

Measure 101 is a Band-Aid

The one-issue ballot that arrived in your mailbox earlier this week, and the complicated question therein, is proof that something is rotten in the state of Oregon.

It's a confusing, complicated decision that asks a lot — too much, we'd argue — of voters. The voters' pamphlet (again, all that for just one question) includes arguments in favor and in opposition that are often too thick to penetrate.

In short, Oregonians are asked to decide the fate of a two-year, 0.7 percent tax on some hospitals that was approved by the Legislature in the last session. A 1.5 percent tax also extends to insurers, the Public Employees Benefits Board and coordinated care organizations.

Voting "yes" keeps the taxes; voting "no" repeals them.

If the tax is repealed, the state would lose anywhere from \$210 million to \$330 million in revenue, in addition to \$630 million to more than \$1 billion in federal Medicaid matching funds. Proponents say as many as 350,000 low-income residents could lose health insurance, while opponents say the state could find other ways to cover them (though they haven't been able to clearly identify any).

There is a lot at stake, but voters have a right to feel like legislators — and initiative proponents — have put them in a vise.

One jaw of the vise is the fact that we know access to health care for people who cannot afford their own insurance comes at a cost. The cost is on those who can afford it — they pay a little extra to cover those who cannot.

Supporting the sick and suffering is something that many believe is a moral and financial obligation. And the fiscal conservatives among us also understand that the obligation is lessened if we pay a little bit up front (in the form of insurance) instead of a lot more in the end (loss of societal production, emergency room visits, delayed care, and avoidable suffering and deaths).

Yet there is pressure from the other side of the vise, too.

Measure 101 isn't fair — not everyone in the state pays equally. People covered by self-insured medical plans through their employer (the East Oregonian, for one) and unions are exempt, among others. Small businesses, school districts, nonprofits and college students

aren't. Shouldn't everyone bear the burden of supporting the neediest in our society? The insurers and hospitals are likely to push their costs onto customers, many of whom count the high cost of health care as one of the biggest challenges in their lives.

Fiscal conservatives are also justified in feeling that the Legislature is holding the state's most vulnerable residents hostage in its thirst for ever-increasing taxes. Who is going to argue against medical coverage for sick kids? But why weren't deeper cuts made in other programs to offset this expense?

That's the pattern of the Legislature. As long as powerful interests — such as the public sector employee unions — carve out their pieces of the pie, solutions to complex problems such as health care will continue to be unevenly applied. And applied poorly, like a two-year Band-Aid over an open wound.

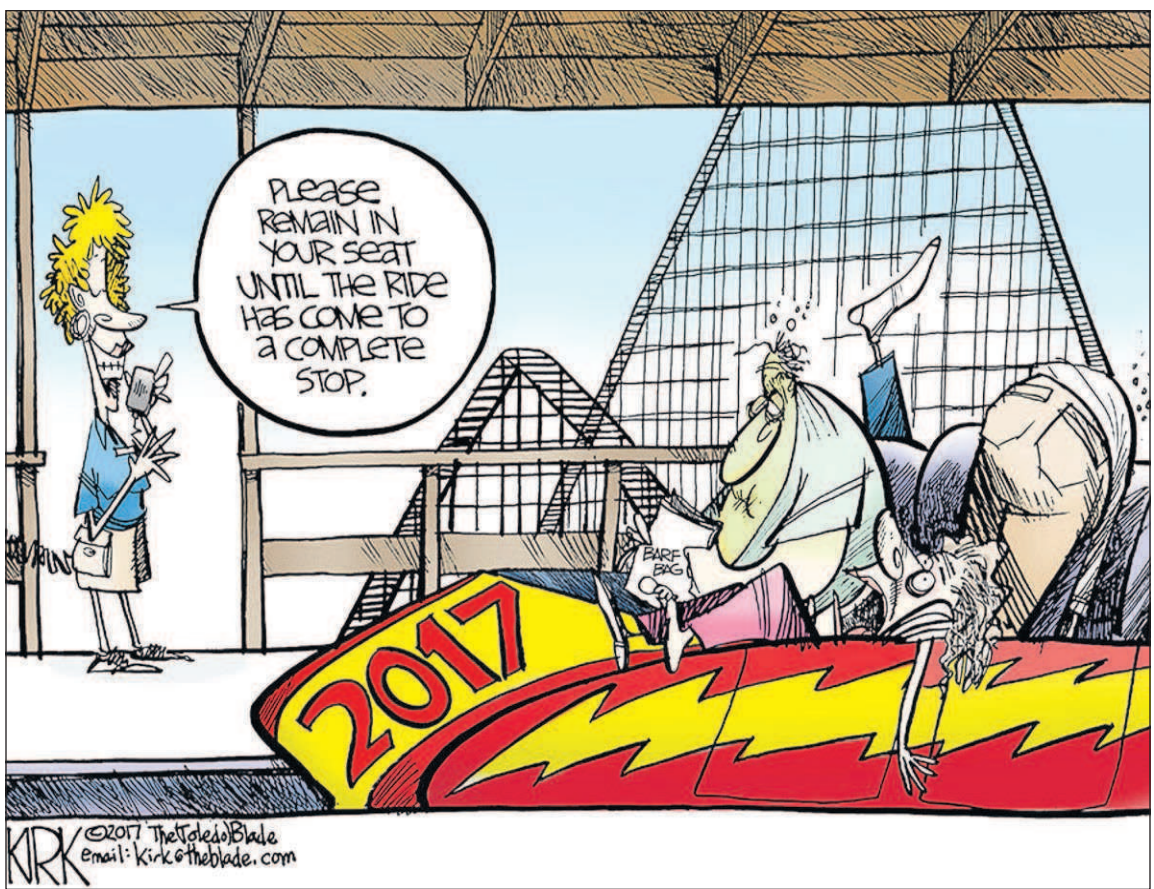
And this is a Band-Aid — a temporary solution that does real good. It will make many Oregonians healthier and less financially stressed. But it does mask the deeper issues beneath.

Yet at the same time, we're not comfortable with complex legislation being picked apart by the initiative process. We live in a representative democracy, and we elected our representatives to run our state — to make laws, make sure the bills are paid and the right investments made.

The initiative process is an excellent way to decide on easily understood social issues like same-sex marriage or marijuana legalization. But complicated tax policy should not be nit-picked this way, and repealing these taxes would set a bad precedent. Business and the government both need stability in revenue and expenditure in order to make decisions and plan for the future — the rug cannot be pulled out from underneath either at a moment's notice.

We sent our legislators to Salem to do a job and this is the job they did. If we don't like it (and we don't), then we should vote them out. Until such time, voters should approve Measure 101.

In recent years, we've seen the number of insured Oregonians increase dramatically in the state. And with the help of coordinated care organizations, we've seen health outcomes improve, too. The opioid epidemic is lapping at these gains, however, and we cannot be complacent.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Republican senator endorsed tax bill

To the Editor:

Sen. Ted Ferrioli deserves the honor he received from the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems' Small and Rural Hospital Committee as the 2017 Rural Legislator of the Year. He has indeed fought long and hard for the financial stability of rural hospitals. Sen. Ferrioli has endorsed Measure 101. He says in the Voters' Pamphlet (page 21), "There's no question: Oregonians should vote Yes. Oregon has a plan for funding healthcare that really works for all of us. That plan is Measure 101."

It is important to know that the tax on hospitals that is included in Measure 101 has in fact been in effect for years and was re-authorized in 2017. And it is important to know that this tax on larger hospitals leverages about \$2 billion every two years from the federal government, which goes to the Oregon DHS. Those funds are then delivered back proportionately to Oregon hospitals, including rural ones, some of which are not taxed but do receive some of the funding. This tax returns about a 5-for-1 investment for health care in Oregon. This is why hospitals support paying this tax.

Please vote yes on Measure 101. We must continue to maintain this funding resource that has been so important for our rural hospitals.

Nancy Nickel
John Day

'Shotgun' approach misses

To the Editor:

Anyone out there still doubt the United States just witnessed the greatest threat of tax dollars in the country's history? Honest tax reform took over a year under Ronald Reagan. Over 30 years later, the "shotgun" approach succeeded in ramming through legislation in roughly a month. The bottom line is that the majority of Congress has been bought and paid for by special interests. It appears the best solution might be to simply flush Congress.

Fred Fitzgerald
Monument

Tax, tax, tax

To the Editor:

Tax. Tax. Tax. Our Democrat-controlled state legislature recently voted to push another tax on the people of Oregon. This insidious tax measure is disguised as an assessment by the drafters of this measure. Calling this tax an assessment is like putting lipstick on a pig, hoping to fool the Oregon voters into thinking they're eating beef.

This tax raiser for Medicaid is to fund abortions and open the door for a flood of free medical care for illegal immigrants. It is a tax on you, the taxpayer, a tax on our health care insurance, state health care organizations, school medical insurance, college student insurance, small businesses, nonprofits and our hospitals — but, of course, exempting big corporations, unions and insurance companies and, of course, the state legislature from this tax. It is a tax on our health care

system for you and me, exempting the elite. Make no mistake the costs incurred by business will be passed on to you.

The sneaky little Democrats moved the election to January when everybody is still recovering from the holidays, hoping for a low voter turnout. The Democrats that wrote this bill, along with the governor, were bought and paid for by accepting Medicaid campaign cash after the law passes. (Source: Voters Pamphlet.) Tell these greedy Democrat politicians "no" and take back our health care system.

It's too bad they couldn't use that gas tax they passed to subsidize the alcohol producers, or the bike tax, or maybe the vehicle registration tax to prop up Medicaid for illegals. Been waiting for the Democrat-controlled legislature to start taxing toilet paper — that's about the only thing they haven't tried putting a tax on.

Chuck Chase
Baker City

Oregon voters beware

To the Editor:

Measure 101 is no good. Purported "temporary assessments" translate to another list of permanent taxes. "May not increase rates on health insurance premiums" likely means it shall happen. HB 2391 has already socked it to us this past October. Carefully read the summaries and see who really benefits from this, and it certainly isn't the public taxpayer. It is the politicians, insurance companies and the Public Employees Benefit Board who want the 1.5 percent assessments on premiums and premium equivalents for two years and then another increase of 0.7 percent. Read page 16 "Text of Measure." These assessments are in addition to current assessments, not in lieu of them. Pay particular attention to pages 39 and 40 of your Voter Pamphlet, then follow the money trail. Oregon doesn't need more taxes. It needs to learn to budget its expenditures like the taxpayers have to do. Vote no on 101.

Peggie Longwell
Baker City

Will wolves attack human beings?

To the Editor:

There have been lively debates on the subject of wolves being reintroduced into Oregon. There have been studies and considerable research on wolves, and many researchers believe the animal has a place in the ecosystem. Based on their studies and data collected, many have strong opinions in favor of introducing wolves back into Oregon. Others, based on their own studies and personal experience, have very strong opinions against their reintroduction. So how dangerous are wolves to human beings?

I would suggest people look at this question based on actual well-documented events being expressed by the source or sources (without opinions). Go to your computer or other device and type in the address bar "List of wolf attacks in North America." On your screen you will see two Wikipedia sites. Click and read the lists of attacks from both sites. The attacks listed contain well-documented

events in North America and Europe, without opinions.

Lee Bouchard
Fossil

Bring back the businesses

To the Editor:

First of all, I want to make it clear that this is my personal opinion only. If I'm wrong, then so be it. I see and read in the paper where Mr. Green and the city of John Day have applied for and received numerous grants with which they have bought up numerous properties and run-down buildings. While this is all good and it seems they can afford it, what I'd like to know is: What about all the empty stores for rent or sale that John Day has now? Offhand, I can count 10 to 12 empty stores where there used to be a business. We're told to shop locally, and I would love to, but where? Where can we buy men's, women's, kids', toddler and baby clothes for all sizes and ages? Where can you get linens, towels, etc.? I could go on and on. So I'm asking: Why not do your best to bring the business back to John Day where we need it and maybe we will shop locally again? It would be worthwhile to everyone.

Jan Lowry
Mt. Vernon

Stand with Ferrioli, vote yes on 101

To the Editor:

Sen. Ted Ferrioli has worked hard for what he believes is in the best interests of his constituents. His statement in favor of Measure 101 in the Voters' Pamphlet (page 21) states his position loud and clear: "There's no question: Oregonians should vote Yes. Oregon has a plan for funding healthcare that really works for all of us. That plan is Measure 101."

We agree with Sen. Ferrioli. Measure 101 secures affordable health care coverage for rural and small town Oregon. It is also critical for rural economies. Health care access creates good jobs in rural areas like Grant County.

We stand with Sen. Ferrioli on this issue. Vote yes for health care!

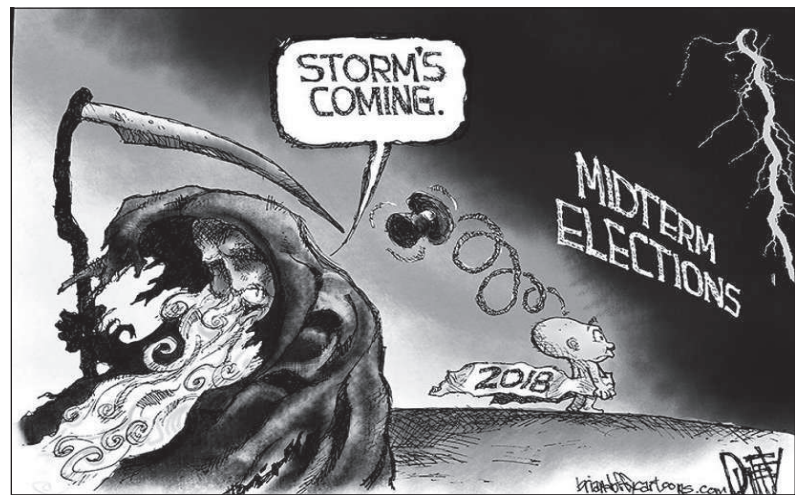
Adele and Mark Cerny
Bear Valley

Vote no on Ballot Measure 101

To the Editor:

Ballot wording for Measure 101 tries to mislead us that this isn't another new tax that our Salem politicians have come up with. By calling it an assessment, they try to fool us into voting for it. Calling a tax an assessment is like calling a rose by another name — it is still a rose. In reality Measure 101 is nothing but a new tax on hospitals, health insurers and coordinated care organizations. This new tax will be passed on to you and me, thus driving up the cost of our health care. It is time to tell Salem to live within their means just as we have to do. If you are tired of new taxes, vote no on Measure 101.

Terry W. Speelman
Baker City



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