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COMMENTARY

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Wednesday, April 24, 2002

We should be thinking in dollars and sense

GUEST COMMENTARY

Colin
Elliott

I can hardly believe my ears. Our consumer-driven economy is in a recession and people like Emerald columnist Jeff Oliver are seeking to take money away from consumers and trust it in the hands of state bureaucrats ("Back-to-school sales tax," April 15). An economy that feeds on consumer confidence, activity and spending must not be starved. If our economy was a sick child, would we, in its already unhealthy state, deny it the resources that it needs to survive?

A sales tax would rip funds out of our desperate economy. Paying a few extra pennies for fast food is one thing, but this is not just a hamburger tax. When Oliver went to Michigan, did he try to buy a car? The sales tax from that kind of purchase would turn out to be much more than his "few dollars on larger purchases." For some, like me, who live below the poverty line and work ourselves to the bone, a sales tax even on inexpensive items steals from what little we have earned. I budget \$2 per meal; a 7 percent tax would make me pay for a meal I did not eat about every 14 meals. If I keep this meager budget standard all year, which is very difficult, then by the end of the year I will have lost \$153.30 (a lot more than a "few pennies at a time") and not eaten about 26 meals. What about a person who lives on the street? How much more would this hurt them?

And what about the public school dilemma? Would a sales tax really help? Nationally, salaries of public school administrators last year

increased 5.7 percent to \$112,158, according to the Department of Research at www.aft.org. This is more than the average for a lawyer, a full-time professor or an engineer and more than twice the state average for teachers. I thought education was about teaching children, not about providing administrators with early retirement.

There are 1,277 public schools in Oregon. If there is one administrator per school and that administrator takes a 10 percent pay cut, the revenue earned would be \$14,322,576.60. I did not add in a bonus or even the projected percentage increase, which, when factored in, only has them losing about \$4,000 rather than \$10,000. This seems a much better solution than picking the pockets of the poor. Oregonians have rejected the sales tax time after time because it is unfair and just plain wrong. Besides, if Oregonians "are afraid of change" as Oliver alleges, then why would we have "formed a nationwide identity of being progressive," as he states in the same column?

This kind of rhetoric is just as hypocritical as the idea of a sales tax saving education. A sales tax earmarked for education would probably just increase the aforementioned percentage of administrators' salaries. Why? Because it would go to a department, or an agency that could almost do whatever it wanted with that money. The word "earmarked" does not guarantee that sales tax revenue would go toward teaching children.

Trust me, sacrificing more money to an ever-increasing government is a bad idea. Taking this money from the poverty-stricken, the weary, and the heavy-laden is more than that — it's an atrocity.

Colin Elliott is a sophomore history major.

Letters to the editor

Picture worth a thousand wrongs

I find Julie Lauderbaugh's article on the Seattle Mardi Gras celebration a perfect example of what is wrong with journalism ("Point/Counterpoint," ODE, April 17).

Yes, journalists should report what is going on, and yes, sometimes it takes a graphic image to get a message across. The sad part of the story here is where she says that the journalist who took the photo was not acting the part of the police because that is not his job, that he had every right to sit by and photograph that woman being assaulted.

So, if you see a woman being raped, would you just pull out your camera and say the same thing? That is disgusting; How different would you feel if that was you in the photograph? Why don't you let others be the judge and print the photo in the Emerald with all the information, like that the photographer who won an award for watching and photographing the event describes how she tried to get away? Try, "It's a photo worth a thousand words and a thousand wrongs."

Sarah Zaleski
senior
geography

Article on Measure 20-56 helpful, voter-friendly

The article about Measure 20-56 was very informative ("Measure would allocate \$116 million to schools," ODE, April 17).

It is extremely important to inform the people about issues such as this. In voter pamphlets, it is often hard to understand what certain ballots are really saying and asking the citizens to vote on. When this happens, it can often create voter apathy and cause people to make uninformed decisions.

The article explained, in an unbiased way and in understandable terms, what this measure consists of. Also, it is important that the article mentioned concerns on both sides of the issue which readers could consider. Doing that allows the reader and voter to decide for themselves where they stand.

Informing people about these issues so that they will be competent when voting is key, and that is exactly what this article did.

Personally, I would vote yes on this issue because learning environments are important to learning and teaching alike. Plus, if making these additions will increase enrollment, then it is a good idea.

Carina J. Zevely
freshman
undeclared

And the winner is ...

Did anyone hear about the Big Game lottery jackpot ballooning to more than \$325 million last week? It was the only thing in the news not involving the Middle East or the scandal within the Catholic Church. So I will now set my sights on lottery programs, which I consider to be nothing less than a government tax on stupidity.

Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan and Virginia all participate in the Big Game. The pot reached such monumental proportions after 18 straight drawings without a winner. Before the April 16 drawing, which finally yielded three winning tickets, poor delusional saps from each state, and in many cases surrounding states as well, lined up outside convenience stores

and newsstands for a chance to beat the odds. And what odds they are. A player has a one-in-76-million chance of winning the Big Game. To put this in perspective, a person's chances of being killed by fireworks are one-in-21.8-million. And fireworks are only legal in 34 of the 50 states!

The odds didn't discourage many, though. Georgia was selling some 1.5 million tickets per hour April 16, contributing vast amounts of money to that state's government. Georgia, and the other Big Game states, each pull in around \$2 billion per year from lottery ticket sales, and 10 percent of that comes from the Big Game. Government lotteries are big business.

Oregon doesn't participate in the Big Game (although other states, including Washington, will join soon), but it does make a pretty penny

off its own lottery. Sales for 2001 reached \$785.6 million. That's a far cry from the billions other states rake in, but considering Oregon's population stands at a paltry 3.42 million people, it is a hefty sum. According to these numbers, Oregonians spent about \$229.71 per person on lottery tickets last year alone.

Now I don't know about you, but I didn't even spend \$1 on lottery tickets last year, let alone \$230. What's more, I don't know a single person who spends even close to that much. I don't think I know anyone who even plays the lottery. So who's spending so much money on a game with virtually no chance of winning?

A 1999 New York Times analysis of the New Jersey lottery found that modest wage earners, the poor and the less educated spend a greater percentage of their income on the lottery than wealthier individuals, that people in the lowest-income zip codes spend five times more on tickets than people in the highest, and that there are twice as many lottery vendors in poor areas.

So it stands to reason that the people spending that \$230 a year (probably more — people like me, who don't play, drag down the average) on the Oregon lottery are the people who can't afford it, and that the people spending that amount often don't have the mental capacity to realize the impossibility of ever turning a profit with their gambling. Is it really fair, then, for the government to be selling them false hope at \$1 to \$5 a shot? I certainly don't think so.

By the way, as of press time, only one of last week's Big Game winners has claimed the money, a 20-year-old Georgia phone company worker. She had never bought a ticket before.

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