumber artificially cheap.

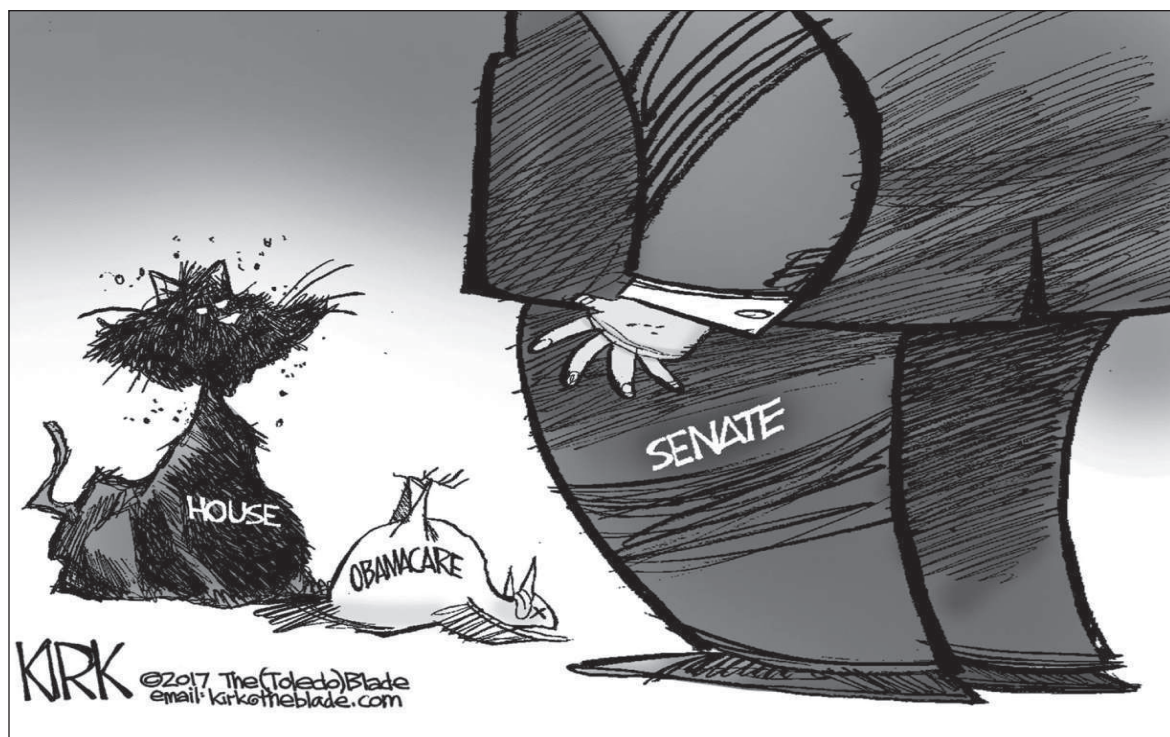
Logging and lumber production represent a significant economic sector in our region. Though nowhere near as dominant as they were a century ago, forestry-related firms remain key to rural economies such as ours, and most in the industry will be grateful for federal help in this fight, so long as it is effective and long-lasting.

Andrew Miller, CEO for Oregon-based Stimson Lumber Co., told National Public Radio that particularly when homebuilding is on a down cycle, the Canadian subsidies in effect act like a grocer holding his thumb on the scale as produce is being weighed. Over time, this inequity has discouraged investment and made it harder for U.S. companies to compete.

"People are less inclined to hire, and meanwhile the Canadian mills are humming away at full employment," Miller said. He and others in the U.S. industry say that increasing their share of the domestic market will directly translate into more American jobs at mills.

The Trump tariffs were actually a good deal less than some expected — not wildly out of line with those the two governments have agreed to in the past. Miller said he estimates they would only add about \$200 to the cost of a new \$250,000 house, though U.S. homebuilders — who oppose the tariff — have a higher figure.

Long experience with tariffs suggests they are usually not the best way to achieve goals that instead require careful and rational negotiations. However, in this case the Trump administration may have chosen the right tool for the right job.



GUEST COMMENT

Rural Oregon wants health care solutions

By Ron Wyden
U.S. senator, (D-Oregon)

Quality rural healthcare always has been and always will be a fundamental foundation to sustain robust rural life in Oregon.

Maintaining quality rural healthcare poses special challenges when hospitals and doctors may be a long drive or even a helicopter flight away, challenges made even harder by inclement winter weather.

We must meet the challenge to protect the health and well-being of rural seniors, children and families. At the same time, healthcare generates good jobs at good wages, providing significant financial resources for smaller communities statewide.

Because rural healthcare is so key, I'm holding a statewide rural healthcare listening tour this year. I've heard so far from doctors, nurses, patients, advocates and many others about what's working and what needs improving to stay on the path toward quality care for all.

Two of my seven roundtables were in Pendleton and John Day. I plan additional Oregon rural healthcare meetings this year but so far can report these five takeaways from my meetings in Pendleton, John Day and the other five roundtables:

1) The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has produced real benefits for rural Oregonians

Rural healthcare providers overwhelmingly said many Oregonians have benefited from the ACA.

I heard powerful personal stories of Oregonians whose lack of insurance pre-ACA had forced them to put off essential medical treatment

because the mammoth healthcare expenses would have bankrupted them.

Thanks to coverage under the ACA, those same people can now receive vital care that helps keep them healthy and providing for their families.

I also heard how the ACA generated more cost-saving and life-saving preventive care, as well as access to caseworkers and behavioral health providers to help patients improve their quality of life.

Healthcare providers also talked about the important connections they can make in coordinating services to link crucial mental health treatment, community resources and good physical health care.

2) Expansion of Medicaid in rural Oregon has been especially helpful. More than 1 in 4 Oregonians are enrolled in Medicaid — and that share exceeds one in three in some rural counties.

I heard repeatedly how repealing the ACA's Medicaid expansion would significantly decrease rural coverage and increase uncompensated care. That could force shutdowns of rural hospitals and clinics, many of which already have slim financial margins.

Cuts to Medicaid would worsen the often-tough job of recruiting providers to rural Oregon, with the ultimate victims being rural residents needing healthcare.

3) Some of the heaviest impacts from repealing the ACA and slashing Medicaid funding would land on rural seniors and children; and people battling opioid addiction

Rural seniors would be threatened because those older Oregonians tend to have chronic condi-

tions and disabilities, and are more likely to enter nursing homes.

I also heard how rural children could suffer because youngsters are disproportionately served through the Oregon Health Plan.

And providers also spoke of how the fight to combat opioid addiction would become tougher if the expanded addiction treatment coverage under the ACA is lost.

4) Soaring prescription drug prices continue to undermine lasting healthcare solutions

There were harrowing tales about Oregonians facing prescription drug costs that place the treatment they need far out of financial reach.

Providers and patients alike highlighted about the need to lift the veil of secrecy covering the opaque system of pricing prescription drugs.

We discussed my bill that would require pharmacy benefit managers in Medicare to disclose their total rebates provided by drug manufacturers.

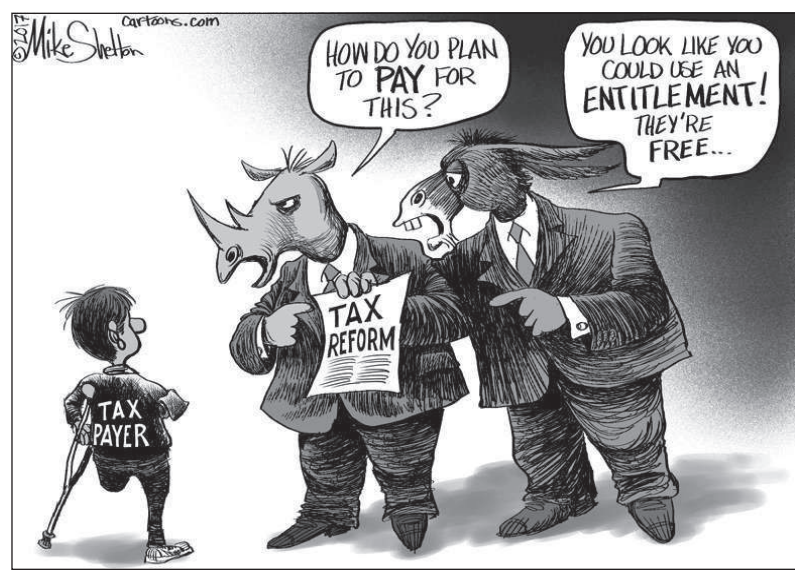
The legislation also would disclose how much those rebates are passed on to health plans so prices are lowered for people needing prescription drugs.

5) Rural Oregon is hungry for solutions

Oregonians prefer proven innovations pioneered in rural Oregon over partisan standoffs that could reverse those gains.

They say ideas are most likely to succeed when they emerge from the "Oregon Way" prioritizing what works over partisan politics.

I wholeheartedly agree.
Ron Wyden is Oregon's senior U.S. senator.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Will there be a next generation of ranchers in Oregon?

To the Editor:

As third-generation stewards of our ranch in Eastern Oregon, we are concerned about the slow, steady decline of Oregon's agricultural land base, and the aging of the farmer and rancher population, now nearly 60 years old on average.

For rural counties in Eastern Oregon, agriculture is the primary economic driver. As aging farmers and ranchers transition their operations to the next generation, they face many obstacles, including estate tax, increasing prices of agricultural lands and mounting pressure from regulatory agencies.

These obstacles create reluctance in young people to "follow the family footsteps" and take over the family farm or ranch. Those children who do not want to continue the family business need to pay off Oregon's repressive estate tax, which sometimes forces them to sell parcels of land. The resulting reduction in size compromises the economic viability and integrity of the whole, often resulting in the eventual sale of the remaining land for developmental uses.

It is urgent and imperative to

facilitate the positive transition of ag lands to the next generation. The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (House Bill 3249) is a good start. It highlights permanent working lands easements and temporary covenants as "tools" for farmers and ranchers to preserve their working lands within mutually agreed upon parameters. Easements and covenants prevent fragmentation and development of the land, while allowing ag production and compensating the landowner for the forgone rights. These agreements do not affect property tax rates.

In short, conservation easements provide an avenue to transition working ag lands to the next generation at an affordable value while allowing for the continuation of a productive lifestyle vital to our rural economy and our state.

For the future of Oregon's working landscapes, future generations and our wildlife habitat and open space, we urge Oregon's Legislature to support the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (HB 3249). If we do not act now to protect working agricultural lands, they will continue to decline until we have none. The loss of working lands means loss of the attributes that brought all of our families to this beautiful state in the first place.

Roger O. and Meredith L. Ediger
Mt. Vernon

Donations for athletic fees appreciated

To the Editor:

In my 20 years as an educator, I have known some very generous boosters for specific athletic events or teams. These donations are appreciated but usually only benefit a select group of individuals. In my experience, Russ Young's donation of paying the athletic fees since March of 2016 is unprecedented. Reducing the financial barrier for student athletes for over a year has benefited any and all families that chose to take advantage of our athletic programs. With over \$40,000 donated to our community in one year, his generosity is unparalleled.

You do great things for our community and more specific from my perspective, our school.

Jason Miller, athletic director
Grant Union Jr./Sr. High School

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WHERE TO WRITE

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Grant County's Weekly Newspaper

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Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

Periodicals Postage Paid at John Day and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER
send address changes to:
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195 N. Canyon Blvd.
John Day, OR 97845-1187

USPS 226-340

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