

Voters likely to dash legislators' hopes

The Oregon Legislature will at least be able to say "We tried."

Just before completing a marathon session of a record-setting 207 days, in which a variety of issues were discussed (and some even resolved), Oregon's elected senators and representatives dealt with their most pressing problem, how to save the state from the effects of Ballot Measure 5, in a predictable, if useless way: They proposed a sales tax.

It was not an unexpected move. After all, 1990's Measure 5, which placed drastic limits on property taxes, left the Legislature in a difficult position: either cut government spending viciously with each successive year, until the limits are fully implemented in 1996, or come up with a plan to replace the revenue.

On the surface, this year's session appears to do a little of both. A total \$1.2 billion was cut from the state budget for 1993-94, and the sales tax should replace much of the tax dollars lost to Measure 5, raising an estimated \$1.2 billion in 1993-94 and \$2 billion in 1995-97.

There's only one hitch: The sales tax must be approved by the voters.

That's a pretty big hitch.

History provides the best evidence that the sales tax proposal is dead in the water. Oregon voters have scuttled the idea eight times already, most recently in 1986, when it failed by nearly a 4-1 margin. Granted, the state's fiscal woes weren't as severe at that time, but even if the measure mobilized twice the support it did that year, it would still go down to defeat.

Why did the Legislature attempt to put a measure before the voters that was about as likely to pass as a Yugo on a steep mountain road? Even the members of the Legislature itself barely supported the idea. It failed once in the Senate and another time in the House before one senator and three representatives switched their votes, allowing the bill to finally gain passage and the proposal to be placed on the Nov. 9 ballot.

It seems incredible that after 207 grueling days of politicking, in which even popular measures such as the Oregon Health Plan came under fire, the Legislature could still be optimistic. But that's the only way to describe its hopes for a sales tax. Pollyanna syndrome. A terminal case.

The Legislature did its best to sugar-coat the sales tax pill, by dedicating most of the revenue it would generate to schools and higher education, and by speeding up the property tax limits of Measure 5. And at least one major objection to the sales tax is addressed by the inclusion of a number of important exemptions, including food and prescription medicine.

Even with these features, however, it is unlikely that the sales tax will gain much popular support. It is, after all, another tax, even with an armload of exemptions (food and medicine, in particular). It is a nuisance to calculate when shopping. Voters fear that once it's in place, it will continue to grow, despite assurances that such increases will require a vote of the people. It is regressive, taking a greater percentage of a poor family's income than a rich one's. And, finally, it is new, and new can be frightening.

The sales tax should be passed, but that hardly means that it will be. And by resting all of its hopes on a hopeless proposal, the Legislature has done little to ease the pain inflicted by Measure 5. Two hundred and seven days for this?



OPINION

Stories that you won't read here



Write Angles

"You will find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view."

— Obi-Wan "Ol' Ben" Kenobi

One day I was trying to discuss a great story idea with another member on staff when my editor told me to "Quit talkin' and start writin'." I tried to reason with him, saying that if I didn't analyze this particular subject, who would? He said, "Precisely."

That sums up American journalism today. The old enthusiasm and imagination that was once the hallmark of newspapers has faded away. Reporters and editors are deliberately holding off investigations that go beneath the surface and are content to run only cut-and-dry stories.

However, these stories need to be brought to light, if only in a rough and incomplete form. So here are some stories that you won't read in the *Emerald* or anywhere else.

• The Mongolian-Shaq attack connection

During the summer, Pepsi has been running a commercial starring NBA center Shaquille "Shaq" O'Neal of the Orlando Magic. In the commercial, Shaq drinks a bottle of Pepsi, and all of the other Pepsi bottles in the world start to empty, as if Shaq was drinking them all in one mighty swallow. (Actually, this has some roots in ancient Norse legends involving Thor at the home of the Giants, but that's another story you won't read.)

Anyhoo, all of the Pepsi drinkers watch their cola disappear before their eyes in shock and amazement. All, that is, except for a group of what appear

to be Mongolian nomads. They look at their empty bottles and cry "Shaq attack" in Mongolian.

And indeed it is, but how did they know that? Mongolia is relatively isolated from the rest of the world. There is no reason why they would know the answer when millions of Pepsi drinkers in the United States don't — people who presumably would be better acquainted with Pepsi and the NBA than a band of nomads.

Now the first and most obvious answer is that it's only a commercial and the Mongolians were simply being paid to say "Shaq attack." However, that story, though conveniently backed up by the "facts," lacks a certain Oliver Stone reality that is so much more interesting than conventional reality.

An experienced, dedicated reporter would go beyond the truth to uncover a story so powerful that the movie rights would be sold before the article was even published.

Perhaps the Mongolians, living in an isolated country under rugged conditions, are being trained by Pepsi as the Fremens were taught by Paul Muad'Dib Atrides in Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Will Pepsi unfurl its banner and use the Mongolians to unleash a soft drink jihad around the world? Maybe not. But remember the words of Pepsi's founder: "God created Pepsi to train the faithful. One cannot go against the word of Pepsi."

• The Pauly Shore-Japan Conspiracy

Pauly Shore, the wandering surfer boy who is riding a wave of popularity following his jump from MTV to Hollywood in such ground-breaking films such as

Encino Man and *Son-in-Law*, cannot be explained by the known laws of physics.

Last time anybody checked, the earth had not entered a space-time distortion and we are not in the 1970s, the last known period of sustained mass delusory behavior.

How then to explain Pauly's apparent popularity? We should harken to the words of Sherlock Holmes, who once said that when the impossible has been eliminated, what remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Pauly cannot be popular, ergo, the improbable truth is that someone manipulated the Nielsen ratings of his MTV show to make him appear to be popular.

Who did this and why? Some have speculated that Japanese Education Ministry officials are conspiring to further erode the average intelligence of American citizens by flooding the airwaves with brain-free programming. Supporters of this conspiracy theory have dubbed it *Rising Dumb*.

(This may not be the full extent of Japan's efforts. It's a Japanese company that brought us Nintendo, the video game system that turns children into Stimpy.)

Pauly is probably not even aware that there is a conspiracy. He may not be aware of anything.

I do not profess to have investigated these and other subjects to their conclusions. Indeed, I have barely scratched the surface of the breadth and depth of such stories. I urge readers to demand more risk-taking from their newspapers.

Ed Carson will not be returning to the Emerald fall term.

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The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.

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