

GUEST OPINION

Supporting a WA capital gains tax

BY MARY ANN WARREN,
MELIESA TIGARD AND
KRISTEN CAMERON

We are community leaders in Wenatchee who have come together from different backgrounds united in the belief that Washington needs a fairer tax code. As signers of an amicus brief in support of a capital gains tax that was passed last year by the State Legislature, we believe that the new law is not only legal, but revenue from the capital gains tax is necessary for Eastern Washington's future, the health of our communities, and our economic prosperity.

Our state needs the capital gains tax because our tax code isn't fair as written. We lead in so many other sectors, like agriculture, technology, and aerospace. Yet when it comes to how we collect taxes, we are dead last. In fact, Washington has been recognized for decades as having the most regressive tax code in the nation. Everyday working families pay up to 17% of our income in state and local taxes, while the wealthiest Washingtonians pay less than 3%.

Our tax code isn't just unfair, it's bad for our economy. By shouldering the biggest share of the state budget, low- and middle-income families feel the greatest impact and have less in their wallets and bank accounts.

We think it's past time that those who do well in Washington do right by Washington and pay their fair share of taxes. After all, everyone who has built wealth here has benefited from public investments and infrastructure, like our schools, parks, health care system, roads and bridges.

The capital gains tax is an important step in fixing our tax code. First, by asking those who should pay more to contribute their share, our system becomes more equitable.

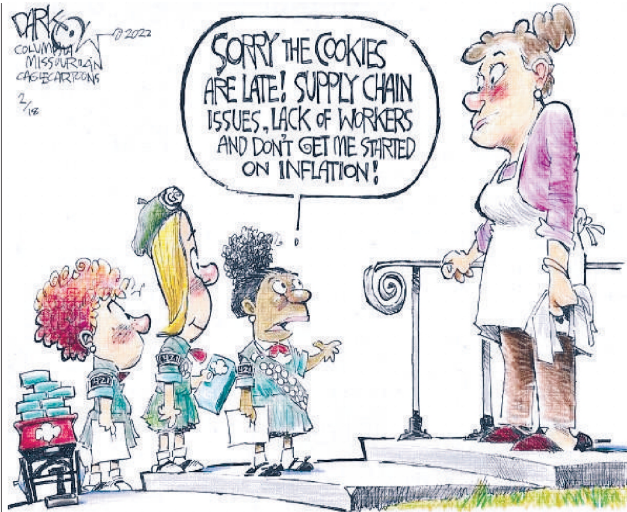
It takes some of the impact off of low- and middle-income earners and fairly shifts it to the exceptionally wealthy. Second, only a small number of Washingtonians, less than 1%, will be impacted by the tax. In Eastern Washington, it is estimated only 838 households will pay it. Most importantly, revenue from the tax — over \$400 million per year — will be invested in childcare, early learning, and public education.

As parents, grandparents, and educators, we see the value of affordable childcare and how it allows parents to get back to work and provides safe environments for their children. We know firsthand the benefits of early learning programs and how they can shape a child's future by increasing literacy and graduation rates. We understand that well-funded schools are the best way to support students and make investments in a community, especially rural ones like ours. We know what positive outcomes result when we provide our youth with opportunities to attend technical colleges or universities.

No matter what they look like or where they were born, every child in the Wenatchee Valley and across the state will feel a meaningful impact of this investment.

The capital gains tax will leave a profound legacy for these students and future generations: a fairer tax code, a sounder economy, stronger communities, and more educational opportunities.

Mary Ann Warren is a former President of the Wenatchee Chamber of Commerce. Meliesia Tigard is a Wenatchee small business owner. Kristen Cameron is a Wenatchee Confluence Rotary board member.



COMMENTARY

Does being a land of plenty make us a land of good?

By Leonard Pitts Jr.
Tribune Content Agency



Last week, it was peanuts. Unsalted, roasted in the shell, to be exact.

But lately, it's always something, some commonplace commodity that suddenly cannot be found at the store. Strawberries. Peppers. Ground turkey. And Lord, don't even get me started on Ore-Ida Golden fries.

I used to enjoy grocery shopping. Weird, but true. In fact, I enjoyed it so much that I once wrote a column rhapsodizing how foraging at the local warehouse store satisfied some primitive masculine need to hunt and gather.

But in this era of supply-chain disruption, shopping feels less like an act of manly provision than an exercise in national mortification. Once upon a time, to be an American

was to feel impervious to forces of supply and demand. Oh, you might occasionally have to pay more, but if you wanted a thing, by God, you could have it. There was always enough. Indeed, having enough — and then some — was a sacred national entitlement.

Until it wasn't. Those who waited hours in line for gasoline during the energy crisis of the 1970s may recall that close behind the annoyance one felt, there was also a sense of disbelief, even betrayal, as if some fundamental law of the universe had been violated.

Out of gas? How could we be out of gas? This is America. We're never out of anything.

Substitute Ore-Ida Golden fries for unleaded, and this moment feels much the same.

There's a scene in Robin Williams' 1984 film, "Moscow on the Hudson," where a group of Soviet performers visiting New York are allowed by their KGB handlers half an hour

to shop at Bloomingdale's. These citizens of dull, gray Moscow surge into the shiny temple of American capitalism — Clinique! Jordache! Calvin Klein! — like children set loose in Santa's workshop, swarming over a rack of blue jeans the way hungry teenagers do pizza. Not even the KGB man is immune. "My God," he breathes happily, "what decadence!"

That scene opened in me a primal, patriotic pride. It seemed to validate every lesson I had ever learned about the exceptionalism of my country. America was a land of plenty and, therefore, a land of good.

But things are — as the movie itself soon makes clear — more complicated than that.

America remains a land of plenty, of course, but the present shortages are a poke in the eye to any sense of sacred national entitlement. It turns out this ability to have whatever, whenever, is fragile enough to be undone by idling trucks or an unruly

virus.

Maybe it's not the worst thing to be reminded of that every now and again. As is often observed, Americans use far more than their share of Earth's resources. We are home to less than 5 percent of its population, but use 24 percent of its energy, with similarly outsized impacts on food, water and the environment.

Meantime, ocean levels are rising, the planet faces hundred-year floods and thousand-year droughts and, as is so often the case, the poor bear the brunt first and worst. If being unable to find one's preferred brand of French fries is frustrating, what is the word for being unable to find clean drinking water? And how long before that question, already relevant in other parts of the globe, finds its way home?

Maybe we should ask the good folks in Flint. Or Jackson. One suspects their responses would provide pungent commentary on the idea that being a land of plenty makes us a land of good.

If we are good, it is not by dint of what we have, but what we do with it.

FROM PAGE 1C

MEDICAL CARE

provide an insurance benefit. But since the insurance premiums many of us pay reflect the cost of coverage — not to mention what we pay before our deductible is reached — this concerns everyone. Or should.

Nancy Giunto, the executive director for Washington Health Alliance, said during a meeting this week with the editorial board. "Even a company the size of Boeing can't impact the market alone.

Insurance purchasers — said the years-long effort was undertaken to provide a baseline of information about health care costs that can direct changes that can keep care affordable.

"To leverage change you need a big group working together," Giunto said during a meeting this week with the editorial board. "Even a company the size of Boeing can't impact the market alone.

It takes a collaborative effort; it takes all stakeholders. And plans have to think about the services they authorize."

The information, said Mark Pregler, the alliance's director of data management and analytics, is geared to employers purchasing insurance and providers. "It starts to give them an indication of where the spending differences might be." But cost-conscious providers are also interested in this as a comparison with their peers.

And already, the alliance itself is pairing the

information with past research to further refine its efforts, including a long-running look at "low-value" care that it has examined in its "Do No Harm" reports, examining the prevalence and costs from unnecessary, duplicative or wasteful tests and procedures that risk medical, emotional and financial harm for patients.

One early focus, Giunto said, has begun looking at the diagnosis and treatment of low-back pain related to examining the costs for imaging and prescription opioids with

an aim to shift care for pain treatment that is evidence based.

Backed now by a wealth of information in the Total Cost of Care report, that examination of costs and outcomes can help drive decisions that help assure more affordable care.

"When I speak to groups of employers, the first thing I ask is 'Do you understand how variable cost and quality are?'" Giunto said. "And most consumers don't understand that."

The costs of knee surgery, for example can vary widely, not just county to

county, but even just across the street.

"Consumers need to become educated that the costs are highly variable, as is quality," Giunto said. "If this begins to highlight for them the variation at a geographic level perhaps they'll begin to ask their providers about what their health care costs."

Getting a better idea of the costs of care — especially before we get the bill in the mail — will create more transparency into what we're paying and what we're getting in return.

FROM PAGE 1C

MONTEBLANCO

about. Far too often, local prosecutors are given far too much discretion in bail recommendations and in determining which cases will move forward to the courts.

There's nothing that is more frustrating for peace officers than building a strong case against a criminal and having the local prosecutor arbitrarily decide that it's not worth moving forward. There's nothing more devastating for victims of crimes than seeing suspects released

on their own recognizance or given a token bail number. And there's nothing more devastating for a community than when one of those suspects then goes on to commit even more serious crimes after being released.

In contrast, there's nothing that emboldens criminals more than the realization that they are unlikely to face a trial, a conviction, or any consequences for their actions. That's why we support Substitution Senate Bill

5691, sponsored by Sen. Chris Gildon (R-Puyallup). SB 5691 required all county prosecuting attorneys that receive over 5,000 adult and juvenile criminal referrals annually to track those referrals and their filing decisions. The bill also required them to make this data and a summary available to public. Although this measure failed to advance this session, we will continue to collaborate with lawmakers and other stakeholders to bring this important issue back for consideration next year. This added transparency would go a long way toward applying the same

degree of accountability to prosecutors that is being applied to peace officers in the field. It would also give the voters the data they need to make informed decisions when local prosecutors run for re-election.

Our communities are changing. Our policing is changing. It's time for our prosecutors to change, too.

Marco Monteblanco is a detective with the Kennewick Police Department and is the President of the 3,700-member Washington Fraternal Order Of Police.

FROM PAGE 1C

SCOTT

There have been no designated workforce investments through the Federal CARES Act or the American Rescue Plan. Existing federal funds are not flexible, not nearly enough, and ill-equipped to meet the "just in time" demands caused by our new pandemic economy, which would leave behind 90% of those in need.

Our state can't afford to leave people like Jordan behind. By investing in these local solutions, legislators can put a down

payment on equitable economic recovery for better and stronger communities.

Tiffany Scott serves as the Chief Executive Officer at the Benton-Franklin Workforce Development Council (BFWDC). The BFWDC is the one-stop career development system that consolidates access to a wide variety of employment and training services for both job seekers and employers at WorkSource Columbia Basin and TC Futures. The BFWDC is also a member of the Washington Workforce Association.