

# The INDEPENDENT

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## Opinion

### Court upholds vote on assisted suicide

In 1994, Oregon voters considered all aspects of a proposed physician-assisted suicide law and decided that it contained sufficient safeguards to prevent either spur-of-the-moment decisions or deliberate misuse. In 1997, they again affirmed the right of terminally ill Oregonians to determine the time of their own deaths.

Last year, with no public input, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft effectively nullified the voters' decisions, by threatening Oregon physicians and pharmacists with criminal charges under the Controlled Substances Act, if they followed state law and prescribed or dispensed drugs to assist in the suicide of terminally ill patients. Ashcroft's action was challenged in federal court and U.S. District Court Judge Robert Jones ruled that the Dep't of Justice lacks the authority to overturn Oregon's law.

Jones ordered the federal government to stop any efforts to prosecute Oregon physicians, pharmacists and other health-care providers who participate in assisted suicide of terminally ill patients under state law.

He criticized Ashcroft for "trying to stifle debate," with his directive and wrote "...the fact that opposition to assisted suicide may be fully justified, morally, ethically, religiously or otherwise, does not permit a federal statute to be manipulated from its true meaning to satisfy even a worthy goal."

It is likely that the Justice Department will appeal Judge Jones' decision to the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Depending on what happens there, it could go on to the U.S. Supreme Court, which previously declined to hear a similar case because, they said, that is a decision to be made at the state level.

Didn't Oregon voters already try that? Twice?

### Registration deadline is April 30th

Your vote really does count, as the above situation emphasizes, but if you want a say at the ballot box, you must be registered. April 30 is the last day to register for the May 21, 2002, primary election. There will be some important measures on the ballot, and voters registered by party will be making decisions on who the candidates will be in the November General Election. If you're not registered, you won't be involved in that decision-making.



### High tax claims not supported by fact

Responding to the exaggerated claims about taxes that surface around April 15 each year, the Oregon Center for Public Policy urged Oregonians to use a critical eye on the inflated claims of anti-government activists. "Each year claims are made that taxes are too high and that they are rising even higher," noted Jeff Thompson, economist with the OCPP. "Nothing could be further from the truth - taxes on middle income Oregonians are not very high and they are actually declining."

Recent analysis of taxes demonstrates that both the federal and the state and local tax burdens have declined in recent years.

A study by the Washington, DC-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities shows that the federal tax burden of middle-income families is at the lowest point in many years. Families in the middle of the income distribution paid just 16.3 percent of their income for all federal taxes (including income, payroll, excise and other taxes) in 2001. This was the lowest level in the 22 years for which the data exist. Additionally, the typical four-person family with two dependents paid just 6.8 percent of its income in federal income taxes, the lowest rate since 1957.

A separate study, released this year by the Oregon Center for Public Policy, showed that, as a share of income, state and local taxes in Oregon have also declined in recent years. According to Thompson, "For most of the last 20 years, taxes consumed a steady share of income in Oregon, a trend which changed downward in the mid-1990's."

Additional analysis by the Oregon Legislative Revenue Office shows that the total state and lo-

cal tax burden on middle-income households is 10.8 percent.

The tax burden on middle-income families is considerably lower than suggested by anti-tax activists. "When read together, these two analyses suggest that middle-income Oregonians pay roughly 27 percent of their income for all federal, state and local taxes," said Thompson.

The public policy research center cautioned that studies claiming that the tax burden is higher or has been rising should be viewed critically.

One particular source used to dramatize the issue of taxes is the Washington, DC-based Tax Foundation. Tax Foundation figures, however, considerably overstate the tax burden for the typical taxpayer. For example, the Tax Foundation's data include payments that private parties make for use of government owned property.

"The chief deception," according to Thompson, "is that the Tax Foundation tries to convince typical Americans that they share the tax burden of the very rich." Because of progressive income taxes, the "average" tax payment is far larger than what most households face. Only those with very high incomes face the "average" tax burden as expressed by the Tax Foundation. In Oregon, the typical taxpayer has an income tax burden that is about half the size of the "average" burden.

Anti-tax activists also rely on data showing total federal tax receipts as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Like the Tax Foundation's numbers, this measure excludes capital gains income, but counts capital gains taxes. For this and other reasons, Federal Reserve Board

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