

OUR VIEW

Cities may urge Legislature to raise taxes

Increase taxes on booze. Allow cities to increase taxes on marijuana. Change incentives in the wake of Measure 110 so more people in Oregon get drug treatment. Change the law so temporary local property taxes become permanent if they pass three or more times.

Those are all possible priorities that cities in Oregon may lobby the Legislature to take action on in 2023. The League of Oregon Cities has asked cities across the state to pick their top five priorities from a list.

We decided to highlight a couple of things on the list that we thought you might be interested in.

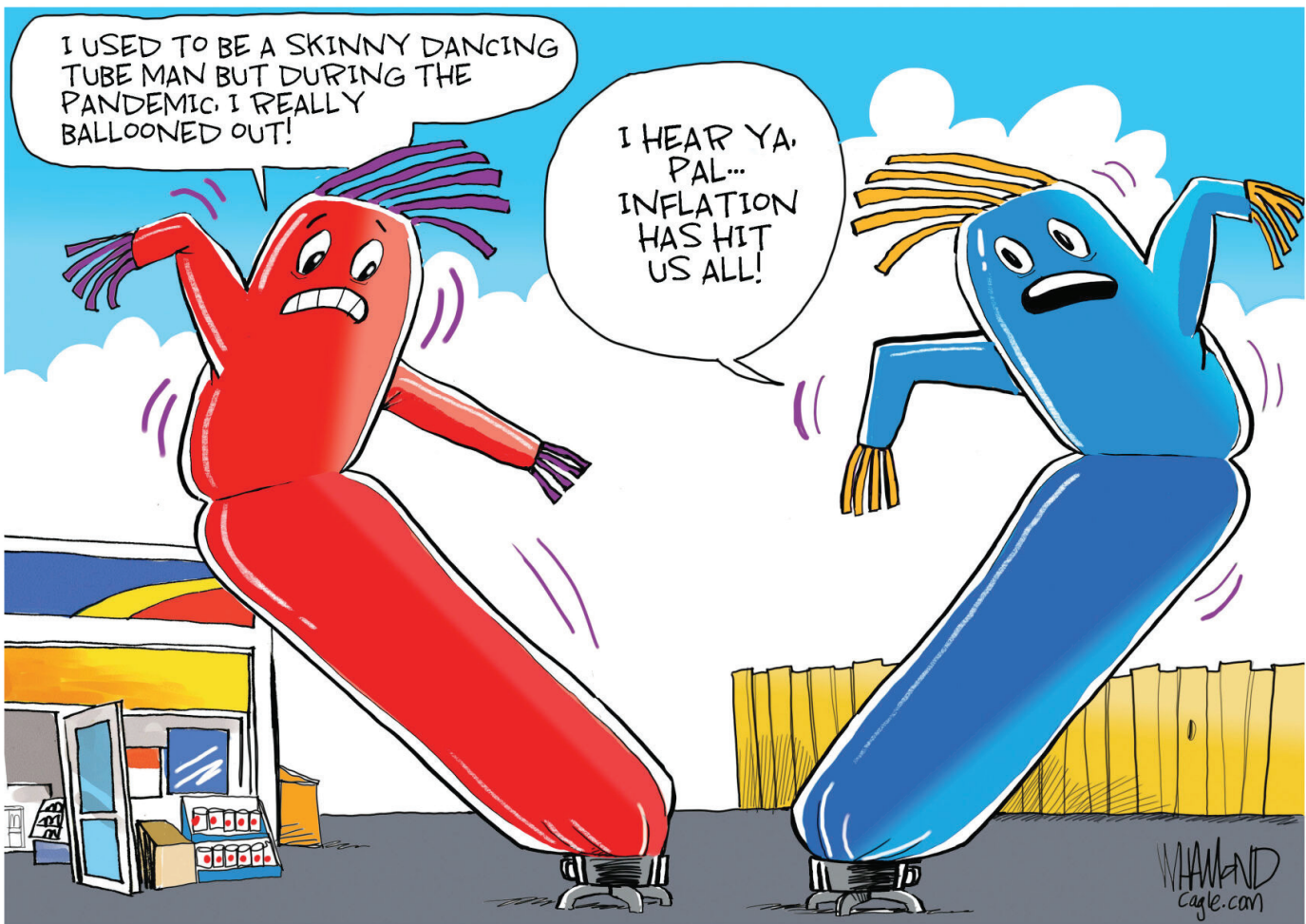
The League of Oregon Cities may push for state taxes to be increased on beer and wine, so in turn, cities would get more money trickling in. One possible piece of legislation: Cities could be allowed to have local sales taxes on beer and wine.

When recreational marijuana was legalized, cities were receiving 10% of the net revenue of the state tax of 17% on all sales of recreational marijuana. That changed with Measure 110. Revenue to cities dropped. Cities can still have a local tax of up to 3%. The League of Oregon Cities proposal is for the state to somehow restore the money that cities lost because of Measure 110 or allow voters in cities to raise the local pot tax above 3%.

Measure 110 decriminalized much minor drug possession in Oregon and replaced it with a \$100 ticket. The concern has been that if a goal is to get more people into drug treatment the measure might not work as intended. The measure did shift more money into treatment centers. It also, though, made it easy for someone cited with a ticket to avoid paying, avoid getting treatment and not face any repercussions. The League of Oregon Cities proposes to encourage legislators to restore more incentives for people to get treatment.

The League has come up with a number of possible changes to property taxes. In Oregon the permanent tax rates for cities were frozen at 1997 levels and cannot be increased. That's because of Measure 50. Property taxes are very important for cities. For instance, taxes and special assessments make up 38% of Pendleton's \$19.3 million general fund. One idea is to make it so local option levies that pass three or more times become permanent. Another idea is to allow voters to set tax rates outside of the current limits.

These are just some of the changes that the League of Oregon Cities may gear up to advocate. You can see the complete list here tinyurl.com/ORcitypriorities. What do you think your community should support?



Playing politics with wildlife conservation



BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

In June, first-term U.S. Rep Andrew Clyde, R-Georgia, introduced a law that would undo what is likely the most successful wildlife conservation program in history.

Clyde's bill, entitled the RETURN (Repealing Excise Tax on Unalienable Rights Now) Our Constitutional Rights Act, would repeal the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937. Pittman-Robertson was proposed and supported by sportsmen and established an excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment with the proceeds dedicated to wildlife management, conservation, and development of sport-shooting facilities.

In the past 85 years, the program has funneled more than \$11 billion to state wildlife agencies, where the money is matched by the states (usually from hunting license fees). It's a beautiful system, with users (hunters) taxing themselves to pay for wildlife management thereby allowing us to proudly claim that hunting is conservation. In Oregon, this dedicated funding source brings \$15-20 million per year to wildlife conservation programs in the state.

Clyde's bill to dismantle Pittman-Robertson has been unanimously criticized by a broad sweep of organizations including professional societies and large and small conservation groups like the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Pheasants Forever, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and the Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. Even the National Rifle Association and National Shooting Sports

Foundation have joined the chorus.

So why did Rep. Clyde propose such a destructive piece of legislation? Clyde is the owner of a gun and ammunition retail business, so perhaps he figures lower gun prices would mean more sales. Or is he anti-wildlife? Perhaps he has noble (if misdirected) motives when he states, "In case my Democrat colleagues forgot, the Bill of Rights enumerates rights to which the government cannot infringe. Unquestionably, infringement exists when the government taxes those rights to limit the people's ability to exercise them." An interesting argument, equating Pittman-Robertson excise taxes to a poll tax.

I suspect, however, that the real reason he introduced this bill was plain and simple polarizing politics. Right versus left, red versus blue, urban versus rural, us versus them. Shortly before the RETURN act was introduced, Rep. Don Beyer, a Democrat from Virginia, introduced a bill to impose a 1,000% excise tax on manufacturers, importers or producers of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. His bill was triggered by a string of mass shootings across the country, and the implied assumption is that increasing the cost of these weapons by a factor of 10 would mean there would be fewer people with access to them. An \$1,800 assault rifle would cost \$20,000, and it may very well be that gun retailer Clyde felt his own ox was being gored by Beyer's bill.

So, the timing of the two bills is not coincidental, but rather tit-for-tat petty politics. A stick in the eye of the other guy.

To be clear, neither of these bills has much chance of becoming law. But they are good for stirring up the masses and reinforcing divisions in our society. Clyde's bill has 54 co-sponsors, all Republican. Beyer's bill has 41 co-spon-

sors, all Democrat. (Cliff Bentz, our representative in D.C., is not a cosponsor of either bill. Thank you, Rep. Bentz.)

Anyone who has studied wildlife conservation in the United States knows the significance of Pittman-Robertson and the sport fishing counterpart known as Dingell-Johnson. They are the cornerstone of state fish and wildlife management programs, and they work wonderfully. In part because of this funding to support the work of our state wildlife agency, the Blue Mountains support thriving elk herds that are famous across the country. Don't believe me? Just try to draw one of the prized tags for a chance to hunt mature bull elk in the Mt. Emily, Mill Creek, or Wenaha units; there's a long line of hunters in front of you.

Those that care about fish and wildlife conservation in our country should be disgusted with Clyde's ham-handed attempt to strike back at those across the aisle, using wildlife conservation as a pawn in his perverse political (and perhaps personal financial) game.

We've all seen enough entrenchment of political divisions in American society. When people stake out extreme positions the opportunity for meaningful conversation ends, threatening our very system of government. We deserve, and should demand, better from our elected officials and should expect our lawmakers to be part of a solution instead of stirring and dividing us.

The RETURN act doesn't stand a chance of becoming law but does show the worst of the state of our democracy circa 2022. Lawmakers who spend time and energy on this type of effort should also be returned from whence they came.

Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

YOUR VIEWS

Write in Pullen for Umatilla County commissioner

Community Counseling Solutions director and Umatilla County commissioners didn't get the memo. In February 2022, out of 36 Oregon counties, Eastern Oregon has the five top overdose counties: Umatilla, Gilliam, Union, Wallowa and Malheur.

Under current commissioners' leadership, our county has grown in drug deaths and incarceration as our county commissioners enjoy more salary individually than several governors. Having newly remodeled buildings and pretty signs at CCS's many locations demonstrates the commis-

sioners are motivated to look good, but the drug death count is the truth teller.

Community Counseling Solutions has been transitioning since January 2017 from Lifeways. The wait time is now five months for an assessment. Commissioner John Shafer defended this failure for addressing the current drug issues in our county by stating the situation is nothing new and the demand has risen for mental health services. Of course, demand is up when none of the programs are successful. He added the problem is not unique to CCS. Citizens were sold the idea CCS would be great communicators and effective. After four years of transitioning, families are asked to understand as their loved ones die.

Commissioners have shot down any Blue Mountain Community College drug counseling program ideas since 2015 yet Shafer complained of staff shortages.

Struggling families could start a write-in campaign for Rick Pullen for Umatilla County commissioner. He will honestly address the drug crisis without shying away. Rumors and mistruths were spread that he was not eligible. Rick Pullen is a worker with follow through. He cares more.

**Sally Sundin
Pendleton**

Idaho Power should stay in Idaho

This is support of Whit Deschner, who is absolutely on point regarding the Board-

man to Hemingway power lines destroying the natural beauty of Eastern Oregon. Idaho Power should find a way to destroy their own state and get the bloody hell out of ours.

As president of the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center's TrailTenders Board of Directors, the thought of massive electric tower supports obstructing the view that the center promotes and works hard to preserve is not to be borne. And every preservationist in the state has an obligation to protest, let alone allow Idaho Power to cross our state lines.

Public Service Announcement: Idaho Power — stay in your own lane.

**Kate Dimon
Pendleton**

EDITORIALS

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LETTERS

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