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## ■ In my opinion

# Tipping the wage scale



CHUCK SLOTHOWER  
TAKING ISSUE

Nobody plays a funnier April Fools' joke than the restaurant industry. In fact, I'm sure Oregon minimum-wage earners are laughing their aprons off.

It must be hilarious to try to feed your kids while the Oregon Restaurant Association pushes business-friendly legislators in Salem to freeze the minimum wage for workers who earn tips.

The restaurant industry has been fighting this battle for years. Restaurateurs hate the minimum wage, they hate increases in the minimum wage and they hate not being able to factor tips into the minimum wage.

The battle has intensified since 2002, when Oregon voters approved an initiative that raised the minimum wage and tied annual increases to the Consumer Price Index. Oregon now has a \$7.25 minimum wage, the second highest in the nation only to Washington.

The minimum wage fight boils down to a political boxing match. In one corner stand Republican legislators, who control the state House, with the restaurant industry playing the role of trainer. In the other corner stand Democrats, who control the Senate and governor's office, with labor unions cheering on their pugilists.

Rep. George Gilman, R-Medford, has thrown a right hook with HB 2409, a bill that would freeze the minimum wage for workers who earn tips.

Gilman apparently thinks all those working mothers earn too much money — all those hard-working

waiters and waitresses who place lemon slices in your iced tea, fetch you an extra stack of napkins for a messy burger and offer you coffee refills.

One might jump to the conclusion that Gilman, his House allies and the Oregon Restaurant Association want to screw over the working poor in exchange for campaign contributions and higher profits.

No, ORA spokesman Bill Perry said, restaurateurs simply want to pay higher wages to their untipped employees, such as cooks. "We're not saying that the servers don't deserve their tip income," Perry told The Associated Press. "The question is, how do we get a fair wage to the back-of-the-house employees?"

Of course. The Oregon Restaurant Association has been pouring campaign contributions into Republican coffers for years — to the tune of \$147,680 in 2004, according to The Institute on Money in State Politics — in an altruistic campaign to raise wages for cooks.

Now that's a good April Fools' joke. And it's on Oregon's working poor.

Amusingly, if Perry were honest in the quote above, the bill would adhere

rather closely to socialist philosophy. Think about it: a government plan lowering wages for one type of worker in order to give more to another type of worker, leveling wages all around. One wonders if Gilman's constituents in the Medford area elected him to ease class divisions in the restaurant industry.

Gilman, a longtime dairy farmer, might not have read a great deal of Karl Marx, who with Friedrich Engels described the essence of the minimum wage more than 150 years ago in "The Communist Manifesto."

"The average price of wage labor," they wrote, "is the minimum wage, i.e., that quantum of the means of subsistence which is absolutely requisite to keep the laborer in bare existence as a laborer. What, therefore, the wage laborer appropriates by means of his labor merely suffices to prolong and reproduce a bare existence ... under which the laborer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it."

Gilman has done the job of a good Republican, submitting to the bidding of the latest industry to whine about the cost of doing business. Simultaneously, he has proposed to shift the cost of paying waitstaff from employers to consumers. One hopes he gets a nice campaign contribution.

One also hopes that Democrats have the wisdom to block this shameless bill.

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## ■ Editorial

# Some news events find their own April fools

In light of April Fools' Day, the Editorial Board would like to present a summary of recent news events we wish were jokes.

## The crap's out of the bag

On Monday night, a San Diego woman experienced a harrowing mugging while walking her dog, according to an Associated Press report. Unfortunately for the criminal, the bag snatched from the woman's hand was not full of money; it was full of her dog's droppings. Criminal recklessness indeed.

## It pays to be a Trekkie

This week, "NBC Nightly News" ran an interesting story on lesser-known, alternative scholarships available to graduating high-school students. Noteworthy awards include: \$500 to language students from the Klingon Language Institute; \$1,500 from the American Sheep Industry; and an award to the University of Chicago if your last name is Zolp.

## X-graded

On Wednesday, a California State University fraternity was suspended after members admitted to acting in a porn film, according to an AP report. They knew something was odd about that Film 101 class.

## The real labor of birth

An Ohio woman failed to get to a hospital to deliver her baby Tuesday and ended up parking at a local gas station to give birth in her family van. The AP reported that a customer at the service station called police with the woman's license number and explained the situation; however, a mix-up occurred, and officers set out looking for the woman's van as a stolen vehicle. Luckily the mix-up was set straight, but before officers could reach the woman, another caller mistakenly reported that someone was trying to throw a baby from the van. In the end, several officers ordered her out of the van at gunpoint, at which time the whole situation was quickly resolved.

## Selsun Blue: pollution prevention

A WebMD news article suggested Thursday that especially in the winter months, dandruff, dead skin cells and other similar cell fragments could account for notable air pollution and climate change.

## When the court starts a-rockin'

The Michael Jackson trial took an intimate turn Wednesday, according to MTV News, when witness Cynthia Bell was asked about her definition of cuddling. Bell offered to show the court instead, and prosecutor Gordon Auchincloss was allowed to approach the witness. However, before things could get too hot and heavy, the witness chair collapsed.

## It's in the punch line

Earlier this week, the AP reported that a New Orleans family discovered two bricks of cocaine in its used car. The drugs had most likely been strapped to the car's fuel line since the family purchased it in 1997, eventually resulting in an ironic deceleration of the vehicle's speed.

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## ■ Guest commentary

# World Bank should lay off dam

On Thursday, the World Bank discussed whether to fund the proposed Nam Theun 2 Dam in Laos. As American students studying development in Northeast Thailand, we have seen first hand the devastation hydroelectric power dams have on local villagers. These villagers have depended on the natural cycles of the Mun River for generations. The Pak Mun Dam is a well known example of a failed development project, and the World Commission on Dams has acknowledged it as such. The Nam Theun 2 Dam promises similar consequences to an even larger degree. Pak Mun Dam failed under a relatively stable Thai government, while the strict Communist Lao regime doesn't allow villagers to

protest or voice their dissent.

In a cost-benefit analysis, the 25 year lifespan of this dam will in no way offset the permanent loss of sustainable livelihoods, natural ecosystems and endangered species unique to the area that would be destroyed if the project passes. Ninety percent of the electricity to be generated from Nam Theun 2 Dam will go to Thailand, which ironically has cheaper, renewable energy alternatives. The World Bank's mission statement is to lift people out of poverty. This cannot be accomplished through the destruction of the natural resources that citizens depend on for their livelihood. This project is unnecessary and destructive. It does not fulfill the World

Bank's criteria for decision-making.

We have the potential to harness real sustainable energy. It is time to put away the notion that hydroelectricity is a harmless and sustainable option. There is too much at stake to remain idle. As citizens of a connected world, we all have a duty to stand up for the oppressed Laotian villagers and demand that the World Bank learn from its past mistakes and deny funding for this devastating project.

*The Council on International Educational Exchange Students are currently participating in a study abroad program in Khon Kaen, Thailand*

## INBOX

### Legislators must repair Measure 37's ambiguities

The Oregon Legislature needs to act decisively to address the many problems with Measure 37. Measure 37 is not the solution to whatever problems Oregon's land use system might have. Measure 37 has created a mess of the state's property law system that will take too long to resolve in the courts. It is the responsibility of our legislators to preserve the land use system, and resolve the legitimate concerns of citizens.

So far this session, legislators have invoked the "will of the people" as their reason for leaving Measure 37 alone. This might be a valid argument if Measure 37's effect could be objectively understood; however, this is not the case. Among its many ambiguities, Measure 37 does not give guidance on how land should be valued, where the money for compensation should come from, or what remedies exist for neighbors harmed by a successful claim.

Legislators should provide guidance in this area by introducing legis-

lation to clear up Measure 37's ambiguities, and remove its most problematic provisions. At the least, legislators should institute a moratorium on Measure 37 claims to allow policymakers and state agencies a chance to catch up and do a better job of implementing the law. If nothing is done, Oregon's property system will grind to a halt until the courts can create workable rules to navigate the mess that Measure 37 has made.

Jason Hartz  
Eugene