

COMMENTARY

Editor in chief:
 Michael J. Kleckner
 Managing editor:
 Jenni Schultz

Tuesday, August 13, 2002

Editorial

Kitzhaber cares about Oregon's school system

Since Measure 5's property tax limits were set in 1990, Oregon schools have been on a downward trajectory: fewer services, fewer teachers, fewer staff and a disintegrating infrastructure.

And despite many words to the contrary, no one has really cared. Until now.

For all of the Democratic hand-wringing and Republican spin that has occurred since Wednesday, when Gov. John Kitzhaber vetoed two budget bills that would fill a \$317 million school budget gap, at least the vetoes showed he cared about education.

Taxpayers haven't cared — they continue electing legislators who cut taxes and refuse to find a long-term solution.

Legislators haven't cared — they keep using one-time funding sources and poor excuses for revenue generation (like the proposed cigarette tax increase) to prop up school budgets.

Businesses certainly haven't cared — they have received the lion's share of tax cuts in the past 12 years and still they beg for more.

Yes, the schools really needed this influx of cash. Yes, catastrophic events are likely to happen if the Legislature sustains Kitzhaber's vetoes.

But they ought to sustain them both. Maybe Oregonians need a wake-up call to realize how horribly they have been treating their children.

Maybe education supporters will push harder on lawmakers to fix the problem if they see more teachers fired, more programs cut and fewer buildings maintained.

And maybe they won't. But overriding Kitzhaber's vetoes only allows the problem to fester. Does anyone really think lawmakers will fix it in the next biennium? Hmm, seems we have heard that before ... and before ... and before.

We also have heard repeatedly that Senate Bill 1022 is a budgeting "maneuver" or that it is "Enron-style" accounting. It is neither. It is actually a cut.

When the state pays for schools in this biennium with money from the next biennium, it reduces the schools' budget in the next biennium. So SB 1022 really is a \$267 million cut from Oregon schools.

Yet Sen. Susan Castillo, D-Eugene — who was elected school superintendent in May — wants to override Kitzhaber's veto and cut next year's school funding.

School supporters should call and ask her why she would do that. Is that the vision of stability for schools she promised in her campaign?

School supporters should also call Reps. Vicki Walker, D-Eugene, and Phil Barnhart, D-Eugene, both of whom have said they are undecided and want to hear from constituents.

Legislators have said that this budget plan was the best they could do. And Kitzhaber showed he cared about Oregon children when he told the Legislature that it wasn't good enough.

Now lawmakers should find some courage and prove they care by passing a budget plan that provides stability for Oregon schools.

A few 'wacko' suggestions to help Lon Mabon get elected governor

GUEST COMMENTARY

Ryan
Nyburg

The political front is heating up in Oregon. "Damn," says the political front, "it's getting pretty hot."

I am of course speaking of our upcoming elections, which include a race for governor. Running this year is everyone's favorite wacko-in-residence, Lon Mabon, head of the Oregon Citizens Alliance.

I think this is wonderful. I personally could not be happier if they picked a patient from a mental institution to run for governor — the kind of guy whose first order of business would be to appoint a thermos of chocolate milk and a small stuffed rabbit named Captain Wiggles into high public offices.

I'm all for Mabon's election, and I just want him to know that if I can be of any help, to please contact me as soon as possible. I have a few ideas for his candidacy that could be of great help in getting him elected.

For example, I propose that the first thing that Mabon does is to secede Oregon from the union. We can avoid all the strife from the rest of the country by simply doing it late at night when no one is looking.

I think that this kind of "take charge" action will show the rest of the country that Mabon is not someone to be messed with. Assuming they notice.

Now some of you might not like the idea of Mabon in office. Some of you might say that he is an ultra-conserva-

tive right-wing wacko with extreme anti-homosexual, anti-abortion views that do not represent the majority of the voters in Oregon, or the majority of rational human beings. That's just the kind of whiny nitpicking I've come to expect from you left-wing subversives.

(Warning: Satirical statements to follow. Do not read in presence of lawyer.)

Once Lon's in office, I'm going to see that all of you are locked up where you can't cause any more trouble. We'll see how much you environmental pansies like trees when we start beating you over the heads with sticks. And we're going to make you hemp-wearing vegetarians change your ways if we have to stuff raw steak down your throats. That's right, you'll be good meat-eating Americans from now on, and Mabon will see to it!

All these great political happenings almost make me want to start my own political party. It would need a general political outline that I can support, something rational and effective, something that will draw a large constituency.

Piracy is the most logical choice.

This is a political view that I can get behind, so I am officially announcing my candidacy for governor of Oregon as a pirate. If you think that this will interfere with my support of the Mabon candidacy, then you obviously do not understand the advantages that come with being a raving lunatic.

My political agenda will include solving the current budget shortfall by plundering California. I think effective raids on Los Angeles, San Francisco and Sacramento will solve most of our budget problems for the next few years.

I will also solve prison overcrowding by forcing all prisoners convicted of anything higher than a misdemeanor to walk the plank.

Medical care: Replace expensive prosthetic limbs with wooden pegs and metal hooks.

I also propose changing the state flag from its current unthreatening picture of a beaver to the more threatening skull of a beaver set over crossed Douglas firs.

With these changes, I think that we as a state will become the most feared and powerful state in the country.

Captain Wiggles will lead us to glory. If you think this sounds mildly demented, wait until Mabon gets in office.

Ryan Nyburg is a freelance columnist. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

VanLeeuwen should learn basic biology

GUEST COMMENTARY

Mason
Gummer

Liz VanLeeuwen ("Tom Daschle should learn logical forest management," ODE, Aug. 1) appears to know nothing about basic biology if she actually believes what she wrote, which is questionable, as she is a politician.

She applauds Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., for sneaking an attachment to a bill that exempts his state's forests from all environmental regulation and lawsuits.

As an aside, I found it interesting that she describes the main legislation that bears the attachment only as "a critical funding bill." In actuality, it's a \$29 billion increase in military spending, a gift to a few of the richest corporations in the world, who are awarded government contracts without even having to bother to bid against competitors.

VanLeeuwen echoes Daschle's claim that it is necessary for the timber industry to thin the forests to prevent forest fires that are so destructive. She states that in the event of a forest fire, "Not only are plant and animal life and fish habitats completely destroyed, but the soil, organic matter and structure are destroyed — leaving bare soil to erode and choke waterways."

That is utter nonsense. If it were

true, all of America's forest ecosystems would have been "completely destroyed" by lightning fires centuries ago.

In actuality, fires are essential to the health of a forest. They clear all of the deadfall trees and branches that accumulate on the forest floor and gradually choke out the underbrush.

Extinguishing forest fires prevents dead wood from burning, letting it accumulate further, creating a "tinderbox" situation. Evergreen seeds require the heat of a fire to crack their outer shell, allowing them to sprout. The leftover ashes fertilize the soil, prompting a quick rebound of plant life. Animals can usually escape fires because they can hear them coming and smell the smoke — they don't just want to be incinerated.

I am from Eastern Oregon and I remember a few years ago when the forest near Tower Mountain burned. Before the fire, the deadfall in the area was 4 to 6 feet deep and there was little underbrush.

Then the forest burned in the sum-

mer, and afterward it looked like a charred wasteland. The trees were reduced to skimpy black poles and the ground devoid of cover.

The following spring the entire area was covered with green foliage and tiny evergreen sprouts. The following year the tree sprouts were a foot tall. The next year they were 2 feet.

I have seen with my own eyes that the forest rebounds from fire. Every biology class I've ever taken has said fires are a natural and essential part of a forest's ecological cycle. So why don't we just let the fires burn, so long as they don't threaten peoples' homes?

Because each live, unburned tree is a dollar sign to the logging industry and its lobby. That's why we have politicians like VanLeeuwen and Daschle lying to us about the issue. Their campaigns are funded mostly by corporations — therefore they must, if they wish to receive further funding, represent that constituency.

So long as we are content to be distracted from our government's actions, issues like forest management will be decided based on what gives corporations the highest profits, rather than on what is best for the environment or the people.

Mason Gummer is a senior sociology major.

Letters to the Editor and Guest Commentaries Policy

Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Please include contact information. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

CORRECTION

Thursday's story about the governor's vetoes ("Kitzhaber kills Legislature's budget plans," ODE, Aug. 8) should have said the total amount of money represented by House Bill 4056 and Senate Bill 1022 is \$317 million.

Also, the story should have said the two bills would fill school budget gaps if the Legislature overrides Kitzhaber's vetoes.

The Emerald regrets the errors.

Letter to the editor

Revise laws to improve forest management

It was refreshing to this old Class of '49 alumnus to have you print Liz VanLeeuwen's commentary ("Tom Daschle should learn logical forest management," ODE, Aug. 1). Nearly all

my dollars were earned working in the timber industry in various capacities.

My opinion is that corrections to the poor federal timber management actions will not take place until corrections are made in laws that created the EPA and EDS Acts.

W. Rex Stevens
Eugehe