

The Sandy Post

Editorial & Opinion

Chris Hale, general manager
Scott Newton, editorSales tax doesn't
limit government

The Oregon House of Representatives came close to designing a workable sales tax, but in the final analysis they blew it. Limits on the growth of local government and schools aren't strict enough.

A resolution calling for a vote of the public on a 5 percent sales tax was passed by the House Friday. It would reduce property taxes statewide by a third, and also provide some income tax relief.

Oregon voters deserve an opportunity to decide whether a sales tax is the solution to the problem of an outrageously-high property tax, which has created a climate where land owners are penalized for their investments and school and governmental officials are seen as the enemy because they seek operating levies.

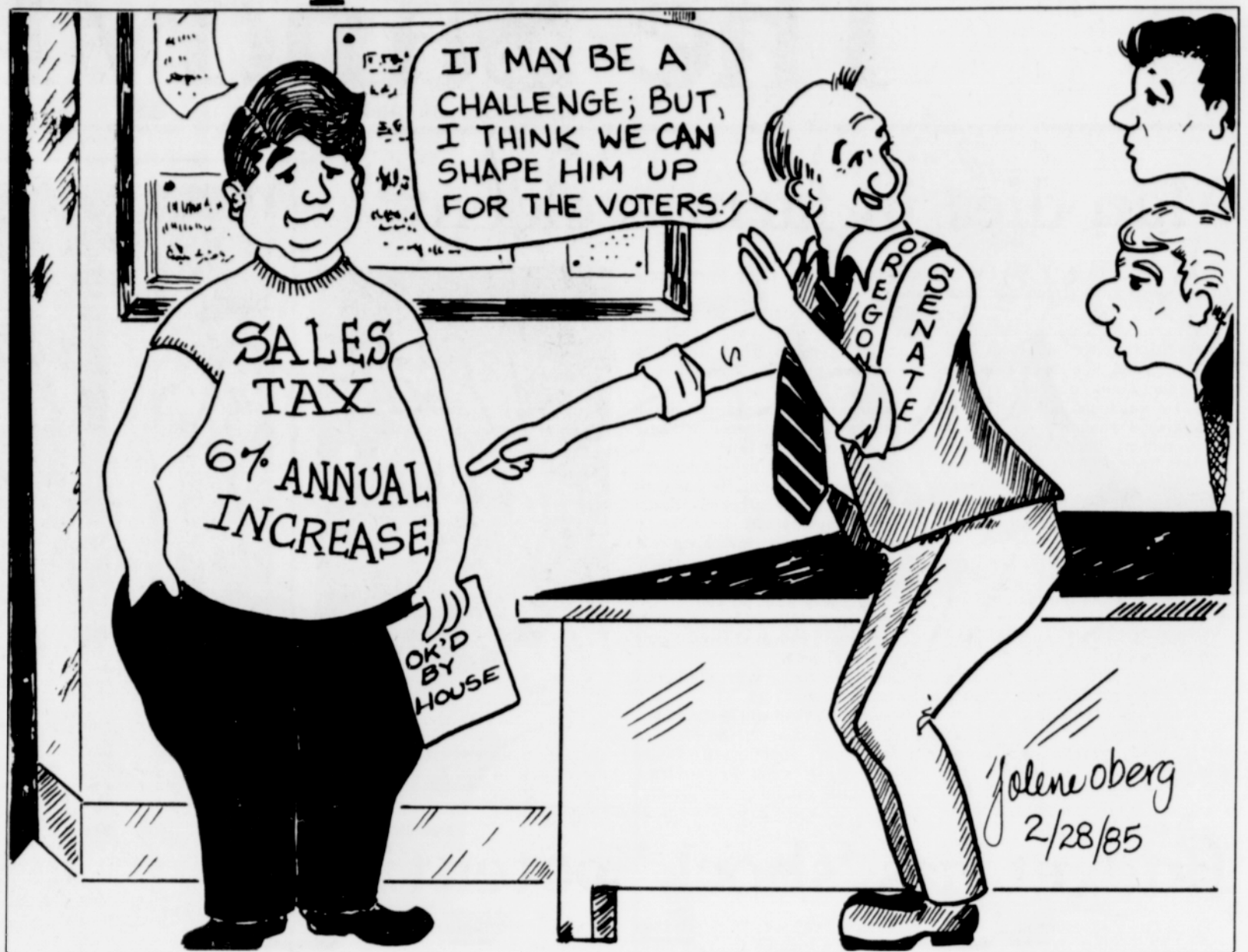
With exemptions for food and medical services, and relief for low income families, we believe the proposed tax is progressive enough.

However, the provision that allows schools and local governments to grow by 6 percent annually is too generous.

With 6 percent annual increases we would, over the course of several years, be in the same fix we are in presently, with higher property taxes than we can afford to pay.

A more reasonable approach might have been to tie the growth of schools and governmental agencies to the Portland Consumer Price Index. Some unions tie salary increases to the index, so there is precedence for its use.

The sales tax must go through the Senate and conference committee before it is voted upon by the public. Hopefully the Senate will tighten up the package. It just won't fly until voters are guaranteed schools and local governmental agencies aren't going to grow faster than Oregon's economy.



Letter to the editor

Merchants, public
make sale a success

On behalf of the Dover Extension Study Group, I would like to express our gratitude to the community of Sandy, in general, and certain merchants, in particular, for their generous support of our annual 4-H benefit bake sale.

The sale, held on Friday, Feb. 8, after one of the heaviest snowfalls in recent memory, proved to be as successful as the one we held last year, and it appears that we will be able to equal last year's support of 4-H campships and scholarships.

Most generous in their support of our project, in donating merchandise used in making many of our baked goods, were Toney's Farm

Marketing, Shorty's Corner, and Sandy Sentry Markets. We also received the support of The Sandy Post and Sandy Profile as they publicized the sale.

To these merchants we extend our sincere thanks. Without their help, our sale would not have been so successful.

The 4-H campships and scholarships that we are now able to provide are used in training the community leaders of tomorrow. Our group is most happy to join with the community in contributing to this work.

Barbara R. Sytsma
bake sale coordinator
Dover Extension Study Group

Commentary

Renting pays when
property taxes are up

by JOHN MITCHELL

During recent hearings on the sales tax plan, a statement was made by a landlord indicating that reductions in property taxes due to the sales tax might not show up as a decline in rents.

Immediately, some became concerned.

My favorite morning announcer proclaimed, "Watch out, renters." Many legislators had been assuming that renters paid the property taxes in the rent and that the reduction would be passed on by competitive pressures. Actually, both points of view are correct, but in different time periods.

Suppose I am considering getting into the residential rental business. In making the analysis, estimates of rent payments, vacancy factors, interest, taxes and appreciation are made and tax consequences estimated.

If the return is expected to be high enough, I will go ahead. Do I expect the rental flow to cover the taxes? Sure I do. If taxes are lower, the rental levels that will make the project viable will be lower.

Over time, if rents are above this level, new buildings will be constructed or conversions made and rents will be driven to where projects are just viable. Renters will be paying the property taxes and lower taxes will mean lower rents. The legislators are right.

The projections might be wrong. Investors, and even economists, have been known to make mistakes in forecasting. Suppose the community or the state is hit with a serious economic downturn — even a period of out-migration, which dramatically reduces the local demand for housing.

As vacancy rates increase, the cash flows are reduced. In an effort to keep tenants and revenues, rent levels may be lowered or not increased. There will be a tendency for "first month free" sorts of offers to appear.

Landlords with no vacancies will be unable to increase rents even as property taxes continue their relentless increase. In this situation, we can ask if renters are paying property taxes. And the answer in a large number of cases would be no.

Along with two friends, I own a rental unit with a rental income that is just \$1,800 below our cash flow. The renter is not paying the taxes.

I suspect that in many parts of Oregon, the latter situation has been all too typical in recent years. It is interesting to consider that with the renter relief program, many renters were getting a rebate on taxes they never paid.

That's the best of all possible worlds for renters. But not one that will result in high levels of maintenance or the construction of many new units. In fact, many landlords in Oregon probably wished in the last five years that they were not in the business.

Over the long run, the renters will pay the property taxes, but there may be periods when they do not. In many parts of Oregon in recent years, we have probably been in the latter situation.

Declining vacancy rates and a reversal of out-migration suggest that we are moving back to a situation in some areas where renters will be paying the taxes.

John Mitchell is an economist with U.S. Bank in Portland.

In a different sense

Game show losers are easy to spot

It used to be that when my family got together for reunions, the guys would head for the nearest playground to shoot some hoops, or the whole gang would get together for a rousing game of softball.

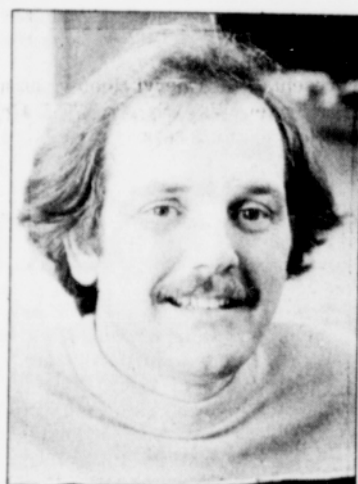
As the years came and went and the pounds came but did not go, our reunion activities changed.

Now we all like to get together and watch "Wheel of Fortune" on TV. We all sit around and laugh and slap each other on the back when they give away consolation prizes like toilet bowl freshener and full-year supplies of pet foods.

Once my mother went down to the studio and watched the losers carrying their little bags of toilet freshener and big boxes of cat food when the winner drove out in his new sports car. The loser, who like most of the losers was wearing a vinyl sport coat, began to sob. My mother tried to console him by explaining that he may have lost the sports car but he had gained the experience of a lifetime, not to mention a year's supply of cat food.

After he wiped his tears on the sleeve of his vinyl coat, the man explained that he still cherished the experience of a lifetime, but the winner of the sports car had just run over his cat.

It might not seem fair that someone has to lose on those quiz



by HANK EMRICH

shows, but that is the same thing I said for years when my big brother grabbed both drumsticks everytime we had chicken for dinner. I still get the wings and some people will always get pet food.

It probably doesn't matter that much to them, anyway. Most of them look like they are pretty well used to losing. They probably all belong to a club of losers that gets vinyl jackets on a group discount.

These men, and women with puffy hair who don't jump up and down

well, never win on quiz shows. But it does not matter because they are there for the sole purpose of looking foolish on national television.

By watching people acting foolish on television, we feel less foolish. Feeling less foolish makes people feel good, which is foolish, because no matter how foolish people on television are, it does not change our own personal degree of foolishness. This is all foolish, except to television producers who manage to get high ratings and a great deal of money from just this kind of foolish logic.

It used to be that quiz shows asked questions about sleeping habits of small, furry animals in Afghanistan and that kind of thing. Now the questions are a lot simpler. That is so people can pick up their slippers and throw them at the television and say "you're so stupid" to people in vinyl jackets when they don't know the name of the Lone Ranger's horse or what city Tony Bennett left his heart in.

To make sure the show will take a full half hour, the producers usually check out a contestant's area of expertise so there will be a suitable number of foolish answers. For instance, there would never be a category called "tomatoes" when a guest is a professor at a large university heading the Department for Studies of Plants that are Neither

Fruit nor Vegetable.

Personally, it amazes me that there are no quiz shows presented on the public television channels. The educational opportunities presented by these kind of shows are unbelievable. I learned more watching two contestants fight through the categories of "capital cities" and "famous buildings" than I did in a whole semester of high school geography. Of course the person revealing the answers on the quiz show was an attractive blonde and the person revealing the answers in class was a strange looking wrestling coach, but you can't argue with results.

The shows are a learning experience for the contestants as well. Losers learn that friends who expected them to win mega-dollars are really not that close after all and winners learn that they had a lot more friends than they thought they had.

Winners on some shows have other lessons to learn. Like the mother of six children who won a glass china closet filled with very breakable china. There was one man who had difficulty clapping both hands at the same time who won a grand piano. If he can't afford piano lessons, maybe he will give it to someone who needs a place to store a year's supply of cat food.

Salem scene

Bill would neuter language in statutes

by JACK ZIMMERMAN
Associated Oregon Industries

If anyone remains capable of underestimating the power of women, he (oops), that person should pay close attention to a measure about to be considered by the 63rd Legislative Assembly in Salem.

Although its backers might take exception to the reference, it is what lawmakers call a housekeeping bill. Its intent is to tidy up language in our statutes — language that smacks of masculinity.

And the bill is designed to hasten the elimination of most such words from Oregon laws.

It is HB 2461, currently resting in House Judiciary Committee and not likely due for public hearing for another month or so. As with most such bills, it appears innocuous and likely will achieve passage without attracting much attention.

That conclusion is based on the history of the more than five-year attempt to neuter Oregon Revised Statutes. It was launched by another House Bill during the Legislature's 1979 session that won easy passage in both chambers was readily signed by Gov. Vic Atiyeh.

Effective on Oct. 3 that year, it became ORS 174.115 which states: "It shall be the policy of the State of Oregon that all statutes, rules and

orders enacted, adopted or amended (after that date), be written in sex-neutral terms unless it is necessary for the purpose of the statute rule or order that it be expressed in terms of a particular gender."

Sponsors and co-signers of that original bill were Reps. Gretchen Kafoury, Mary Burrows, Jane Cease, Nancy Ryles, Mae Yih, Joyce Cohen, Sue Pisha and a lone male, Sen. Frank Roberts. And despite its extensive implications, it attracted only six no votes in the House and three nays in the Senate.

Careful wording to avoid the immense and costly undertaking in one fell swoop. In other words, the desexification of our laws would be accomplished over time as amendments were made during subsequent legislative sessions. Although thousands of words such as he, him and his then existed — and were considered sex-neutral by virtue of existing law that remains on the books, ORS 174.110 (2) backers thought the process would only take about three regular sessions.

Not so. After two regular sessions and seven special sessions, it appears the job is only half done. For instance, back in '79 the word "him" appears 2,401 times in the ORS and the word "his" 8,794 times. By current tally, there are 1,633 "hims" left and "his" still appears 5,792 times.

In view of this rather mediocre accomplishment record, HB 2461 will permit the Legislature's bill-drafting legal arm, Legislative Counsel, to change many of the offensive terms by simply editing the language and not waiting until remaining existing laws are amended during regular and special sessions.

There will be exceptions. In some instances entire sentences must be rewritten. And the Legislature's lawyers don't want responsibility for what might be construed as making substantive changes in laws without specific legislative direction. Those laws, according to HB 2461, will have to be made into a master (oops again), principal list and introduced as omnibus legislation next session.

While there are those who may wonder why this project ever got off the ground, one must reflect on the feminist fervor permeating the atmosphere in 1979. The movement was in full swing. The Legislature that year was considering bills dealing with sex education, sex changes, sex discrimination, sex offenses and sexual harassment, intimidation and orientation. And although no women were serving in the Senate that year, 14 held House seats and obvious clout in both chambers.

What are chances for passage of HB 2461 this session? There are two fewer women in the House this year

but six sit in the Senate and four are former Representatives who sponsored or co-signed the 1979 bill. And while this session doesn't appear as obsessed with sex as did lawmakers six years ago, they are considering bills dealing with sexual discrimination, obscenity and indecency, sexual abuse, registration and treatment of sexual offenders and sexual performances by children.

Also, one must consider only three of the nine lawmakers who voted against the original sex-neutral bill in 1979 still serve in the Legislature.

Meanwhile, former Rep. Gretchen Kafoury, prime sponsor of the '79 bill, speaking from her present position as Multnomah County Commissioner, reports that although she hasn't attempted a similar county ordinance, precedent has been set by her legislation and most attorneys drafting ordinances carefully refrain from using masculine terms.

So much for the fact pronouns through the centuries have been accorded equal gender status in law and certain grammatical situations throughout the English-speaking world. So much also for the argument by grammarians that English is a sexless language in which users must learn that "boy" is masculine and "wife" is feminine — unlike romance languages that address sexuality in their spelling.