

COMMENTARY

Monday, January 27, 2003

Editorial

Legislature's 'secret plan' no solution for state's budget woes

The Register-Guard recently reported that some Republicans in the Oregon Legislature claim there is a way to solve the state's budget crisis without a need to vote for Measure 28's tax increase. They claim there's plenty of money to go around, and they have a "secret plan" to find it. The rub? They'll only tell voters if Measure 28 fails.

After we finished laughing (yes, there are secret "money shacks" hidden behind state buildings across the state, and only those greedy state workers know where they are!), we decided to ask, in all calmness and equanimity: If you have such a plan, why in the name of broken government didn't you bring it up in the summer?

Could it be that: A) It's the same old Kruse-Doyle plan, calling for cutting state services and disbanding the OLCC, that was floated around in the special sessions and went nowhere? (Gee, cutting state services? Sound familiar?) or B) It's a clever misdirection campaign to fool Oregonians into voting "no" on the promise of fixing the problems with a bag of "magic budget dust"?

Oregon's vital services don't have time for nonsense — they need answers. If anyone has a fair, workable solution that will pass political muster, either sing or step away from the microphone.

Editorial policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com.

City council's dramatics reminiscent of 'Gang of 9'

If I weren't so upset by what it means to Eugene politics, I might laugh at the drama of the Jan. 13 City Council meeting. Councilors made a rip-roaring start on what could become a more ideologically contentious year than most students have ever seen.

I've been watching Eugene politics since the late 1980s, and I've been a politically active city voter for many years as well, which is why I am using this space to write about something other than the Emerald. Students may not think City Council has much campus impact, but in many ways, it does (think "Special Response Fee" for parties and increased pot fines currently being considered).

Eugene councilors are non-partisan, at least for the purposes of election. In practice, they are anything but non-partisan. Progressives and pro-growth conservatives currently split the Council seats, although two of them might be called "moderate" even though they vote with one bloc or the other fairly regularly. This causes 4-4 ties, with pro-growth Mayor Jim Torrey left to break it. Council was split before the recent election as well, and 4-4 votes were cast on hard-core ideological issues.

But the ideology took an ugly tone Jan. 13, and it became clear that a conservative mood could drown out Eugene's progressive voice. The subject was pretty arcane for most watchers — electing the council president and vice-president — but the discussion had a telling ideological tone. The tradition governing who gets elected to the largely ceremonial executive positions was questioned, and two conservative-leaning councilors were elected to the posts.

This should be disturbing to all Eugene voters, because the progressive voice, which represents the progressive half of the electorate in our bipolar town, now has no role in the ceremony or administration of the Council.

Equally disturbing was the acrimonious debate before the election. There were personal accusations, charges of ideological war, high tension and general incivility. I have been watching the Council at work long enough to know that it can get much worse; I remember the food-throwing and shouting matches of years ago.

Maybe that's what makes me so concerned: Council has made such progress since then, and the city doesn't need more of those public policy train wrecks.

Recent years have shown that the two ideologies have a lot in common. Progressives are not anti-growth, they generally are just asking for something better than simply additional low-wage, big-box corporate jobs and developments that only line the pockets of developers. Pro-growth advocates don't hate the environment or low-income residents, they are generally just asking for policies that make it easier to draw companies with jobs. With some work, these ideas can meet.

Unfortunately, what was on display at the Jan. 13 meeting was a subtle indication that a "Gang of 9" mentality (for those who remember the growth-at-any-cost cartoons from 18 months ago that lampooned progressive councilors) may decide that informed argumentation and discourse is beneath it, and that brute force is the best way to achieve its goals.

Such an attitude won't serve any Eugenean well — except maybe those watchers who enjoy food fights.

Contact the editor in chief at editor@dailyemerald.com. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Wal-Mart's dominance will eliminate mom-and-pop stores

Ever seen the parking lot at Eugene's West 11th Avenue Wal-Mart on any given night? The lot is usually packed, and it makes the adjacent Target look deserted in comparison.

Wal-Mart is the Superman in the world of ailing discount heroes. In some areas, the Arkansas-based "el-cheapo" chain has stores less than five miles apart, creating a dominant presence in suburbs by bullying their way through city building codes and asphyxiating competitors.

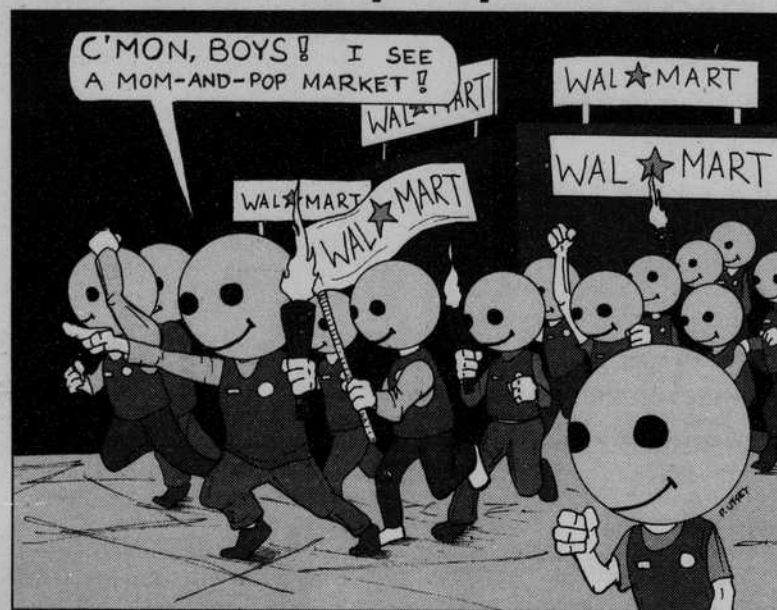
According to Time magazine, Wal-Mart's goal is to have a 30 percent share of every major business it is in. And the company's variety of business endeavors has grown, from cheap towels made in India to used-car sales in Houston. That's right, soon you too can purchase your very own lemon decked out with Wal-Mart tires, seat covers and G-rated CDs such as John Tesh (sorry, sinful Snoop Dogg albums are not sold at faith-based Wal-Mart).

Wal-Marts are so hot in America that the company is mounting an expansion that will increase from 3,400 U.S. locations to 5,000 stores in five years. Hiring for all of the new stores will give Wal-Mart a workforce that outnumbers the U.S. military. Just when you thought the epitome of big American business couldn't make us look more like capitalist (and cheap) hee-haws, the company plans to invade Japan and has successfully pushed its way into Mexico, Brazil, Germany and China.

Wal-Mart has proudly announced it will increase the number of stores in China from 25 to 40 next year. And just when you thought things couldn't get any weirder, at the Supercenter in Shenzhen, just north of Hong Kong, employees have their own fight song: "My heart is filled with



Julie Lauderbaugh
Judge Julie



Peter Utsey Emerald

pride ... I long to tell you how deep my love for Wal-Mart is." Creepy.

The gloomy irony is that the same Chinese capitalists who patronize the Asian version of a "white trash" American grocery store are contributing to the exploitation of their own people.

The Nation reported the company refuses to tell labor-rights activists the locations of its factories. Last year, Wal-Mart was kicked out of the Domini 400 Social Index, a socially-responsible investment fund, for failure to respond to "calls for change" and not upholding a standard of labor rights. Besides Wal-Mart, only Nike has been removed from the fund for the same reason.

Not only does Wal-Mart have questionable manufacturing practices overseas, the company's image is suffering domestically from a class action lawsuit victory in Portland last month. The company was convicted of forcing employees, who are not unionized, to clock out and continue working. The case was one success out of 38 pending lawsuits.

To add insult to injury, Wal-Mart is being sued for gender discrimination. In July, a San Francisco judge

will begin hearing *Dukes v. Wal-Mart*, a civil rights class-action lawsuit that may bring restitution to more than 700,000 women.

So if Wal-Mart is the part of the big-box world's axis of evil, why don't employees just quit? Why should anyone feel sorry for the "associates" — upper-class parlance for "cashier" — who are perfectly capable of filing complaints or walking away?

Well, most employees earn less than \$10 per hour, are uneducated and are working in communities that offer residents few alternative jobs. Small communities where competition, such as mom-and-pop stands down the street, are easily bullied out of town are the types of places that Wal-Mart likes to set up shop. Jobs available for their skill level simply aren't out there.

Big business has its place in the United States. However, I will think twice before handing over my money to a hopeless cashier and supporting the yellow smiley face brainwashing America.

Contact the columnist at juliaulderbaugh@dailyemerald.com. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Schools should spend wisely

Guest commentary

As I sit each morning and listen to the garbled pleas of elderly spokespeople and parents of children, I cannot help but wonder if stupidity is merely a natural phenomenon of human nature or whether indeed people strive to be as imbecilic as they possibly can.

I have to wonder, because the current budget woes of the state, though perhaps tight and frightening to the services we have come to expect on an annual basis, are in my mind the result not of lower-than-expected revenue collections as the nimrods in this community seem to want us to believe, but rather are the result of a tradition of waste and fiscal irresponsibility that, were the public to spend enough time to become familiar with, would cause a real scandal for the ages.

I say this not as a person separated from the hullabaloo but from the point of view of a classroom teacher, and a person who has dedicated his life to

the service of the community in the form of the education of our youth.

It seems to me that instead of raising the rate of taxation that this state imposes on its citizenry, perhaps we ought to consider the idea of forcing publicly funded institutions and agencies to be fiscally responsible and ethical with what they have been given. I don't think even the most conservative Republican in this state would object to paying more taxes to support government programs and agencies that were utilizing their budgets soundly but simply were not funded to the level necessary to properly carry out its mission. That, however, is not the case.

Instead of encouraging responsibility and thrift, our mid-level bureaucratic leaders here at the University and in Salem seem to think that waste is the way to go. I believe the only way to combat this is to force the state to live within its means by refusing to bolster an already obese budget.

To the next person who dares

complain to me that our schools are faced with imminent and drastic cuts in faculty, resources, etc., I would advise you to take a close and serious look at the budget of the districts in this area. Not only do you not have to be a CPA to recognize and be baffled by the extraordinary waste that dominates the public schools of this state, but I would suggest that were you to spend any time at all looking over how and where funds are allocated, you would come to nearly the same conclusion that I have come to: You could cut the budgets of the school districts in half and they would still have more than enough funds to run, should they opt to use those funds wisely.

But hey, in this community, the idea that funds ought to be allocated in a responsible manner is, after all, quite an offensive notion. So, as a classroom teacher, let me encourage you all to vote no on Measure 28.

Scott Austin is a graduate student in educational leadership.