

Making inmates work will cost Oregonians

When Oregon voters passed Ballot Measure 17, they sent a clear message that prison inmates should work.

Any measure that brings more productivity to the state is a definite plus. The 6,700 inmates in Oregon's prison system have a chance to repay taxpayers for prison costs by providing cheap labor, and inmates can better prepare for life after prison by integrating themselves into a work environment and developing a strong work ethic.

And the better suited inmates are for life in the work place, the less likely they'll commit more crimes when they are released.

Oregon voters obviously believe work is the best penalty and treatment for prisoners. Seven out of 10 voters supported Ballot Measure 17 last Tuesday.

With the passage of this measure, inmates will work at jobs that include making computer-digitized maps, stitching blue jeans, making cabinets and answering phones for state agencies. Plus, they could work on projects that would better the environment.

Ballot Measure 17 requires inmates to work at least 40 hours a week — some could work as much as 70 hours a week.

Sounds too good to be true? Maybe.

Although Ballot Measure 17 is a critical step forward at a time when Oregon's prisons are overburdened with dead-beat inmates, it poses serious financial questions for our state government. Who's going to pay the estimated \$20.1 million needed to operate new prison industries, education and work crew program? And what about the \$10.9 million needed to set up programs with equipment, inventory and work facilities?

The measure is now part of the state constitution and the state legislature is required to implement it. Oregon corrections officials must develop a program by April of 1995. That means money for work programs must come from an already lean budget.

Oregonians should worry about where the money will come from — especially if education, social service or public safety budgets will be affected.

Revenues produced from prison labor will eventually offset costs. However, the money needed to start up programs could be a serious burden on the legislature.

Another concern raised by the passage of this measure is whether the state can produce enough demand for all inmates who are required to work. Thirty-eight percent of the state's 6,700 inmates already work in prison kitchens, physical plants and prison grounds. Another 21 percent of inmates are in work training programs. Eleven percent of prisoners are too ill or are considered too dangerous to work.

About 23 percent or 1,500 inmates still need to be placed in jobs. With so many Oregonians who are not in prison struggling to find jobs, it's questionable where these jobs will be created.

Members of the private sector need to step in to develop partnerships with the state to ensure jobs for these inmates.

Ballot Measure 17 could be a win-win situation for the economy and for prisoners. However, state officials must take all precautions to ensure its fair implementation.



LETTERS

OsloViews

The midterm elections are no less than a catastrophe for the American people. For a foreign observer, the choices of the electorate appear irrational and incomprehensible. After two years of Bill Clinton, all the leading economic indicators are good. Productivity and competitiveness are up and unemployment and the increase in the deficit are down, and inflation is down despite pressure.

Nonetheless, the voters are frustrated enough to give both the Senate and the House to the Republicans. The U.S. Congress has been hijacked by Christian fundamentalists, bigots and ultraconservatives.

Bob Dole, who has stalled legislation with the disreputable filibuster, is now the majority leader and a candidate for president in 1996. Jesse Helms will be in charge of the committee that oversees foreign relations, while Alfonse D'Amato will be in charge of banking and finance.

The worst part of it all is that the Republicans won even though they did not have a clearly defined alternative to the Clinton policies. The "Contract with America" advocated by Newt Gingrich is no more substantial than Ronald Reagan's promise of "A New Dawn in America." Negative campaigning, now predominant in U.S. politics, appears to be extremely effective, even though the voters say they dislike it.

Dark clouds are gathering above America. From Europe, we are watching with apprehension and nervousness.

Marius Meland
1994 University Graduate
Oslo, Norway

Prop 187 unfair

Proposition 187 passed in California last Tuesday, denying social services to all undocumented immigrants and requiring all state employees to report individuals whom they suspect of being undocumented residents to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

This initiative, in effect, requires teachers, social workers, medical workers and all other

state employees to become informants for the federal government.

The word immigrant does not mean refugees from the dissolved Soviet Union or immigrants from Europe whose student or work visas have expired. The word immigrant, when applied to Proposition 187, is nothing but a thinly veiled attack on California's Hispanic community.

In this xenophobic climate created by misinformation and racist ideas, one is suspected of being an immigrant based simply on one's Hispanic heritage. This legislation makes suspects out of all Hispanic people, legal status notwithstanding.

One of the measure's sponsor groups, "Save Our State," has a title that points out the most insidious white supremacist ramifications of this legislation. Namely, the claim by some Californians (most of their ancestors immigrants from somewhere) that they have an inherent right to California and its resources over and above all who came and continue to come after them.

Unfortunately, S.O.S. does not have a membership large enough to account for the proposition's passage. The racial scapegoating on all sides of the gubernatorial and Senate races has created a status quo wherein hate and blame are acceptable. In the most recent statewide races, even the Democratic candidates who opposed 187 fell over each other bragging about their plans for more razor wire and armed guards on the California-Mexico border.

The true reason for the lack of human services in California is just that — a lack of services, not an overwhelming influx of immigrants.

We Americans are all too good at placing blame, and it is time we started targeting those truly responsible. How much power do undocumented immigrants have over job creation, industrial flight and economic crises in California? How much power do they have, period? What is California afraid of?

A.P. Lowry
History
Ezra Bookstein
Fine Arts

Warped logic

Paul Van Sickle's suggestion (ODE, Nov. 9) to take the economy out of the music business is as feasible an idea as living in peace and harmony. Lest we forget, the music business is a billion-dollar juggernaut around which lives are made or destroyed and small industries and countries are sold or destroyed.

People still make music for their own self-enrichment and enjoyment with no aspirations of riding the gravy train, but the problem does not lie solely with corporate greed.

Pop music has been around for hundreds of years, believe it or not, most often keeping the same formula throughout the generations. Pop music takes the form of retracting to whatever social situations are currently present (inner city=gangster rap, white suburbia=white noise). Pop music is its own entity born from discontent. Pop music never changes; it only wears the latest fashion. It is the most utilitarian of all music (save the liturgy), but just because it achieves function over form does not mean that it is exempt from scrutiny.

Like all musical genres, it has built up its own vague systems of rules, aesthetics and practices. Unlike other musical genres, pop music is safe (for now) from schools and institutions that, at this very moment, are trying to imply the same restrictions to the "vernacular" world as they did to theirs. This is obviously unfair, for what is good for the goose isn't always good for the gander. People's tastes, no matter how atrocious they are, will always stand firm in their own warped logic.

So, in light of this, I propose that pop music itself is to blame for the downfall of pop, such is the nature of the beast. But some responsibility must lie on the shoulders of the population, which actually listens to the enormous amount of crap being disseminated these days. Here, an aesthetic rule of thumb applies well: It's gone gold or platinum, then connoisseur beware. Use your wits and graze in greener pastures.

Robert Hanson
Music

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