

Measure 5 doesn't live up to promises

Good thing Measure 5 passed last year, or things would be mighty boring these days around Oregon, in terms of taxes. Now, instead of property and homeowners exclusively enjoying the pleasures of buckling under a massive tax burden, we can all join in the fun.

Voters approved Ballot Measure 5 last November in hopes of lessening the state's property taxes. The move stemmed from the understandable urge to plug up the seemingly bottomless pit of governmental spending.

The consequential tax limit reduced money available for state-funded operations, resulting in some painful effects. One example was this year's almost one-third tuition hike for Oregon's public colleges and universities. This, combined with a reduction in degree-program offerings, faculty and staff positions, and eligible-student numbers made more than property owners feel the crunch.

But hey — it would all be worth it, wouldn't it? Property owners would get their break, making the other financial ball-and-chains easier to lug. Right? Wrong.

Lane County landowners got a big surprise recently when they started receiving the first post-Measure 5 tax statements: their tax bills were nearly as much as last year's.

The measure had seductively proposed about 12 percent worth of savings on tax bills should voters pass it. And pass it they did — who wouldn't? But a funny thing happened after the fund-reducing measure was approved. Property value assessments suddenly rose over most of the state — 20 percent in the Eugene-Springfield area.

Coincidence? No. Lack of bucks? Yes.

However, the possibility state government would just get its money in a different way should voters approve the measure conveniently got left out of the debate. Now, landowners have their tax cut, but with their land worth more, they end up paying as much as they did in the first place.

Next year's disappearance of Oregon's Homeowner and Renter Refund Program is another remedy for the lost money. The program, which every fall for the last 17 years rebated part of homeowners' and renters' housing payments, will be axed in an effort to deal with Measure 5 cuts.

So Oregonians' efforts to send a message that they're tired of scraping the bottom of the pot when it comes to paying taxes seems all for naught.

Voters said "no," yet still end up paying, facing more problems than when they started — problems that affect more than just the state's property owners.

Gov. Barbara Roberts' effort to find replacement monies via her "Conversation with Oregon" now continues with her closed-circuit television appearances to, and survey of, voters. The "Conversation" will go until next March.

Citizens can hope this frustrating situation will be resolved in a real way through this process. Oregonians tend to get itchy when the wool is pulled over their eyes.



SWINE LAKE

OPINION

It wasn't the Club Med vacation



THE FINE PRINT

BY DON PETERS

Last May I joined the National Guard. I requested infantry training.

Strike one.

They sent me to Fort Benning, Ga.

Strike two.

In the middle of the summer.

Strike three. Next batter please.

For those of you who have never been in the South during the hot months, I'll explain. It usually runs to about 90 degrees with 90 percent humidity. In full gear, you swelter until your clothes are drenched. Then it usually rains, whereupon the humidity goes up even higher.

I finished my basic training and swore to myself I would never again live in a place that got over 90 degrees. Antarctica would be pleasantly mild, I thought, when contrasted to Georgia humidity.

This last weekend, while on drill with my National Guard unit, I was to look back fondly on those Fort Benning memories as a time of good fortune, great weather and high living.

They sent us up to Yakima, Wash. I had never been in central Washington, and I looked forward to it, despite the frequent warnings that it might be a little cold.

Cold, I thought. How tough could it be?

We got off the bus in the middle of the night. I looked around in astonishment at Yakima (apparently the Indian word for wasteland). The Army only puts up bases in the most desolate of areas; cheap land with no other uses. The real scary places get turned into firing ranges.

The Yakima Firing Range has no trees. None. Zip. Zero. Just sagebrush and six inches of snow.

This lack of wood products would come back to haunt me.

They herded us onto a truck for the hour-long trip out to the M-60 machine gun firing range. If possible, the range was even more desolate than the base camp.

Surmising that a fire had recently swept through the area, I figured the starkness of the land was due to nature taking its sweet time getting back to normal. I asked the range officer about my theory.

"Nope," the captain said. "It's always like this."

On the cold scale, the weather was somewhere between unbearable and unbelievable. A biting wind swept across the range, and there was no cover. My job as an ammunition bearer (read: low man on totem pole) for an M-60 team is really just a glorified name for a pack mule. I lug around equipment and hold the ammo so it feeds properly into the gun.

Consequently, I spent the entire day crouched into the snow with one hand up, cursing and alternately trying to stay warm. (Writer's note: Using a Zippo lighter to thaw your fingers is definitely a last-resort kind of tactic.)

Finally and mercifully, the day ended just as the sun ducked behind the mountains. As we were packing up to leave, the range officer came over to my squad, which consisted of nine guys in a foul mood.

There weren't enough trucks to get everybody back to the base camp, the captain said.

Ha ha ha, we laughed.

Somebody's going to have to stay behind.

Ha ha, we chuckled.

You're it.

Ha ... um, that's not very funny.

But unfortunately, it was the truth. We had to stay behind, brave the cold and wait for the trucks to come back: at least a two-hour wait.

When it got dark, it got cold-

er. Survive and adapt is the motto of the infantry soldier, and we did. We gathered up the paper targets, sagebrush, etc., and somebody flicked a Bic.

The fire was warm, but we quickly ran out of things to burn. After an hour, the targets were all gone, foraging parties had stripped the immediate area bare, and the first oblique references to the Donner party were put forth.

The range officer stayed behind, mostly to keep us from tearing down the three-story wood range tower and the plywood target holders. But mutiny was fermenting, and after 90 minutes, the ultimatum was delivered.

In 30 minutes, my squad leader said, the first target holder would come down. Every half-hour after that, another would be sacrificed until we were picked up. If we ran out of target holders, the range tower was going to make a very pretty bonfire.

One guy couldn't wait. He came back with a piece of wood, covered in gray paint. The only thing painted that color was the tower, so the captain was immediately suspicious.

"Where did you get that," he demanded.

"Um, it was just lying there," the intrepid forager answered.

The captain accepted the explanation, apparently for morale's sake. He ignored the bent nails sticking out of the board.

Five minutes before the first target holder was to go up, the trucks finally arrived. Some of the squad members were disappointed, figuring we had the right to torch at least one of them.

Sufficiently thawed back at the base camp, I revised my opinion on cold. Cold is just as bad as hot. How come they never send us to Club Med for training?

It was just a thought.

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