

Tax debate requires a sharp eye

It's hard to cover the machinations of Washington, D.C., from the friendly wide open spaces of Eastern Oregon. It's doubly hard when the issue being discussed in the Capitol is the American tax code, a mess so complicated that most Americans can barely make limited sense of it.

Now how in the world could a reader translate the whispers, rumors and actual reports of possible changes to the system — and not just what effect those changes would have on you and your family — but on millions of other Americans, our national debt, the Federal Reserve and the global economic system?

It's near impossible, but that doesn't mean we intend to give tax reform short shrift. Perhaps nothing is as important to our readers, and to the fiscal strength of our country and its inhabitants.

Republicans are in control of all levers of the federal government, having secured the White House and a majority in the Senate and House of Representatives in 2016.

Thus far, that hasn't translated into any meaningful legislative victories, but tax reform is by far the best chance. Most Americans don't trust Republicans when it comes to health care, but a majority do when it comes to fiscal policies. And tax reform also unites both the Trumpian and traditional wings of the Republican Party (who were divided on health care) as well as many moderate non-affiliated voters who yearn for simpler and lower taxes.

"Tax reform," at its core, is supported by a majority of Americans. But how you slice and dice "reform" moves its acceptability ratings. If a majority of the tax cuts and "reform" is perceived to benefit corporations and the rich, its popularity plummets. Therefore, it's curious to see the different tax packages currently being debated in the House and Senate, which are both centered around cutting taxes for corporations and the rich. That's especially disappointing due to the fact that low-income Americans were the voters who swept Trump into the presidency.

Republicans argue that those tax breaks will eventually trickle down, but on that fact many economists remain unconvinced, and history hasn't done much to

sway them. An analysis of the House plan by the Tax Policy Center concludes taxes would decrease for all income groups in 2018, but by 2027, 50 percent of the tax benefits would go to those with incomes in the top 1 percent.

Both bills would almost double the standard deduction. But at the same time, they would eliminate the personal exemption for each taxpayer and dependent, which could actually cause large families to pay more.

Removing the medical expense tax deduction, as is proposed in the House plan, would be good for the deficit but bad for many Americans already struggling with high medical costs. The student loan interest tax deduction to be eliminated in the House plan is a significant help to many young people who pursue higher education. The Senate plan currently retains these deductions.

The Senate plan to eliminate federal deductions for state and local income and property taxes would affect taxpayers differently, based on local and state taxes. After opposition to a similar proposal in the House plan, it was amended to allow up to a \$10,000 deduction for state and local property taxes.

There are hundreds — maybe thousands — of nooks and crannies in these proposals, each of which will have real-world effects on the wallets and budgets of all Americans.

And as they wend their way through Congress, the bills are sure to change form many times over in ways both obvious and obscure. The Republican party establishment will have their go at it, as will lobbyists and special interest groups, and the White House holds key powers as well. Americans should remain positive about the possibility of true reform and its ability to improve our broken tax system. But we should demand fairness, simplicity and reasonableness from the tax code. And we should demand that the needs and desires of taxpayers outweigh the lobbyists and special interests, the corporations and the rich.

It won't be easy. But if it's done, the American people and economy — as well as the political party that ushers it into being — stand to benefit.



GUEST COMMENT

Pass Oregon Clean Energy Jobs bill to help our rural communities and Tribes

By Don Sampson
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

As a fishery biologist, I have worked on Columbia River salmon restoration for over 30 years. As an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, I grew up on the Reservation hunting elk and deer, and fishing for salmon.

My work has involved studying changes to our river system. The impact of climate change became apparent almost 20 years ago as our Tribes studied the flow of water in the river at different times. Since then, our Tribes have worked extensively to document the impact of climate change on our salmon and Oregon rivers due to reduced snowpack and increased drought. For many of you reading this, you know summer wildfires fill our skies for weeks with smoke — affecting our air, our children, our elders. It is projected the intensity and magnitude of wildfires in the West will increase due to climate change. We are seeing it now.

Native Americans and rural communities in Oregon are affected by climate impacts on a daily basis. The salmon run sometimes arrives late — or not at all. The migration patterns of birds and elk, which we have hunted for generations, are changing. The native roots in the foothills and mountains that we have relied on for food arrive earlier and for a much shorter period of time. Last year the huckleberries were few, arrived early, and the window of time they were available decreased from three months to two and a half weeks. These native foods have great cul-



Contributed photo

Don Sampson and grandson Loren.

tural and ceremonial significance, and to lose them due to climate change means losing part of who we are.

We're working on adaptation strategies, but many tribes have also begun to focus on how to prevent and mitigate climate impacts by reducing carbon pollution, increasing the use of wind and solar energy, and developing innovative projects like at the Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, which is so energy efficient it produces nearly as much energy as it uses.

The Clean Energy Jobs bill, a policy I'm advocating that the legislature pass in 2018, is important to Tribes and rural communities like Pendleton, because it will reduce climate pollution by making large emitters pay for what they pollute, and use the proceeds to invest in clean energy solutions. Investments will be prioritized to help Native American communities and other low income, rural and communities of color that are hardest hit by the impacts of climate change and air pollution.

The Clean Energy Jobs bill will also help tribes protect the forest. Trees absorb carbon dioxide, and companies can "offset" some of

their contributions to global warming by paying to protect the trees. The Warm Springs Tribe in central Oregon just completed a 20,000-acre forest land project on the east side of Mt. Jefferson. This project will help mitigate carbon emissions for the next 100 years while bring millions in revenues to be reinvested in the reservation's rural economy. But this project is being developed under California's cap and trade program. With Clean Energy Jobs, tribes could participate in the offset program, right here in Oregon benefiting the Tribe and all Oregonians.

Most Tribes in Oregon are developing climate mitigation plans, and the reinvestment resources from Clean Energy Jobs would create an exciting opportunity for Tribes to implement those plans. These plans are being developed with our local city, county and state partners. We could invest in expanding renewable energy like wind and solar and in land preservation, which creates jobs and protects our culture, food and watershed.

Our lives and our way of life are interconnected with the climate. It's time to transition Oregon from dirty to clean energy while creating jobs and business opportunities. Find out how you can help at RenewOregon.org. When the legislature convenes in February, they should pass the Clean Energy Jobs bill.

Don Sampson is the former chairman and executive director of the Umatilla Tribe. He currently serves as the climate change project director for the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, a consortium of 61 Tribes in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Alaska and California.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hunter should confess to wolf killing

To the Editor:

In regards to the hunter who shot the wolf, why can't he be honest? He's obviously lying about shooting it. Charging straight at him but the bullet passed through the front sides. I wouldn't issue him a hunting license because I wouldn't trust him to properly harvest and fill the tag for the animal he intends to harvest! In my opinion, he should just confess and face the consequences if any.

John Melland
John Day

Ferrioli appointment a big opportunity for rural Oregon

To the Editor:

Recently, there have been several articles written on the appointment of state Sen. Ted Ferrioli to a federal board that oversees huge amounts of money and Rep. Cliff Bentz taking over Ferrioli's senatorial seat. What has not been fully explained is the importance that both of these moves has on the well being of rural Eastern Oregon communities.

Ferrioli's job will be to direct how money is appropriated from sources such as the Bonneville Power Administration. Who knows, maybe some of the money may be

directed to the actual cause of environmental problems. If the truth finally comes out, it could really help the resource industries.

Rep. Bentz would be an excellent replacement for Ferrioli. He has firsthand experience in the issues that greatly effect rural Oregon. He is very accessible and, most important, listens to the concerns of his constituents and acts on it. A very intricate part of saving Malheur County from the federal government would be just one example. His staff is very professional and always has time for his constituents.

What all this boils down to is that an opportunity like this does not happen very often for the people of rural Oregon. Hopefully all of these pieces fall together.

Loren Stout
John Day

Editor's note: State Sen. Ted Ferrioli has been appointed to the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Council, but the Senate Rules Committee must confirm the appointment and was scheduled to take up the matter Nov. 13-15. If confirmed, Republican precinct committees in his district will submit the names of three to five candidates to the county courts or commissions in his district. The commissioners will then choose Ferrioli's replacement, with the votes apportioned by the total number of electors in each county.

Honoring our vets

To the Editor:

I am a director on the board of the Long Creek Cemetery maintenance district, and I apologize for the fact that there were no flags put out on the veterans' graves on Veterans Day.

The person who has a contract to take care of the cemetery was supposed to put flags out, weather permitting, but didn't feel it was important on Veterans Day. There was no rain nor two feet of snow on Veterans Day, just cold, and we were told by the John Day radio station and it was on the Portland news that Veterans Day will not have snow nor heavy rain.

It was cold, but as I watched ceremonies across the country in some places a lot colder than Long Creek, the people had flags and honored their vets.

Flags should have been on every grave of a veteran, and if there were two feet of snow, a flag should have been on each of the gates.

One gate was even locked. In the past, volunteers from the school and our community have helped put the flags out on Memorial Day, Fourth of July and or Labor Day.

To me, one of the most important is Veterans Day.

Wanda McHatton
Long Creek



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