

**BLUMENAUER, from page 4**

who show how bad marijuana is but not the therapeutic aspects. We need a good test to determine who is impaired to drive, because the traces stay in the system for days when they may not be impaired at all. Let's get this squared out.

When I was in high school, there was a huge smoking problem. It killed my father. Since I've been in high school, we've reduced the amount of the population that smokes by two-thirds. We didn't lock them up; we didn't prohibit it. We modified the products to make them less dangerous and taxed the dickens out of it, and, particularly for kids, that taxation discouraged it.

*S.R.: And we can use those taxes on our streets and improve our transportation system. Of course you've heard a thing or two about transportation and the road system. And you were once the man in charge of Portland's transportation.*

**E.B.:** 10 years.

*S.R.: There are a lot of people pointing fingers at Washington, D.C. There are a lot of people saying that we walked into this. They're looking at past leadership and D.C. as part of the problem. What's your take?*

**E.B.:** It is true that Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick (who heads the Portland Bureau of Transportation) inherited a situation that was years in the making. I fought

for years to stop the City Council from bleeding money away that was supposed to be dedicated to transportation from the utility franchise fee, the money that the gas company, the electrical company, the fiber optics pay to work in the right of way. They really deteriorate the roads. This was a revenue stream that the city had for years that helped finance the road system, and the City Council, again, I was opposed to it when I was there, started backing money out to use for the general fund so they wouldn't have do other revenue sources or cut programs. That was, and is, a serious problem, and it wasn't replaced.

*S.R.: How much was siphoned off?*

**E.B.:** Tens of millions of dollars. I can't give you the exact number, but I would say that it's over \$100 million in 20 years since they started doing it. That's money that could be used for transportation. That's money that should be used for transportation, and little, if any, of it is used for transportation. Steve Novick was asking me about the history. I said, yeah, this is something that drove me crazy because we have this big maintenance backlog. You'll always have a maintenance backlog because you'll have to manage what streets you pave and reconstruct at different times. But when you have 300 to 400 miles, that's serious. The federal government has not been a reliable partner. We have more money per capita for light rail than any city in the U.S., and we are seeing the fruit of that with this terrific bridge and the rail line that's opening, but the federal government has not kept pace with its investment in the federal partnership with state and local government. We have not raised the gas tax in 21 years back when gasoline was \$1.08 a gallon and I'm not sure Barack had met Michelle. We've kept it basically together with a series of short-term fixes that are slowly being reduced. The federal government has stepped in and Portland has been pretty successful.

We've had significant investment into bikes and pedestrian trails from the feds. But it's shrinking, and we are at this point facing a significant regional deficit because they are planning on federal spending staying at the current level, but if we were going to keep the partnership it should be going up for inflation and the cost of construction. The federal budget is scheduled to have a 30-percent reduction, and no new money for construction after Oct 1. This is serious.

*S.R.: Nationwide, no new money for construction after Oct.1?*

**E.B.:** In fact you're seeing states now trying to cobble together a 27-month extension, which expires Oct. 1. They did this by essentially draining the highway trust fund, and, in fact, the highway trust fund won't even last through Sept. 30, and you can't even get down to zero because you have to manage contracts. We are expecting contracts for the light rail Milwaukie project for another three years. So the federal government, to deal with cash management, needs to have a \$2 or 3 billion. In order to do that they are going to stop issuing contracts later this summer. So states are looking at this and they are starting to pull back now. Eight states have already indicated that they are going to cut back this spring and more are facing the same things. So we need the federal government to step up and be a full partner with us.

The final point is that we've had a dramatically different evolution in our transportation demands. The funding has been dependent on volume of fuel consumed. We're driving less. For nine consecutive years per capita vehicle travel has gone down and we have more fuel efficient cars and the mileage is going up. We have hybrids, electric cars, so the combination of inflation and changes in driving patterns means the needs don't go away but the funding is not what it was.

*S.R.: So why not raise the gas tax?*

**E.B.:** It's not a popular tax. Trust me. If you took a poll, people would be opposed, but this isn't a popularity contest. I used the analogy that it's like flossing teeth. Flossing your teeth is not a natural act. You have to really work at it. In our household we always said, just floss the ones you want to keep. But a lot of people do it because it's important. The gas tax can be raised.

If I asked you, give me two of the most conservative anti-tax states in the union. Odds are that Wyoming and New Hampshire would be at the top of the list, and they have both increased their gas tax.

We introduced the legislation and, in so doing, we were joined by the AF-CIO, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, transit, cyclists, engineers, truckers and AAA. It was a very broad coalition that said we don't like the gas tax either, but our members should pay it because it's costing us money now. It's costing the average family because of damage to the car to say nothing of congestion. So we're working hard this year to get it approved before the end of this Congress. There will be a lame duck session after the election, and this might be a good time when all the Tea Party primaries are over.

*S.R.: How did Congress get so broken, and how can we fix it?*

**E.B.:** One of the things that people need to understand is that they're getting the Congress that the American public wants. The American public is itself fractured, with lots of discordant voices. If the American public wanted universal background checks they could make that feeling known; they could boot some people out of office, and the fact that they don't means that politicians are responding to their publics.

The public doesn't care much about some of the arcane reform issues. You start talking about reforming commodity programs in the farm bill, and people's eyes glaze over. The details of the transportation trust fund, if we did it right, we would put hundreds of thousands of people to work at family-wage jobs and relieve the pressure on transportation problems. But very few people are focusing on it. It's not a priority for them.

I don't mean to be dismissive. I understand that we've had some real economic challenges. I know that we are facing challenges in a world that is increasingly complex and no one person is responsible for the problems we face. It's a culmination of areas of sub-optimal results. A lot of people are struggling just to pay the rent and keep the kids in school and make their cellphones work.

*S.R.: I think that there are a lot of people who have that disconnect with Congress and the government because they don't see it doing anything for them in a positive way.*

**E.B.:** I will say this also in the defense of the City of Portland, it is a gift representing this community. I go somewhere else every month. I look at what we have done here, the quality of life, the people, the environment. We are on target to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, and people here are really generous of spirit.

In many cases, government does a very good job and people take it for granted. The complexity of providing the transportation system that works where the lights are synchronized, where water goes down the drain and gets treated. There is less of an appreciation of how we got here, and the risks going forward rather than the problems that pop up. Sure, pound the tar out of elected officials, but also part of what's wrong is that people don't have the context for how we got here and how hard some of these things are and how miraculous some of these things are.

*S.R.: Where's the front for more affordable housing? Where's the front for low-income housing subsidies helping people get off the streets?*

**E.B.:** Look at the budget that the House approved. It would take funding for those discretionary funds for those programs through pre-Eisenhower levels. And you look at the budgets that are coming forward and they continue to chop away and reset revenue increases, and they want to increase the spending on things like nuclear weapons. So we are coming into a fiscal train wreck.

I think we will get a gas tax increase because we are starting to make the case. We've got an outside shot at making some adjustments to military spending. There are things that have gone on so long that they will change because they have to. If you look at the Republican budget, and there is no path forward that meets any of these needs. There are people who want to get rid of food stamps, they think that unemployment insurance is part of this safety net that has turned into a hammock. They are comfortable with 5 million people who are too poor to qualify for subsidies for healthcare and not bat an eye. This is a very real struggle that is going on right now, and (Republican Rep.) Paul Ryan and other people are pushing the edge of it.

It's not true that the Tea Party has been defeated. You've read this in the major papers. The Tea Party has taken over the Republican party. The way that these people beat back these challenges from the Tea Party was to embrace the Tea Party. That battle for the soul of the Republican party is going to be very interesting over the next few years.

*S.R.: The county has changed a lot on the issue of gay marriage. You voted for DOMA in the mid-90s. What was the thinking back then?*

**E.B.:** I wrote an essay on it. I supported the civil rights of people based on their sexual orientation from 1973. I chaired the first hearing in the Oregon Legislature that had ever considered that.

In 1996, we were watching this stuff where (North Carolina Republican Senator) Jessie Helms and the Republican party figured out they had a wedge issue they were going to drive, and I was concerned that it was going to be a major setback. We had always been told that the next priority was dealing with housing and employment discrimination and the combination of it being a political wedge issue that would empower the right wing and that it was going to undercut what I, and most people, thought was the real agenda in the intermediate was we were trying to get rid of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." And I made a political calculation that it would be better to not fight the DOMA battle, that we might get it behind us, and work on these other agenda items. I was wrong. We just should have waited and dealt with the messiness.

I have always strongly supported equality despite anyone's sexual orientation, and I've done work on it before others have, and that vote, making a political calculation that we could de-fang that movement and move on with progress, was a political calculation that was wrong. It didn't slow them. It energized them. Of all the votes I've cast in Congress, that was one of the stupidest.

**We've had significant investment into bikes and pedestrian trails from the feds. But it's shrinking...The federal budget is scheduled to have a 30-percent reduction, and no new money for construction after Oct 1. This is serious.**