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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Legislature slashes social safety net

*By failing to call a special session to cover a \$40 million shortfall, Senate President Brady Adams is hurting at least 8,500 people*

**W**e know what to call someone who risks his or her personal safety to help others — a hero. But what do we call people who refuse to help those in need despite facing no risk themselves?

All of us should be asking Oregon lawmakers that question, particularly Senate President Brady Adams, R-Grants Pass. Despite the fact that our coffers are overflowing — new forecasts indicate the state will have a \$548 million surplus of tax revenue by July 1999 — Adams and other Oregon lawmakers are considering cuts in social services for thousands of poor, elderly and developmentally disabled Oregonians, including children.

This was revealed at a Nov. 20 meeting of the Legislative Emergency Board. The Department of Human Resources is facing a nearly \$40 million shortfall due in part to the failure of state lawmakers and Gov. John Kitzhaber to accurately foresee the department's expenses.

Someone has to pay for the errors of our Legislature. It's no surprise that it has to be the impoverished and politically powerless.

The cuts would stretch deep and wide, affecting at least 8,500 people. Some examples include: doing away with 85 beds at state psychiatric hospitals; cutting outpatient services for 3,500 adults; slashing health care programs for 1,300 children; and flat out eliminating the Medically Needy Program, which provides medical care to 3,700 elderly Oregonians not covered by Medicaid.

When you read those figures, try not to see numbers. Try to see the people that will be affected by the sudden collapse of their social safety net.

Then remember the reason that the state emergency fund doesn't have the money. We keep funding corporate welfare programs like Senate Bill 605, the industry-sponsored effort to get taxpayers to pick up the tab for high-technology training. In the same week that these cuts were discussed, the emergency board approved \$5 million in funding for Senate Bill 605. It seems the public is expected to pay for the expenses of corporations but not the medical needs of children, seniors or the mentally ill.

Sadly, this reflects national trends. Even before the 1996 welfare "reform" bill, we spent 3 1/2 times as much on aid to corporations than we did on aid to the needy.

And current plans to balance the budget include 10 times as many cuts to social programs as there are cuts in corporate grants. With this type of handout rate, it's no surprise we don't have the money in our emergency fund.

But wait: Didn't I say that the state of Oregon was awash in excess cash? Why, one might ask, do we even have to think about emergency money when our standard budget is in such good shape? The answer is enough to make you laugh or cry.

Since the Legislature is not in session right now, budget decisions are made by the Legislative Emergency Board. They draw on the emergency fund. By Oregon law, money from the regular treasury can't be spent unless the state Legislature reconvenes in a special session.

Senate President Brady Adams seems unwilling to call such a session, though the health and welfare of 8,500 Oregonians depends on it. The main reason these cuts even need to be considered is this unwillingness on Adams' part to go back to work.

Adams informed The Oregonian that a special session was unlikely. His rationale? He "blamed the Kitzhaber administration" for not requesting enough money for the Department of Human Resources. His most telling comment, however, came when he complained about the possibility of having to call a special session.

"I just left here in July," Adams told The Oregonian. "How come you're coming here and knocking on my door in November?"

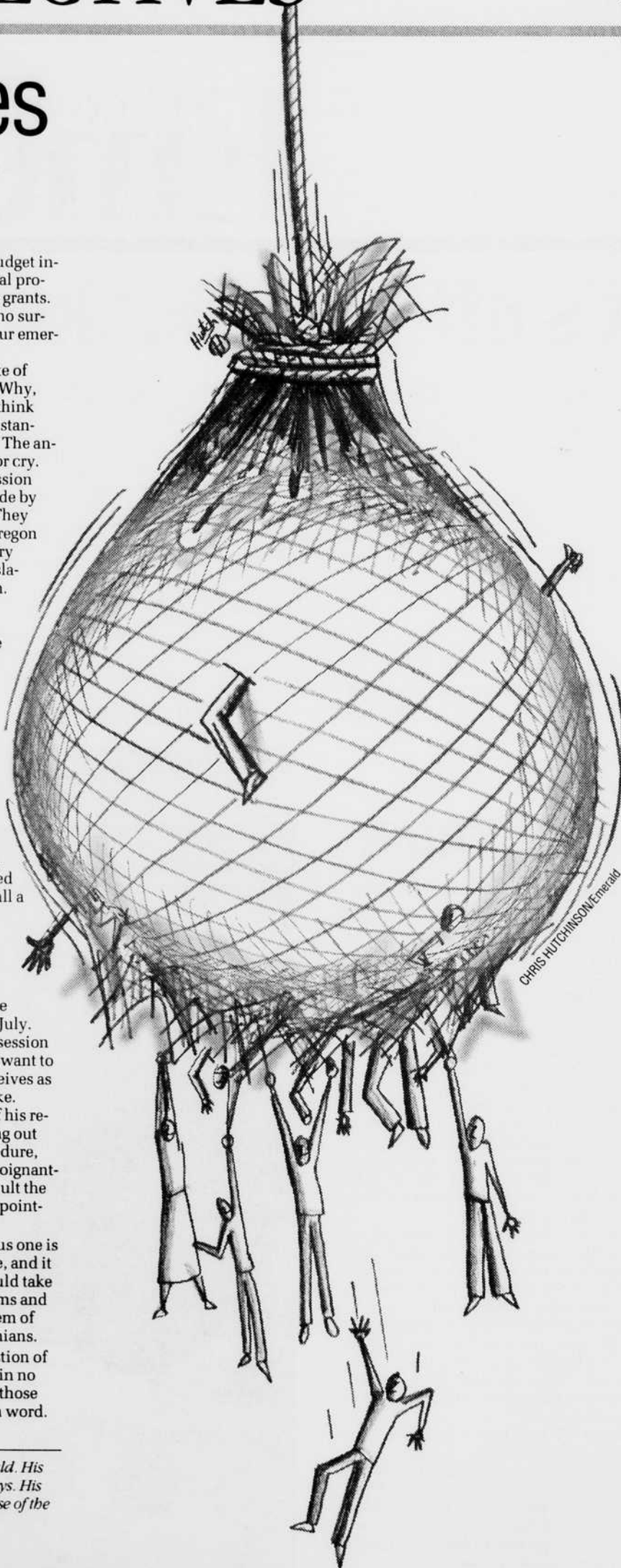
Adams feels that his job was done when the Legislature adjourned in July. His problem with calling a special session of the Legislature is that he doesn't want to go back to work to fix what he perceives as someone else's (Kitzhaber's) mistake.

Adams is the Senate president. If his responsibilities don't include working out problems in state lawmaking procedure, then what do they include? More poignantly, the public doesn't care whose fault the problem is — we don't need finger pointing, we need a solution.

And all Adams has to do to give us one is call the session. The money is there, and it isn't doing anyone any good. It would take one day of work on the part of Adams and other state legislators to fix a problem of critical importance to 8,500 Oregonians.

Which brings us back to the question of what to call someone who, though in no danger themselves, refuses to help those who are. Coward seems too polite a word. Perhaps politician would suffice.

*Jeff Shaw is a columnist for the Emerald. His work appears on alternate Wednesdays. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.*



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Hansen showed courage**

I would like to honor sports writer Chris Hansen for his frank commentary on women officiating in the NBA. In this age of greed and ego in sports, I guess I shouldn't be surprised that some players and other men would make jerks out of themselves over issues such as these. But those of us with compassion left in our hearts can't help

but still be frustrated that people can be so cruel.

What especially concerns me is that players who come from a minority ethnic group who have historically experienced discrimination in their lives would become perpetrators themselves. If people were saying this about African Americans entering any field, there would be public outrage, I guaran-

tee it. I know this because I am an African American, and I think we ALL in this society need to rethink our definition of respect and equal rights. I don't want people thinking they don't want to work with me because I have brown skin — something which does not determine my ability to perform a job. This kind of thinking has been a cancer in our country.

Folks, let's look in the mirror and think! Chris Hansen, as a member of the majority in our society, is not afraid to speak out against discrimination by his own group, and I want to support this kind of attitude. Keep it up Chris!!

**Callan Coleman**  
Academic advisor, Office of Multicultural Affairs

**CORRECTION**

In the story "University post office may become contract station in 1998" (ODE, Nov. 25), it should have said students and the public will be given a 60-day period to give feedback to the postal service. The Emerald regrets the error.