

COMMENTARY

Tuesday, July 9, 2002

Editorial

Oregon voters should demand better fixes to state budget woes

Oregonians should be outraged at their elected representatives. Last week, just in time for the Fourth of July holiday, the Oregon Legislature passed a package of bills to close the state's \$860 million budget shortfall. And despite Gov. John Kitzhaber's demand for a structurally sound fix for Oregon's revenue problems, legislators used accounting tricks, a targeted tax and money raids to get themselves out of Salem and beat the heat of new, across-the-board taxes. Instead, they passed to voters two measures — one to take \$150 million from the education endowment and another to make smokers pay 60 cents per pack more for schools — that need to be approved in a Sept. 17 special election to make the budget work.

The plan is a shining example of politicians failing to muster the will to do their job. Kitzhaber should veto the plan and call another special session — and he should again remind lawmakers to find a real solution.

On Thursday, just three days after Oregon's budget "deal," the Tennessee Legislature passed a plan to fix that state's \$800 million shortfall by raising its sales tax as well as levies on businesses, alcohol and tobacco. That's right: They raised tobacco taxes in Tennessee, where the leafy plant is the leading cash crop. It had to take some guts to just make a decision to raise taxes.

Back in Oregon, no such political courage exists. The state has a structural revenue problem. Until Oregon politicians acknowledge that fact, as the folks in Tennessee did, there can't be a proper debate about the best solution.

At the Pacific Green Party convention in late June, former U.S. Congressman Jim Weaver, currently being courted by the Greens to be their candidate for governor, suggested a progressive sales tax be established and dedicated to education. Also in late June, the Emerald editorial board suggested a two-tiered sales tax that would levy a higher rate on big-ticket items.

Whether it's a sales tax or not, new taxes are going to be necessary if Oregonians want roads, schools, social services and police. And we would like to see these taxes reverse the trend of the past 15 years and actually split the tax burden fairly between businesses and individuals. Currently, businesses pay far less than 50 percent of the state's tax bill — which is an issue we'll explore in the coming weeks.

In the meantime, if Kitzhaber doesn't have the political fortitude to call another special session, voters should make their own demands in September by defeating both of the ill-conceived measures referred by the Legislature.

Voters should then take another step and demand that candidates running for the Oregon House and Senate offer their ideas for fixing the state's budget. Finally, Oregonians should take care in November to elect lawmakers who will look at the state's future needs and fight for a tax structure that provides enough revenue to cover expenses. It was a surprise to see people all over campus on Sunday and Monday after a month of lazy, quiet afternoons. The first of seven IntroDUCKtion orientation programs finished up Monday afternoon, and it was a pleasure to see excited faces learning what to expect from their higher education.

Welcome, new students

We want to extend a warm welcome to new students and a thank you to the orientation staff for getting students prepared for and interested in the University. Involved students make better newspaper readers, better citizens and more successful adults.

New students should be prepared for their own surprise, however; good housing near campus is mostly hard to find and expensive, and classes this fall could cost upwards of 10 percent more than last fall if a student registers for all "prime time" classes — those before 3 p.m.

This is only a friendly warning, and we'll explore these concerns in more depth in the coming weeks. Parents need not suddenly worry about hidden costs; the University is still a great buy. We just thought new students should know.

Editorial Policy

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Dry greek houses add security

GUEST COMMENTARY

Meghann Farnsworth

Fraternities and drinking are a combination that has been eternalized in the minds of Americans by the film "Animal House." Filmed on the University of Oregon campus, "Animal House" provided an image of fraternities where, like the infamous Deltas of Faber comically display, college life is nothing more than sex, beer and drunken camaraderie.

Saying he was disturbed by recent studies claiming that those who drink the most are in fraternities and sororities, President Frohnmayer has acted on this drunk image, signing a ban on all drinking in greek houses, which is to take effect later this coming school year.

I am not so naive to believe that this ban will alleviate the problems of binge drinking currently afflicting many college students here and throughout the nation. There is no way to "fix" the problem with a piece of paper, and just as can be seen in the rebellious and determined actions of the Deltas, fraternities will not stop drinking simply because the University tells them to stop. While the ban may seem to be a Band-Aid attempt to cover a severed artery, it is in fact an appropriate and timely step toward making the overall campus environment a safer place.

Long-standing party trends in fraternities in which a wide array of unknown alcoholic concoctions are freely available inevitably leads to trouble for University women. For example, this environment is espe-

cially dangerous for incoming freshmen women, newly released from their parents' protective custody and thrilled at the prospect of large parties filled with an unlimited supply of alcohol and boys.

Since fraternities are, for the most part, University sponsored, young women may feel a false sense of security when they attend those parties. While anyone can become intoxicated at an off-campus party, those which take place within the University system should be held to a higher standard because of their affiliation. The University provides neither adequate cautionary words for these women nor classes on alcohol abuse.

While rape occurs off-campus as well, the drinking and social situations of greek living provide a potentially dangerous surrounding that the University should not sponsor. Because they are able to participate in "rush" — the campuswide recruitment week where sororities and fraternities are able to dip into the freshmen pool for new recruits — fraternities and sororities should promote healthy college living.

While this ban certainly will not end underage drinking, its effect will provide an alternative living environment for those who may not feel com-

fortable with drinking. Peer pressure is an unfortunate occurrence which is astoundingly hard to navigate, especially as a new recruit, and having a dry house will allow those students who may not want to be surrounded by drinking and constant parties to live free of pressure.

Those members who are of age and wish to drink can simply walk a couple of blocks to the campus bars and get a drink there or attend an off-campus party; plenty of members live off-campus, and there is no ban on drinking there.

Most of the vocal critics of the new policy have asserted that the ban will not end abusive drinking, and I agree; however, I cannot understand the argument that this ban will simply force greek members into the community at large, thus endangering countless citizens with drunken driving. Are the fraternity brothers really that out of control?

I have slightly more faith in our greek system than to fear for my life once the ban has taken effect — the majority of the student population already currently attends off-campus parties.

It is obvious that binge and underage drinking is a problem, but keeping drinking out of the eyes of the community will only cause this dire problem to fester, not be kept under control.

Meghann Farnsworth is a freelance columnist. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

