

# The Matrix Unloaded

Computer program will release a higher number of jail inmates.

**W**illamette Week (Portland's pale imitation of *Eugene Weekly*) ran an interesting story this past January. A reporter for *Willamette Week* wrote that inmates in the Multnomah County Detention Center were advocating against Measure 28. The inmates had taken trays from the cafeteria and had written "No on 28!" on the back of the trays. The inmates were holding up these trays in the windows of their cells.



It turns out that the guys in the orange jumpsuits are better at picking locks than persuading voters. (Gosh, they seemed so trustworthy as they waved at the passing cars!) Voters in Multnomah County approved Measure 28 by a margin of 57 to 43 percent. But 33 of Oregon's 36 counties rejected the measure. The failure of Measure 28 required the state to cut its budget by over \$300 million.

Why were the inmates at MDCD so politically engaged? Were they worried about the tax burden imposed that Measure 28 would have imposed? Nope – it's a safe bet that most of these gentlemen aren't paying taxes.

Their real concern was that state budget cuts would reduce bed space in the county jails. That means a computer program known as "the matrix" must release a higher number of inmates than ever before. The matrix was created as a result of a federal consent decree that limited the number of inmates to 93 percent of the available beds in county jails. If the occupancy exceeds 93 percent, the computer starts issuing "get out of jail free" cards.

**K**eanu Reeves himself would be mystified by Oregon's version of the matrix. It's stranger than science fiction. The matrix takes account of an inmate's criminal history and present offense, but the main criterion is *who else is in the jail*. If you beat up your girlfriend, but you're lucky enough to go to jail when the other prisoners are murderers and rapists, then the matrix may call your number. On the other hand, if you're a two-bit drug dealer, and your colleagues at the jail all happen to be less serious offenders, then you're staying put.

This week the Lane County Budget Committee is considering whether to adopt a staff recommendation that we close 84 more beds in the jail. We've learned that the loss of bed space would increase the number of matrix releases by 25 percent. A total of 5,000 offenders and pretrial detainees would be "matrixed" before the date when the judges said they should be released.

Who are these offenders? The way the bar has been set lately, a number of domestic abusers are becoming eligible for matrix releases, and this number would increase with the loss of 84 more beds. At the budget hearings, we saw photos of a badly beaten woman whose assailant had been "matrixed" twice.

**S**ometimes the jail staff can override the matrix when they recognize that certain domestic abusers pose a high risk of recidivism. But we can't expect the jail staff to seal the cracks when the dam is about to burst. The staff can't change the federal consent decree. It's not the Sheriff's fault when budget cuts convert his jail into a revolving door for certain offenders.

A man who beats a woman should go to jail and stay there. He shouldn't be released four hours later to come back home and finish the job. I hope that in a few years, the only matrix that a domestic abuser will be thinking about is a rerun of an awful Keanu Reeves movie on that little black-and-white television at the Lane County Jail.

*Tom Lininger is a county commissioner and a member of the Lane County Domestic Violence Council.*

Schools must not make deeper cuts. It's not fair to our students and it's insanity for the future of our state. Don't feel powerless! Here's something you can do! Let's make our leaders accountable. Let's urge our legislators to examine and reduce tax breaks.

*Michelle Holman  
Deadwood*

swer is yes and these lessons have yet to be learned.

I urge those elected to carefully consider tax incentives and redistribute the funding to those who need it most.

*George G. Brooks  
Eugene*

## BLASTIN' GNATS

So the newly crowned emperor of the universe, George Bush, has won a great victory over a tiny, beaten-up nation of Third World, non-Christian, dark-skinned peoples. The largest war machine ever seen on this planet, funded with tax dollars desperately needed for our own citizens' welfare, should be ashamed of itself. The victory is a totally dishonorable, heinous crime, akin to shooting a gnat with an elephant gun. Which gnat will be the next target for our courageous, heroic, ugly bullies? Syria, Iran, Cuba, Canada?

There is not one shred of human decency or kindness in our present corporate-gangster military regime. They should all be charged with war crimes against the most vulnerable among us.

*Alice Keiser Greth  
Bend*

## FATE OF THE STATE

The fate of the state's most vulnerable is with our elected officials in Salem. To cover the deficit of \$480 million they can: 1) increase taxes to make up the needed funding, 2) make dramatic cuts that deny needed services and will end up costing the state several times over to fix challenges that could have been dealt with, 3) look at the tax incentives and reduce or temporarily suspend to balance the budget. As it now stands the state actually receives only about 42 cents on the dollar collected.

This is not to say that tax incentives aren't needed to encourage business development and new sources of potential revenue. What needs to be done? An additional \$1.7 billion over the next budget cycle could remove the burden and restore much needed services with monies left over to maintain the quality of life that we currently enjoy. One example is a write-off on a family's vacation home. A recently passed bill in the house expanded the incentives rather than reduce them.

Is it fair that we allow investments to grow and profits to be made with the promise that jobs will be created and taxes paid when the reality is that these concerns can move when and where they chose? Sadly the an-

## AXIS OF ARROGANCE

We all have an inalienable right to question authority; it is at the core of our national character. But Bush has no patience with the democratic process. He has single-mindedly focused on getting us into Iraq with the hope of setting up a sequence of events that will establish an American Empire in the entire Middle East. The document titled "The National Security Strategy of the U.S." was first drafted in 1991 by Wolfowitz. You can read the document at [www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html)

Under the guidance of the 30-year-old Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz Axis of Arrogance, the priorities are perfectly clear: oil, empire and limitless corporate profits — a New World Order. Far from being conservatives who believe in limited government — they are sinking billions of our tax dollars into war. But we'll pay far more than money. Our long history of democratic idealism is being drained and parts of our Constitution are being suspended in the name of national security.

The "Bush Doctrine," or "Bully Policy," far from making our world more secure, is creating unplumbed resentment, giving corporate and military imperialism an American face and address.

How far will all this go? The great hope of American democracy is in the people themselves. We all need to pay attention and not just by watching mega-corporate TV controlled by Bush campaign contributors who hope to reap tax and deregulation paybacks. Hurrah for local newspapers, radio and TV, wherever they remain. The administration's push for deregulation and consolidation of TV, cable and radio stations continues to enlarge a major obstacle to public forum and debate on the important issues before us.

*Laura Stuart  
Eugene*

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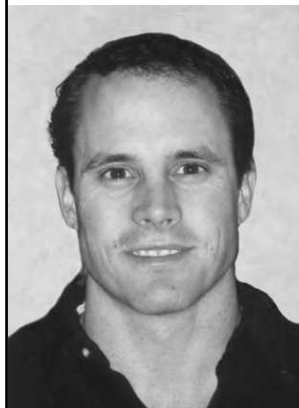
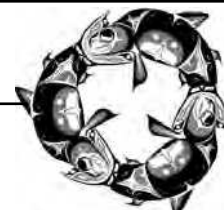
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