

We know too little about governor's tax, spending plans

If the Oregon Legislature intends to pass tax and spending reforms in 2019, the work should have begun months ago.

That was the message from veteran legislators at the recent Oregon Leadership Summit. It echoed what Gov. Kate Brown and legislative leaders said in June: In the 2019 Legislature, focus on structural budget and tax reforms.

Yet Brown told the Leadership Summit this month that she wanted to achieve such reforms a year earlier — in the 2018 Legislature. She said her staff was working on “options to solve the structural deficit issues Oregon faces, not just for the short term but for the long term.”

With that 35-day legislative session starting in February, Brown has yet to show her hand.

Which reinforces why four veteran legislators — Democrats and Republicans — were skeptical about the state soon being able to make progress on tax and spending reforms.

The four lawmakers steered the massive transportation-finance plan through this year's Legislature. The Democrats — Springfield Sen. Lee Beyer and Coos Bay Rep. Caddy McKeown — chaired the special transportation committee. The Republicans — Dallas Sen. Brian Boquist and Ontario Rep. Cliff Bentz — served as vice chairs.

Their collaborative success might provide a guide for handling revenue and budget reform, which is why the summit's organizers asked them to speak. Yet the lawmakers warned that financial reform would be far more complicated,

difficult and potentially divisive than the state's transportation package, far-reaching as it was.

Three approaches were key to the transportation plan:

First, the four legislators operated as a bipartisan leadership team, instead of the Democrats controlling the outcome. The four trusted and respected each other, even when they disagreed, sometimes vehemently.

That team approach recognized political practicality — the majority Democrats would need minority Republicans' votes for passage. Widespread bipartisan support also would deter critics from trying to overturn the transportation plan through a voter referendum.

That approach also reflected the leadership quartet's commitment to a transportation plan that would overcome ideological and geographical differences. Maybe it's noteworthy that three of the four came from rural regions; none represented the Portland metro area; none was considered an ideologue.

Second, the negotiations involved months of work — or years, if you count past iterations of transportation plans.

Third, everyone had a say. Scores of individuals and interest groups from throughout Oregon participated in workgroups. They could not reasonably claim they had not been heard.

In contrast, the 2018 Legislature is only weeks away and Oregonians know little about the governor's and legislative leaders' plans for genuine tax and spending reforms. We are not filled with hope.



FARMER'S FATE

That didn't go as planned

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Brianna Walker

Bad decisions make great stories — and this was a whopper. I kneeled over our bathtub, pulling pieces of epoxy paint out of the clogged drain. Years ago, when my husband and I were first married, our bathroom sported a colorful collection of Pepto-Bismol pink fixtures and sea foam green tile and floor.

One day while he was on a hay run to the other side of the state, I installed a new white toilet, setting the old pink one on the lawn to greet my husband upon his return. Later, while he was again hauling hay, I enlisted my mom's support, and we sent the pink sink to ugly appliance heaven. The big, pink cast iron tub, however, seemed a little bit more daunting. I stood in the hardware store admiring the sleek, white fiberglass ones, knowing they were well out of my realm of expertise. How to get the old one out seemed the most problematic — my husband would love to help with house repairs — if they were “income generating projects.” Unfortunately, I haven't been too successful with installing a “pay bathroom.”

Then I saw it. On the end of the bathtubs display I found a box of epoxy paint for toilets, sinks and bathtubs. I picked it up. I felt my tub dilemma slipping away under a lovely coat of white paint.

“Don't do it,” a voice behind me said.

I turned to see a general contractor friend of ours. He warned me

that I wouldn't be happy with the end results for long, as he had never seen one that lasted more than a few years. I listened, and my brain heard, “It'll last a few years — and then perhaps

you will have had time to figure out how to encourage your husband to help you install a new one.”

A half-baked idea is OK — as long as it's still cooking in the oven. But I pulled that idea right out and bought it. Within days, I had a lovely white tub — which lasted almost a year. Then came the “peel and plug” stage, which left us with the only thing uglier than a Pepto-Bismol tub — a Pepto-Bismol tub with a little milk of magnesia thrown in! It was a great example of a bad idea.

My mind contains many good ideas — but sometimes my brain forgets to tell me which is which when it squeezes them out. My 1-year-old enjoys sitting in front of steering wheels pretending to drive. He'll pull the key out and put it back in, push and pull every light and button, until the windshield wipers are going crazy, the hazard lights are flashing and the radio is blaring some horrible station.

One evening while waiting to load a hay truck, he was playing in the front seat of my Jeep. In the dark, with the top down, I could imagine the keys being thrown outside and lost into the sea of goat heads. I figured they would be safer

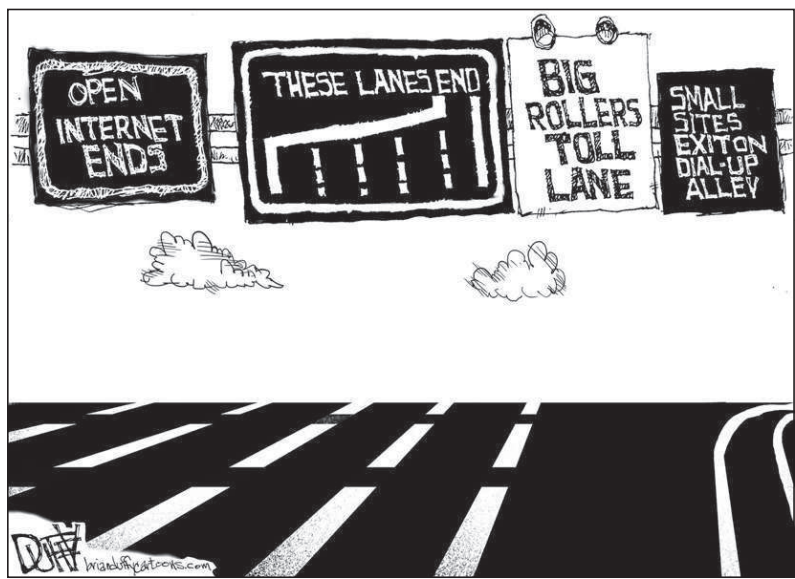
with me. The risk I took was calculated — but, boy, I must be bad at math! My Jeep sat in that same location for nearly two weeks before we finally found the keys — the keys that I had so carefully taken away so the baby didn't lose them.

You are always one decision away from a different life. It's amazing how even the smallest of decisions can change your life. When my oldest son was learning how to talk, he said “Daddee” for almost a year before he said “Momma.” I told my husband it was my turn this time to be first. And you know? The worse you want something, the worse you get it. I said every variation of mommy imaginable to my littlest son. And then one day he said it “maMA.” I clapped in delight, he'd said “Momma” before “Daddy.” He pointed at his thermos, then at me and said, “maMA.” It was a beautiful moment. Then he pointed at his snacks, and later his toys, each time saying the glorious word “maMA.” That was in the morning.

By that evening, it was “maMA, maMA,” getting louder each time if he thought I didn't jump fast enough.

By the end of the week, he was relishing his own personal assistant, and I was begging him to say “Daddy.” They say everything happens for a reason — but sometimes that reason is that you are stupid and make bad decisions.

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.



GUEST COMMENT

Children need health care

By Sen. Jeff Merkley
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

This year has been one of stark partisanship, with rhetoric from both sides of the aisle seeking to stress differences between Democrats and Republicans. But one thing I thought we all could agree on is that we need to do everything we can to look out for our children. I see our responsibility and mission as legislators — and the core purpose of our Constitution — as ensuring children have safe spaces, full bellies and good health.

That's why I am outraged that the majority in Congress has refused to act to renew the Children's Health Insurance Program, commonly referred to as CHIP. For 20 years the program, with strong bipartisan support, has ensured that no children fall through the cracks of our health care system. It provides states with funding to cover health care expenses for children whose families have incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid, but too low to afford expensive private coverage.

Oregon's CHIP program, called Oregon Healthy Kids, last year helped more than 140,000 Oregon children access health care. Thanks to CHIP, 85 children from Grant County — that's 7 percent of chil-

dren in the county — this year have been able to access check-ups, immunizations, dental care, doctors' visits and other important health care services.

Funding for CHIP expired on Sept. 30, 2017, because Congress failed to extend funding for the program. Every single state in America — 50 out of 50 states — has a CHIP program. Oregon, along with five other states, will run out of CHIP money this month. Another 25 states will run out of CHIP money in the first three months of 2018.

It is completely unacceptable that the Congressional majority allowed CHIP to expire — and it's even more outrageous that they've waited 88 days and counting to reauthorize it.

Right now there is a bipartisan bill ready and waiting to be brought to the Senate floor. It would extend the Children's Health Insurance Program through 2022. It was passed by the Finance Committee with unanimous support. The Senate could take up that bill right now and pass it. So what's the holdup? Why is health care for our children being disrupted?

The answer makes my blood boil: It is a pawn in cynical political machinations. The majority leadership in Congress is using the health and well-being of scores of

children in Grant County and 9 million children across the country as a bargaining chip. Instead of taking up this bipartisan bill, they're holding it hostage to try to win concessions in budget negotiations. The most the majority is willing to give our children is a paltry three-month extension of the program that was included in a continuing appropriations bill. Three months is unacceptable; we need to create stability and reliability for our children by reauthorizing this program for years to come.

The holidays are around the corner, and no parents should have to worry at this time of year that an illness or injury could endanger their child's life or family's finances. I am urging my Senate colleagues on both sides of the aisle to urgently prioritize issues that are essential to working folks — like ensuring the children who rely on CHIP can keep getting the care they need.

There is no reason I can see that we shouldn't be able to agree that protecting health care for 9 million children across the country is an absolute top priority. That is our responsibility. That should be our mission. We must get it done. Nine million American children are waiting.

Jeff Merkley, a Democrat, is a United States senator for Oregon.

WHERE TO WRITE

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- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
- **State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** (District: 60), Room H-475, State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., Salem OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. Email: rep.cliffbentz@state.or.us. Website: www.leg.state.or.us/bentz/home.htm.



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