Editorial

New tax system is needed for schools

Recent failures of school levies throughout the state exposed the inadequacy of the current system for funding public education. The state needs to find a solution to the problem.

Levies presented in 11 of 29 school elections held last week were rejected, and as a result, two school districts were forced to close. One has since reopended, but a 1,444-student district will remain closed until at least Dec. 4 when an emergency election will be held.

1985 is certainly not the first year the state has been plagued by threats of school closures. But the situation has erupted into a serious problem. The state has never faced as many districts still in need of school levy approval this late in the year, and the difficulty associated with getting levies passed has intensified. In addition, the number of emergency elections held so far this year has surpassed that of previous years.

Also, prior to this school year, only six schools closed due to a lack of funds. This year has already seen two closures and may see three more if school levies are shot down at emergency elections next month. Every time a school closes, lessons are interrupted, children lose part of their education, teachers and school staff members are laid off and many families must arrange and pay for child care. It is an unpleasant situation all around.

Some voters may be unhappy with the school systems themselves, but as a whole, rejection of the levies appears to be a rebellion against property taxes. Citizens are using their voting power to obtain property tax relief and voice dissatisfaction with the current tax level.

Thus divorcing school funding from property taxes and generating money through an alternative tax system is the key to a solution. The sales tax proposal was an attempt to do just this, but it was strongly rejected by voters earlier this year.

If a new tax system is not sought, only two viable alternatives remain. The state could attempt to convince voters to accept higher property taxes or cut school budgets. If schools are already closing, it is clear that officials have already tightened budgets as much as possible without significantly damaging the quality of education. The quality of education should remain a priority.

The state might be able to persuade voters to approve property tax increases by convincing them that their money is needed and is being used efficiently. This could be attempted through a wide-scale information campaign via the mail or media, but it is not clear how much a campaign of this sort would cost or how long its effectiveness would last. As long as school funding is tied to property taxes, the state will be forced to fight a constant battle to persuade voters to pass levies.

Instead, the state should seek an alternative tax structure. It should start by determining why voters rejected the sales tax. It appears that rejection of the proposal was linked to suspicions that instead of realizing property and income tax relief, the public would simply be burdened with an additional tax. Others feared that the state would be able to raise taxes without voter approval. If these fears can be allayed, voters might be willing to reconsider the proposal.

If it is found that taxpayers will reject both property tax increases and a sales tax, the state should conduct a survey to find out what taxpayers will support. It is clear that a new system is desperately needed.

Letters

Tax was unfair

This letter is in response to the editorial "City takes positive approach" (ODE, Nov. 8).

The defeat of the Eugene Agenda tax should be seen as more than a rejection of a method of obtaining funds. Even if you accept that these kinds of projects should be done by government, the procedure used by the City Council to put together the proposal is basically flawed.

Putting together a "wish list" of projects that individually have majority support, without taking into account the cumulative cost of all the projects (not to mention existing city services) cannot possibly result in a package that meets the true needs of the city. The resulting budget will not reflect the priorities even of the majority, let alone the priorities of taxpayers with other ideas of how to spend their hard-earned money.

A county tax for airport expansion will not solve the basic problem. It would increase the number of non-users who would be forced to subsidize the airport and would still allow heavy users to avoid paying their share of the costs. If users don't have to pay the real cost, they will naturally demand more than they really need. On the other hand, if county taxpayers see they will have to subsidize the operation, they may stand in the way of an expansion that really would be beneficial. The consequence of making such decisions through the political process will be not only an unfair tax, but also an incorrect assessment of what kind of expansion is really worthwhile.

Joseph W. Dehn III
Chairman
Libertarians Against New Taxes

No war is good

William Moore's letter "Ask Inmates" (ODE 11-6) was very thought provoking. What I'd like to address, though, is not the genocide inflicted on East European and Asian people by Marxist governments, but the effects of war on soldiers.

No war in history hasn't adversely affected people — regardless of the justification for the war. Unfortunately, the liberal media has given people the impression that only veterans of Vietnam have been subject to guilt — thus cultivating the impression that their emotional problems are due to the "immorality" of our involvement in Vietnam, an unfair presentation to those men to say the least.

Our generation was taught to view World War II as a "good war." Unlike Vietnam, we weren't shown the horrors inflicted on people unless it was done by the Nazis or Japanese. Sure, the anti-nukes barrage us with pictures of atomic blast victims. But rarely, if ever, would they show us pictures of German, Italian or Japanese children burned alive by phospherous bombs. Remember, more innocent people died in the Allied firebombing of Oresten, Germany than in both atomic blasts combined!

I knew one World War II pilot who still suffered from the pain of knowing he must have hit schools, churches, houses, etc. on various runs. And no soldier couldn't feel pain at realizing he killed men who were beloved fathers, brothers and husbands of someone.

War is ugly no matter if it's Vietnam, World War II or even Afghanistan. Let us never forget that!

Michael Cross
Senior, Political Science

Moral choices?

Mr. Moore, in your letter (ODE, Nov. 12), you condemn the United Way for imposing destructive and immoral influences upon the masses. You also say that the United Way organization opposes the imposition of one's morality upon others. And what is your solution? Forcing your morality upon us instead?

Please Mr. Moore, give me a break. From what I understand, there are at least 4.5 billion other people on this Earth beside yourself. That's a fair amount of human beings — all of whom think, eat, defecate, sleep and try to survive to see tomorrow. Now you come along and think you are the only one among 4.5 billion other humans who knows how all of us should live. Wow.

You may think premarital sex, homosexuality and abortion are wrong, but that is your opinion. I am sure that with the proper attitude and by taking certain precautions, you can successfully avoid these occurrences in your life. If you are happy in your beliefs, fine. But in the words of Monty Python, "I can live my own life, in my own way if I want to." And so can 4.5 billion others.

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