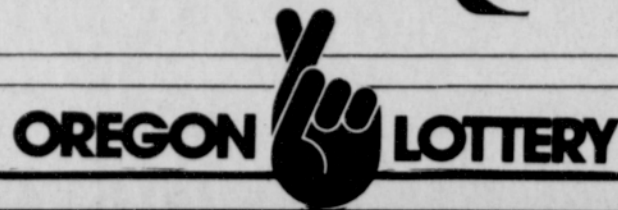


A GET RICH QUICK FIX



Call it what you like. Call it the great equalizer, call it a whisper of hope in a bad economy, call it an equal opportunity regardless of education, sex, race or socioeconomic class. Don't forget to call Oregon's lottery system a quick way for the state to earn a buck, a short-term solution for a long-term problem, which addresses none of the long-term causes and cannot, therefore, solve them. The lottery is a product sold by the state, and as such is a mirage, a creation of advertising like any other product, promising by image and slogan what it can never deliver.

Combine the glowing promotional descriptions of Oregon's lottery, the shining faces of TV ad hopefuls, and the bright eight-by-ten smiles of winners, and it would rival a beam from the Tillamook lighthouse; you'd think the lottery would save as many lives as well.

In defense of state lotteries in general, an article in *The Sunday Oregonian* (July 21, 1985) claimed that a lottery is a cohesive element in society. It unites across all boundaries of race, sex, religion, ideology, in the game of chance. The odds may be small, but everyone has an equal shot. A brief moment of intuitive understanding unites the man in gray pinstripes and the man in muddy overalls as they rub off the shiny silver film, and presumably they are better human beings for that moment. Yeah. Probably we laugh or sigh or cheer and go back to whatever we were doing.

The poor achieve instant equality, the *Oregonian* article claimed. In what realm? Instant equality because they have the same odds? Or because if they win they have money and are now equal? If that's the equality we're looking for, we'd do better to learn to play good poker for high stakes where the odds are more favorable. The unemployed among us are not looking for equal betting odds, they're looking for a job or a home and the lottery doesn't do anything to give them a better chance at either. No matter how many poor people win big, the structures they battle with don't change. The lottery may be an equal opportunity, but it doesn't create one, a crucial difference the advertising people avoid delineating.

The prime defense, though, is Lottery As Great Hope. When all other arguments fail, no one can disagree that the lottery gives people an instant of hopeful anticipation, reinforced by the crossed

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by Katrin Bridget Snow

fingers logo, and carefully nurtured by the news media who splash the big winners in banner headlines. This could have been you if you had been one second/minute/hour/day/week earlier/later, and had walked around the block to buy just one/two/ten tickets.

We all need hope to get to work in the morning and make it home at night. The lottery, even when we don't win, gives us that long-awaited gleam in the eye. If we can't make the economy better, we can at least have fun at the bottom. Handy of the state to make a few bucks off the deal. Mills close, canneries close, whole towns have folded, businesses pull their headquarters out of the state and we don't know yet that a recovery has been in process since 1984. Offer a million to one shot at the big one and who isn't going to bite?

The image of lottery as great hope sidesteps the reason we need hope in the first place. We need jobs. We need to have something to do, somewhere to go, something to feel good about, and some way to pay the rent. The lottery isn't going to get us hopping out of bed with bright anticipation for the new day. The lottery is a gamble. It's a quick fix like a chocolate bar. We all need them on occasion, we all use them. Every once in a while someone wins and pays off their mortgages and sends their kids to college and that's nice. But it doesn't guarantee equality and it does not give anyone any opportunities they didn't already have.

Advertisers have to pump the image or buying tickets wouldn't be nearly so exciting, but you'd think with the amazing possibilities they say it holds and the impact on social structures it is purported to have, that the lottery is World War II come back to save the economy. The lottery is no great good and it's no great evil. It's not meant to change any structures, nor is it profound enough to change human beings. It's another escape route for the state budget and another temporary distraction for the people who buy in. It's a game; play it or don't. When it comes to asking whether or not it's a good thing for Oregon, ask where the proceeds go, how much goes for advertising, is it financing itself, is it sufficiently self-perpetuating not to be a drain on the state's economy. Ask if it's doing what it was meant to do. It was meant to be a stop-gap in the budget deficit, not a great white hope.

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