

■ COMMENTARY

Gas tax seeks equity for homeowners, renters

By Paul Nicholson

I am writing in response to an *ODE* editorial about the Eugene City Council's recent decision to refer a .017 cent gas tax to the voters. The editorial suggests that this proposal is motivated by a city council program to get people out of their cars. In fact, the real issue is tax equity.

The question the Council will place before you is whether storm water charges attributable to street run-off should be charged to the automobile drivers who are served by the streets, or whether we continue to collect all storm water fees from property owners and renters. We are not propos-

ing to collect new revenue.

The issue before the voters is whether owners and renters who live in Eugene wish to continue to subsidize drivers. Next time you pay your EWEB bill, take a close look at the charges. If you own or rent a typical house, the proposed gas tax would reduce your storm water fees by \$1.97 — from the current rate of \$7.87 to \$5.90 per month. Residents who purchase less than 70 gallons of gas in Eugene per month will come out ahead because storm water costs will be more equitably shared by drivers, many of whom are non-residents or commercial users.

Federal mandates require cities with populations more than

100,000 to meet stringent federal standards which greatly increase Eugene storm water fees. These standards are imposed on urban centers, not because the residents of cities create more or dirtier storm water, but because only large cities have the density required to support a storm water treatment facility. We are required to treat storm water so that people out in the country can continue to send their untreated run-off into our streams and rivers. A reasonable editorial would have proposed a county-wide revenue source to pay for Eugene's federally mandated storm water treatment, a position that I could have heartily endorsed.

Contrary to the *ODE*'s editorial claims, the Eugene City Council is not even the original author of the proposal to tax gas to pay storm water fees. The Citizen's Advisory Committee on Storm Water formulated the recommendation which the Council is now referring to voters.

I do wish to give the impression that the City Council is indifferent to the escalating single-occupancy vehicle miles traveled in Eugene. We do intend an earnest attempt to meet State of Oregon mandates which require that all Oregon cities plan to reduce the average amount of driving by 10 percent over the next 20 years. Refraining from subsidizing driving is consistent with

this goal. The average driver drives 17 percent more today than he or she drove 10 years ago, a trend we can ill afford to continue.

The most depressing aspect of this editorial is that the editors drew all of their information from *The Register-Guard* article of Sept. 28. The editors of the *ODE* have beheld the spectacle of their professional brethren at *The Register-Guard* popping off editorially without bothering with balanced or accurate information. It is a shame that the editors of the *ODE* have not found a better standard to emulate.

Paul Nicholson is the Eugene City Council president.

■ LETTERS

Smith's bad math

Like many other students, I was interested to read Denny Smith's idea to increase funding for higher education from an undisclosed amount to \$650 million in his budget proposal. Smith's previously undefined budget for higher education now reveals a number which, magically, is \$50 million more than Kitzhaber's allocation for higher education. And, more magic, tuition won't go up! Of course there will be no new taxes, and you won't lose any state services. Everybody wins. Too bad it doesn't balance out: Smith can't pay for his plan, according to the Oct. 6 edition of *The Oregonian*.

Not only that, but Denny Smith, Reagan Republican, enemy of big government, and fiscal conservative says it's too early to tell what programs to cut. I guess that is why his budget spends \$47 million more than

Kitzhaber's proposal. Is this the beginning of a trend? Are "tax and spend Republicans" the wave of the future?

David C. Sloane
LCC student

Flying bridges

If City Hall told the *ODE* that pigs could fly, then presumably the *ODE* would not print "Pigs can fly." Rather, the headline would read "City Hall claims pigs can fly."

By the same token, the *ODE* should not have printed on Friday, Oct. 7, that the proposed \$80 million Ferry Street Bridge will contain rail lanes. Rather, the *ODE* should have printed that City Hall claims that the new bridge will have rail lanes. The *ODE* story should have then explained that Eugene Transportation Engineer Dave Richard has informed the City Council that the dedicated transit lanes (including rail)

are not practical on either the present or any redesigned bridge because of the way car traffic must enter and exit, and that the draft environmental impact statement supports this conclusion.

City Hall knows there will not be rail lanes on the new Ferry Street Bridge, but they know that dangling the possibility of rail lanes gathers votes.

If City hall were really serious about light rail, its ballot measure, 20-23, would propose a separate bridge for pedestrians, bicycles, buses and eventually light rail right next to the present bridge. But for such a forward-looking solution to be considered, we must first defeat the giant car-bridge plan, which Peter Keyes, University architecture professor, characterized as the "last grasp of the old way of thinking."

Junior Robertson
Alumnus, 1980

Ask petitioners

Now, during the fall, I see a lot of petitioners. While walking to the post office I often speak to these people. Some petitioners are paid, some are not. I would like to remind people that they always have the right to ask if the petitioners are paid or not.

I circulate a lot of non-paid petitions, but only for the group I belong to, the Clearing House on Human Rights and Psychiatry. David Oaks runs this unique association for ex-mental patients.

Although I'm against any petition to remove our historic trees, I think Measure 20-23 has some good points. I like the idea of the Ferry Street Bridge being improved since I do a lot of bicycle riding.

Rhonda Rauch
Eugene

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