

# Fee-for-All

Watch out for new fees in lieu of taxes.

Last fall the Board of County Commissioners referred six revenue measures to the voters. We lost all six. The technical term for this performance is an "oh-fer" (i.e., 0-for-6). Lately the county seems to have more "oh-fers" than the Detroit Tigers.

With a shortfall of revenue, the county has resorted to fee increases to pay for certain services. Cynics say it's just the law of supply and demand: If you're going to reduce the supply of services, you might as well reduce the demand by charging more for the services you still provide. In reality, we're not that clever. We're just broke.

Recently I supported a fee increase for developers seeking permits from the Land Management Division (LMD). I wasn't thrilled to charge more for permits, but LMD needs the money to do its job. The problem with a fee-based budget is that revenue goes down when building goes down. Critics claim that LMD has a natural incentive to grant permits for big multi-stage projects, so LMD can collect fees at each step of the way. (One critic says that LMD stands for "Let's Make a Deal.") I believe that LMD is more scrupulous than that, but I hope some day we can support LMD from the general fund again so we can avoid any appearance of bias. How comfortable would you feel in court if your opponent were paying the judge's salary?



While I supported the fee increase for LMD, I refused to impose an admission fee for the county park at Mount Pisgah. I'm happy to report that Pisgah is still free. When the board voted again on the Pisgah fee last week, I joined a 3-2 majority with Anna Morrison and Pete Sorenson to reject the proposed fee. If Anna and Pete oppose something together, it's probably a bad idea. (Orrin Hatch and Ted Kennedy team up more often than Anna and Pete.)

Why not charge for Pisgah? Stop and think about what makes that park special. It's not a boat ramp. It's not a water slide. It's nature. This park lacks the man-made amenities that have justified fees at other county parks. Pisgah is named after the biblical mountain where Moses stood when he first viewed the promised land. I reread the book of Deuteronomy the other day, and I somehow missed the part about Moses paying an admission fee.

I understand that the Parks Department needs \$177,000 in new revenue to cover maintenance costs throughout the parks system. I've proposed fee increases totaling \$130,000, including increases in fees that companies pay for large picnics at county parks. Last month I even gave tentative approval for a \$2 fee at Pisgah. But on reflection, I think Lane County needs to have at least one major park that is always free for individuals and small groups. The best choice for that free park is Mount Pisgah — where nature, not man, did all the heavy lifting.

Even if you share Lane County's current fee-mania, it's hard to know where to draw the line. Why not charge the public a \$2 fee to use the bathrooms in the county building? The arguments for a bathroom fee would be identical to the arguments for new fees at Mount Pisgah and LMD. The public uses the service; the cost to the county increases with each use; and we could probably extort the fee from people who are committed to using the service. There's no end to the possibilities once you accept the premise that users of a service should pay a fee for it.

But let's not blame the county staffers who are trying to scrape together money for their programs. The real fault lies with our collective lack of will to fund government adequately. *The New York Times* ran a story May 1 characterizing Oregon as the "Mississippi of the West." I e-mailed the story to my college buddy who lives in Mississippi, and he fired back, "I think that comparison is insulting to Mississippi." Ouch! Maybe we should charge a fee for ridiculing our state. That would put some money in the coffers.

*Tom Lininger is county commissioner for the East Lane District.*

## HISTORICAL PARALLEL

After Nazi Germany finished celebrating their easy victory over an obviously defenseless nation, they started planning their next "preemptive" attack. Czechoslovakia was mistreating its German population and the Nazis needed to stop this human rights abuse. Next it was Poland. Nothing can stop us now but our own conscience, if we still have one.

*Cheryl O'Neill  
Junction City*

## DEAD MEAT

Recently there have been several letters condemning *EW* for running sexually oriented advertising. Some people find these ads offensive, but I see something printed on the back page amongst these ads that is truly disgusting. It is the cartoon called "Red Meat." It is never enlightening or humorous. Its existence degrades the other fine comics that *EW* presents. I remember the comic being dropped shortly after the initial few installments. When it was revived, I expected Max Cannon to prove the comic worthy of a second chance. The most recent cartoon about the finger found in a dumpster was truly disturbing. Why give credence to this drivel by publishing it? This comic is far more embarrassing to your publication than the sex ads.

*Jeff Levy  
Springfield*

## FLAG-WAVING

Since the war machine has cranked up in this country everyone has been waving the flag and professing their love and support for our troops and veterans. I really have to question these shows of patriotism. Where is all your love and support when your elected officials under-fund the VA year after year? Why aren't you speaking up for veteran's who are forced to wait sometimes over a year to be seen by a doctor if they are lucky enough to be seen at all? Part of the tax cut for the rich and corporations President Bush wants is going to be partly funded by cuts to the already strapped Veterans Administration. Why aren't you protesting that?

America, if you really love your veterans, put your money where your mouth is and support full funding for the Veterans Administration and fair treatment of veterans in the VA system.

*Tina Marie Mercurio  
Springfield*

## INTO THE FUTURE

Interesting future, ours. As the oil runs out, it will become precious. The oil "producers" will either join in the American economic cartel, or be invaded and destroyed. This country will be deliberately bankrupted through war and tax cuts. "Labor discipline" will be instilled through starvation wages at private industry. Unions will be outlawed, as the business model will be Wal-Martian. All factions will be played off against the other. Business will be represented in Congress, with the right to vote. The media will be controlled by embedding reporters in business and the military; their salaries will be paid by the government.

National Forests will be privatized and sold to the highest bidder. Anxiety will be the national emotion, but declaring that 80 percent of the population has a "mental illness" will control it. The country will resemble America in the 1890s: No tax for the rich as they spend and so produce jobs.

If there is no alternative to oil, can there be any other than this horrible future for America? Glad I am so often wrong that I can just see this as the daydream of a fool. I can trust my leaders, both in business and politics. They are smarter and wiser and more compassionate than I. They know how to run a country without oil; with an increasing population; with economic chaos around every turn — hope so.

*Hugh Massengill  
Eugene*

## MATTER OF TRUST

To those individuals in the community who feel that I am irresponsible for opposing U.S. military action in the Middle East, and the handing over of power to the Bush administration in this time of "crisis":

I have recognized a key element: You trust Bush, and I don't. Imagine yourself in my position. What if it were Bill Clinton or Richard Nixon asking for unprecedented powers over decision-making, allocation of resources and the lives of our young men and women? I would certainly not blame you for having some doubts. It is clearly not un-American to oppose handing over power to someone you don't trust, and if it is treason to ever mistrust a president, then we are all guilty.

I actually think it is perfect just the way it is. "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance," they say, and we get to take turns.

*Art Peck  
Eugene*

## ROOT ROT

In smashing and looting the Iraqi National Museum and other cultural sites and burning the National Library, the evil ones of the U.S. military and Bush regime have destroyed the roots of western culture.

These repositories of the stories of ancient western culture were our elders, our grandparents. By destroying our elders, they have destroyed our stories. By destroying the stories, they have destroyed the roots and source of our culture, and thus the culture will die. By destroying our culture, they have destroyed our humanity. We are a dead people. We are ghosts, condemned to wander forever without a home.

Unfortunately, they have also killed many of the roots of Asian and African culture at the same time. Whether humanity can survive with so many of its roots destroyed, we do not know. Perhaps this is the beginning of the death of the human species.

*Ann Tattersall  
Eugene*

## MMM ... PERCHLORATE!

It is the mother of all ironies that our president has spent billions of dollars and sent thousands of troops halfway around the world only to find a barrel of rocket fuel.

Thanks to the Pentagon and a former Nevada rocket-fuel factory, 88 percent of our nation's lettuce crop is irrigated with Colorado River water, which is contaminated with perchlorate, a salt used to make rocket fuel. Lettuce from an organic farm contains perchlorate contamination 20 times as high as the amount California now considers safe for drinking water.

Our president has vowed to give billions of dollars to his contractor buddies so that they can clean up the damage our military has done in Iraq; at the same time, he is pushing laws through Congress that would exempt military

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