

Campaign against restaurant tax begins

By Daralyn Trappe
Emerald Associate Editor

Opponents of a proposed Eugene restaurant tax that will be voted on March 23 kicked off a campaign Tuesday in an effort to defeat what they call an "inequitable tax."



Meanwhile, Kaye Robinette, president of the Eugene City Council, said he anticipates that residents will approve the tax and pointed out that 73 percent of respondents to 1991's extensive Eugene Decisions survey favored a restaurant tax over four other tax options.

Measure 20-02, as it will be referred to on the ballot, would implement a 3 percent tax on prepared meals purchased from restaurants, diners, cafeterias, delicatessens, push carts, athletic concession stands, bars, taverns and caterers.

Certain vendors would be exempt, such as residential facilities and campus dormitories.

If approved, the tax would go into effect Jan. 1, 1994. It was referred to the voters by the City Council as part of an effort to deflect an expected \$9 million budget shortfall for 1993-94. The tax would generate an estimated \$5.3 million annually in gross revenue for the first five years.

Gretchen Hult Pierce and Greg Evans, co-

chairpersons of Citizens Against Selective Sales Tax, which is supported by several local restaurants and the Oregon Restaurants Association, said at a Tuesday news conference the tax would unfairly affect low-income residents and small businesses.

"We believe that it's simply wrong to tax food in general. And this tax is an attempt to support broad-based public services with a very narrow industry that's been targeted for this tax," Pierce said. "We believe that's simply not fair."

The tax would affect small businesses because, for example, a sandwich purchased from a restaurant or a sub shop would be subject to the tax, but a sandwich purchased in a supermarket would not be, Pierce said.

Evans said the tax would unfairly affect low-income residents because the same amount would be charged to each patron, despite their income.

"This is not a luxury tax," he said. "This is a tax that will hit people on low and fixed incomes, such as senior citizens. More than a quarter of the seniors in the community eat prepared meals, some because they are not able to prepare their own meals or don't have the facilities to."

Households with an annual income of less than \$5,000 spend 41.5 percent of their total food budget on meals purchased away from home, Evans said, and the average for all households is 42.3 percent. Households headed by seniors, with a \$5,000 to \$10,000 annual budget, spend nearly a quarter of their total food budget on meals purchased

away from home, he said.

If 20-02 passes, low-income people will be charged a total of \$17.31 during the course of a year for meals, Evans said.

"This is very debilitating if you are a person on a fixed income, or a low budget," he said. Both he and Pierce support a progressive income tax, which was favored by only about 25 percent of Eugene Decisions respondents.

Robinette said his impression is that the restaurant tax will pass because it is a kind of tax people can have control over. All residents can make a choice about whether they can afford to eat out and where, he said.

Robinette said the respondents to Eugene Decisions were given a significant amount of information about the city's financial situation.

"They responded not because someone simply asked them a question, but came to their responses as the result of having gone through a process and understanding the financial problems," Robinette said. "They told us, 'OK, if we have to have a tax, this is what we'd prefer.'"

Pierce said she believes people responded that way out of the mistaken notion that a restaurant tax is something that "other people" will have to pay.

Robinette said people do understand what's at stake, whether or not they support the idea of a new tax.

"It's important to keep in mind the seriousness of the financial problems that we're facing," he said.

OSPIRG takes action against plastic industry

By Marion Suitor
Emerald Contributor

OSPIRG sent a surprise package full of styrofoam, shrink wrap and plastic packaging to the headquarters of the Society of the Plastics Industry in Washington, D.C., last week.

In part of its "Take the Wrap" campaign, OSPIRG has been returning unrecyclable plastic materials from whence they came.

"Basically, we are telling the plastics industry to take responsibility for all the waste they are producing," said Gretchen Haber, OSPIRG staff member. "The package was meant as a visual message to the industry that something has to be done about unrecyclable plastic."

OSPIRG has started three campaigns to address the issue of plastics recycling, mainly focusing on widening the scope of plastic recycling in Oregon, Haber said.

In addition to the "Take the Wrap" campaign, OSPIRG's plastic recycling agenda also includes extending some of the requirements of a recycling bill passed in 1991 called Senate Bill No. 66.

Senate Bill No. 66 requires plastic packaging to contain 25 percent recycled content by 1995. OSPIRG wants that percentage increased to 50. Also, OSPIRG supports a truth-in-labeling law so that plastic materials cannot be labeled "recyclable" unless consumers have access to convenient recycling facilities.

OSPIRG's third extension to Senate Bill No. 66 would be to

convince the plastics industry to fund programs to develop the recycled plastics market.

OSPIRG recently collected 3,000 signatures statewide on a petition in support of these three amendments, Haber said.

Although it seems plastic is just as easily collected and recycled as aluminum cans, only a small amount of plastic actually finds its way to recycling facilities, Haber said.

Currently, only a limited amount of No. 1 and No. 2 plastics are recycled in Oregon. Plastics labeled No. 3, No. 4, No. 5, No. 6 and No. 7 go to landfills.

"Part of the reason so little plastic is actually recycled in Oregon is because there is no market for recycled plastics," Haber said. "People think it is so easy to recycle plastic because they don't have to think about it after it leaves the curb."

Karyn Kaplan, University recycling coordinator, said people often ask her what they should do with the styrofoam shipping materials that come in computer boxes and other plastic materials.

"I tell them to throw it away," Kaplan said. "No matter what the plastics industry might tell you, there's just no place to send it for recycling."

Currently, the University can only send No. 2 milk jugs to be recycled; everything else goes in the garbage. About 70 percent of all plastics are used in food-related capacities and can't be recycled, Kaplan said.

OSPIRG focuses on education as a means to help keep plastic out of landfills, Haber said.

Playing with shadows



University students cast shadows while playing basketball near the campus tennis courts Tuesday afternoon despite chilly winter temperatures in Eugene.

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