Oregon Daily Emerald

COMMENTARY

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Editorial

Oregon must pay for services

With the Oregon Legislature's third special session getting closer to a finish, Oregonians are once again being treated to a ridiculous show of impracticality, partisan fighting, and flat-out denial.

A group of senators is apparently working on a plan to replace the "no new taxes" bill defeated Tuesday. We're glad that bill, which included no new ideas as well as no new taxes, was stopped in its tracks. Now someone needs to stop the new "compromise" being worked on — and someone really needs to find a rational way to fund Oregon public services.

Surely Oregonians realize that if they want schools, police and a safety net for the most vulnerable populations, they have to pay for it. And surely no one believes that there's much fat left to cut at state agencies; those agencies have been trimmed and cut repeatedly in recent years, and they've become more efficient as a result.

So perhaps it's just our legislators who don't realize that a stable solution is needed for Oregon's budget woes. In the long run, a more equitable system, which taxes businesses and individuals evenly (instead of relying more heavily on individuals, as is done currently), should be the goal of state lawmakers.

For now, however, Oregon needs a tax plan that doesn't simply rely on accounting tricks (shifting payments into the next biennium), failed attempts to raid the state's education endowment fund (the recently defeated Measure 13) and singling out the 20 percent of Oregonians who smoke (why choose cigarettes and not hair dye or DVDs?).

Here's our solution: Legislators should gather all their internal fortitude and pass a two-tiered sales tax. Forget referring it to the voters — let's just have it and balance the budget. The first tier should be fairly low and be for products ranging up to $10,000 in price. The second tier could be a much higher tax rate for products costing more than $10,000.

With a two-tiered system, some of the flat tax sting on lower-income residents' pocketbooks would be eliminated. Big-ticket luxury items will cost more, as well they should. But the state could then reap the benefit of taxing tourists, who currently pay too little for the pleasure of visiting our fine state.

Perhaps the political will doesn't exist in Salem for a tax that has failed at the polls so many times. But legislators need to find some political will — any political will — and raise taxes now, before our state services are forced into bankruptcy.

Judges are supposed to judge

Congratulations are in order to the ASUO and students who testified June 10 to the Eugene City Council regarding fines for furnishing alcohol to a minor or allowing minors to drink on one's property.

City staff proposed changing the law, in what they called a "housekeeping" measure, to remove the possibility of diversion programs or community service and instead creating mandatory sentences of fines and jail time.

Mandatory sentences for anything are a bad idea. Judges exist specifically to judge, and when we remove their ability to weigh circumstances and offenders' history, we might as well just use a computer to come up with the sentence.

In this case, University students organized by the ASUO testified about the value of diversion programs, and with Ward 3 Councilor David Kelly's support, the City Council dropped the mandatory minimum wording from the proposed changes.

This victory, however small in the scheme of things, should be lauded because it shows that when students get involved in policy decisions, they can make a difference. It also shows that Kelly is standing up for students' interest, as he promised during the May election.

Concerned community members should take note, however: The battle may not be over. City Council will be revisiting the issue of changes to city ordinances during a special Monday meeting. Whether you support or oppose this specific change — or other changes to city law — the opportunity exists to make your voice heard.

Students should take HIV tests

Today is National HIV Testing Day, and students need to follow the organizers' advice — "Take the Test. Take Control." This is the eighth year that the National Association of People with AIDS has organized the event, and it is more critical now than ever that people find out their HIV status.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, people under age 25 are estimated to make up half of all new HIV infections occurring in the United States, and HIV remains a leading cause of death among young people.

A study published by Kaiser Permanente shows that 40 percent of Americans who are HIV-positive don't know about the infection until they are about to develop AIDS. The study found that this is often 10 or more years after the person was infected.

That's 10 years of potentially infecting sexual partners. Ten years that could have been spent getting treatment to boost the immune system and learning to live with the virus.

College is often said to be a time of experimentation and learning to find oneself. Often this time of "growth" involves sexual encounters — and they're not always safe.

Students should now take the time to experiment with needles: Go to a clinic or doctor's office, get a blood test and learn your HIV status.

Then, regardless of the results, follow it up by taking control. Cut down on high-risk behaviors, such as having unprotected sex and sharing needles used to inject drugs.

As of June 2001, 41,093 people under age 25 had been diagnosed with AIDS, according to the CDC. Nobody knows how many more are HIV-positive, and that number will skyrocket if people don't take the test. Do it today.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Oregon Daily Emerald. Responses are welcomed and may be sent to editor@dailyemerald.com.

Pledge used to have meaning

GUEST COLUMNIST

Pat **Payne**

"I pledge allegiance to my flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

— Original pledge of allegiance, written by Francis Bellamy, 1892

It was these 22 words, written by minister Francis Bellamy, that have sparked a running national controversy. Wednesday, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled that the pledge of allegiance, perhaps more recognizable in its current form — "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" — was unconstitutional in its current form, because the words "under God" constitute an establishment of religion. If the ruling is upheld, it will mean the end of a familiar morning ritual at schools around the country.

The value of the pledge as a sign of love of our country should not be discounted. I am not against voluntary recitations of the pledge. I am against saying the pledge before class every day in public schools, only because it becomes a matter of "teacher said to say it" rather than a thoughtful reflection on the sacrifices made for this country by so many people. Further, the climate in schools, both today and in the '50s, when the pledge mandate was made widespread, is not conducive to thoughtful reflection.

Schoolchildren, both in the 1950s and today, have no conception of what the pledge really means or what this country is about. In the Eisenhower Era, about the time that the words "under God" were put in the pledge, we were in the middle of the Cold War. Senator Joseph McCarthy was conducting his mostly chimerical hunts for Communists in government to further his own political career, people were building bomb shelters in their backyards in anticipation of the day that Soviet planes would blanket the entire country with H-bombs, and the average American either saw or was told of hidden Communist intrigues everywhere.

Into this climate, the pledge was introduced into schools. This was not the right time, as I believe it was installed in the spirit of paranoia rather than love of country. It was perhaps not so much a tool to foster patriotism as it was a hope that "If he says the pledge enough times, little Johnny won't become a Commie."

Further, there was a mindset that "America can do no wrong." Slavery, the Trail of Tears and even our own civil war, were simply swept under the rug. All of these things should have reminded people of how precious and fragile the ideas behind the pledge are and how far we have come in our own history, instead of being ignored.

Today, however, we have just as little a grasp on the meaning of the words. Whereas in the '50s, children were given the pledge and then told that "America can do no wrong — ever," in some cases, there is a tendency in academic circles toward "America has never done, and can never do, right."

On college campuses across the nation, students are attending classes with professors who, far from presenting an unvarnished, "warts and all" view of America, are in many cases depicting American history as only greed, war, genocide and racism. Future teachers will be bringing to elementary and high school a view of the United States that is as much divorced from reality as the view in the '50s. Children will be no more prepared to realize the meaning of the pledge than were their forebearers.

Perhaps some day there can be a place for a voluntary affirmation of the pledge, without the words "under God." But for that to happen we are going to have to change our schools and strike a balance between whitewash and self-flagellation.

Pat Payne is a freelance columnist. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

UO should fight for professors

GUEST COMMENTARY

James **Squires**

I am deeply dismayed to hear about the departure of one of my professors, Makiko Nagae, from the University of Oregon. Not only because she is a wonderful teacher who I count among the very best I have had the pleasure of studying under, but more distressing is the nature of her departure.

Professor Nagae is a Japanese citizen who has lived and taught in Eugene both in high school and at the college level for more than 10 years. Yet the nature of her visa requires that, in order for her to secure a green card and continue teaching, she is reliant on the University to provide her with a statement of support. Yet for some reason this support was not forthcoming, leaving her with no other option but to leave the country and return to Japan.

I do not claim to be an expert in immigration law and its various complexities, but if the problem is that Professor Nagae is only under a nine-month contract rather than a one- or two-year contract that is standard for such statements of support, it seems to me that the University would and should take whatever steps necessary to retain one of its top instructors.

If anyone were to inquire about whether Professor Nagae is indeed one of the best teachers at the University, I think they would find no shortage of people to attest to this fact.

It then comes as a huge disappointment to me that the University would be unwilling to lend its support to her, especially in light of a highly charged political climate in which "non-Americans" are being harassed and deported seemingly arbitrarily.

As a student who has been on the Dean's List every term I have attended this University, and as one who values what extraordinary instructors like Professor Nagae have to offer, it makes me wonder why I am supporting an institution of higher learning that will not extend this same support to its faculty. Regardless of what I decide to do with my education in the future, I know that many of my fellow students echo my sentiments.

I would like to leave you with one final thought: No university, no matter what it may believe to the contrary, has the luxury of losing not only quality teachers but more importantly, quality human beings. The loss of even one is one too many, and it is something that should cause all those involved to reflect on what a great loss it is for all concerned.

James Squires is a junior Japanese major.