

Governor should call special session

With frustration mounting, it was only a matter of time before it happened. Last week, a coalition of 51 Oregon school districts decided to sue the state, claiming the school finance system is "grossly inequitable."

Defendants in the suit are House Speaker Vera Katz, Senate President John Kitzhaber, state superintendent of public instruction and the state Board of Education.

The suit comes in wake of the 1989 Legislature's inability to remedy the crumbling state system. Every time a possible solution came up, partisan politics or voter rejection shot it down.

Put bluntly, educators are tired of listening to lawmakers' excuses. They hear plans, but see no action come from them. They watch legislators debate school finance reform, only to see ideas evaporate.

That Oregon's school finance system is in shambles should come as no shock. Because the system is heavily dependent on local property tax levies, it creates a great disparity between districts. Rich districts have more money, while the poorer districts struggle to keep their doors open. Schools are also at the mercy of whether voters wish to approve budget requests.

The coalition who brought the suit are smart enough to realize probably nothing concrete will come of it. If anything, the state will contest it in the Oregon Supreme Court, tying it up for years in legal red tape.

But what the suit does do is awaken people to the problem. It is a desperate grab for attention, which stems from a desperate situation.

We noticed something curious in the coalition's suit. Gov. Goldschmidt was not named as a defendant. If you're suing the state, why not go after the state's number one official?

But then again, Goldschmidt has been highly supportive of school finance reform. Last year, he formulated a three-step plan, only to see it gutted in the Legislature, and later turned down by voters.

We have a suggestion. Goldschmidt should call a special session of the Legislature with the sole purpose of reforming the state's education system.

It may seem like a radical idea, or a bit drastic. But the next legislative session won't convene until January, 1991. The system is deteriorating so rapidly, by the time lawmakers meet again, the problem could have reached catastrophic proportions.

If Goldschmidt and the Legislature are truly committed to fixing the school finance system, they will convene a special session. Now is the time for both Republicans and Democrats to forget their differences, and fix the educational system before it all comes tumbling down.



No summer break would be harsh for kids

School kids who take a Calvin-and-Hobbesian approach to life would probably equate year-round schooling with a fate worse than death. But there is a growing segment of the population that favors such a concept.

Thomas Wogaman, superintendent of the Corvallis School District, is one proponent of a year-round school system. He recently proposed to the city's school board a plan that would divide the school year into trimesters, with a month off in August and two-week breaks in December and April.

Wogaman's concept would make students' time in class six weeks longer than the current school year. Proponents of such a plan believe students need this extra time in class, because they aren't learning enough to stay caught with today's technological society. They also point to recent studies that show American students lagging behind other countries in education, partly due to less time spent in school.

Proponents of the radical plan also feel the nine-month school year is essentially obsolete. The system was designed when the country was an agrarian nation and children were needed to help in the fields during the summers.

While these reasons for changing our school system are valid and logical, the drawbacks outnumber the benefits.

For one reason, this new plan seems to

be designed solely with city dwellers in mind. As far-fetched as it may seem to some of us, there are kids out there who still live on farms and rural communities. Indeed, Corvallis is considered an agrarian community, and there are certainly kids in that district who have to help on the farm during the summers.

Also, the year-round school plan would by all accounts cost more to execute than our current system. Because we are struggling to fund our schools the way they are now, the more expensive system is essentially inconceivable at the moment.

There is another reason for not going with the year-round school system, something the proponents seem to be overlooking or just ignoring. That reason has to do with what kids learn away from the classroom.

Kids don't become brain-dead vegetables once summer vacation hits. Instead, they get an opportunity to learn about themselves, their friends and the way the real world works through this pleasurable diversion from school tedium.

It is likely that all of us can remember at least one special summer from our childhood, one that taught us life lessons and gave us some invaluable memories. To do away with summer break may not be a fate worse than death, but it would cheat future students out of a big chunk of their childhood.

Letters

Aiding, abetting

The execution of six Jesuit priests in El Salvador should come as no surprise to anyone even vaguely familiar with church-state relations in that country. For years the Catholic church has been persecuted by a military and ruling oligarchy threatened by its work among the country's poor and dispossessed.

Imprisonment, torture, expulsion, and disappearances have long been the norm for those Christians brave enough to speak out against the nation's social ills and injustices.

El Salvador is the most densely populated, most undernourished country in Central America. "The dogs of the rich," wrote a former newspaper publisher, "eat better than the poor."

The word "Gospel" means good news, and in the atmosphere of fatalism and fear, the church tried to provide hope and comfort to the poor.

"They were beginning to understand that their situation of hunger and sickness, the premature death of their children, their unemployment, that all these disasters are not the will of God, but to the lust for profit of a few Salvadorans, and to (their own) passivity," wrote one priest.

Because of their work, churchmen have been labeled communists and subversives: labels that in El Salvador are tantamount to a death wish.

In an American court of justice, a person is guilty of aiding and abetting a murderer if he knowingly provides the bullets and the murder weapon to the murderer. Where does that place President Bush in relation to the six murdered priests? It leaves him guilty.

Christian Gunther
Eugene

Honest living

Cindy Huibregtse states

(ODE, Nov. 13). "... if you are insulted by the fact that people ask you to spare some change, maybe it's about time to do something about this problem."

The people who harassed me for the money on 13th Avenue were in their late teens or early twenties and in good physical condition. One of them that was running around with a box shouted at me "Hey babe, ya got any beer money?!"

I know this was an exceptional case, but I certainly don't find it hard to understand why many of these people don't have money; most people earn money by working, and how can one work while they are socializing on 13th St. for most of the day?

And don't tell me there aren't any jobs to be had by these people. Just catch the Sunday Register-Guard help wanted ads. True, many jobs pay minimum wage or only a little better, but isn't warning a honest living better than asking

college students for spare change?

Grace Wilson Jr. states (ODE, Nov. 16). "... most students (spend about) six to ten thousand dollars a year (to attend the University). One should be ashamed of themselves if they are above pitying a person less fortunate."

Financial aid, student loans and two part-time jobs — not my parents — have gotten me this far. So I am supposed to feel sympathy for these people who spend the majority of the day socializing, while I attend school and work? I don't think so.

Sarah Jean Snyder
English

Be good

I want to call out to all my fellow students and urge everyone to remember to be good citizens. So often these days we forget our duty to be good citizens.

As I go about my studies each day, I often come across fellow students who are carrying America forward with pride. These students attend to their appearance, and are careful who they associate with.

I know they study hard and avoid late hours and recreational sex. I feel welling pride when I see our school's fraternity and sorority members, for they make America great and competitive.

Come Sunday it's church time and I press my slacks and go. Last Sunday, at a downtown cafe, I overheard a couple discussing plans to take psychedelics in the forest. We just enjoy Cheetos at our fun picnics.

So let's crowd the barber-shops, go to yellow sweater socials and ball games, and respect our President. After all, who wants to live in a country whose youngsters have forgotten proper citizenship.

Tom Ribe
Graduate Student