

BUDGET EXCUSE

I knew it would only be a matter of time. The neo-conservative Republicans in the state House of Representatives finally got around to attacking the commissions that advocate for blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, women and the disabled. Of course, they are using the budget crisis as an excuse. Never mind that these commissions had nothing to do with creating the budget crisis and there is virtually nothing they can do to relieve the crisis.

They are the most cost-efficient services the state provides. All the commissions combined cost little more than \$100,000 per year. About 90 percent of that goes right back to the state to pay for rent, phones, computers and the like. The commissions leverage more than 10 times as many resources in the form of skilled volunteers that do the vast majority of work of the commissions. The commissions were de-funded in April and have operated exclusively with volunteers ever since then.

I saw a letter to the editor in *The Oregonian* the other day labeling these commissions as special interest advocates that are unnecessary. If you think advocating for the rule of law and equal protection under the law are special interest issues, you must not support the Constitution. These commissions are the only state institutions that have the sole purpose of making sure that the populations they represent are treated as equal citizens in this state.

Of course, we could eliminate the need for them if we eliminate racism, sexism, and abuse of the disabled. The current batch of neo-conservatives doesn't seem to care about these populations because they benefit from the status quo, which includes the biases that disadvantage these populations. The neo-

cons never liked these commissions anyway.

I urge the governor and those legislators that believe in the rights embodied in the Constitution to build a budget that includes funding for these commissions.

*Charles Dalton
Past Vice-Chair
Commission of Black Affairs, Eugene*

FARMERS SUPPORT

As the Board of Directors for the Lane County Farmers' Market, we represent an association of over 175 growers and producers. We wish to state our support for FOOD for Lane County and for its many innovative programs that have made it a caring and effective hunger relief agency.

We understand the economic climate has resulted in the agency cutting its payroll and budget, while scrutinizing its internal finances. Of particular concern to us is the threat to programs designed to strengthen our food system and prevent the cycle of emergency need, specifically their nutrition education classes and much-loved community gardens.

As partners in the local food system, the Farmers' Market has contributed tens of thousands of pounds of fresh produce to FFLC each year to provide for the nutritional needs of low-income people in our community. We have found FFLC's staff to be incredibly dedicated, creative people, unique in their efforts to alleviate hunger, and we believe these programs are essential to their assertive education, advocacy and building of community in order to prevent hunger.

The Farmers' Market is confident that FFLC will overcome its challenges and emerge stronger as a result. In the meantime, we will continue to actively support their mission by donating food, raising awareness

TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN BY SHANNON WHEELER



of hunger, and encouraging everyone to take a more active role in improving our community's health.

Only through working together, especially when times are tough, will we be able meet our challenges and live up to our obligations to each other.

*Board of Directors
& Noa C. O'Hare, market director
Lane County Farmers' Market*

MENOPAUSE SALE

I wanted to place a garage sale ad with the *R-G* and I thought "menopause sale" would catch people's eyes.

I was phoned by the classified ad staff and told that "they" had talked about it and decided I should not use the word "menopause" and instead use something "cutesy" like "mid-life crisis" sale, since I had tools for sale, etc.

INSIDER BASEBALL BY TONY CORCORAN

\$21,000 Dog Days

ORPs ... I burped.

It's Sunday morning, I just drove back from Salem. I'm attending to my own version of a religious ceremony, listening to Celtic music on Leslie Hildreth's Mist Covered Mountain. The last two days have been grueling. We worked day and evening sessions with committee meetings both nights as we struggled to the finish line. So why the hell ain't I in Salem today finishing up? Inquiring minds want to know.

Peter Courtney, the Senate president, was pushing hard for our *sine die* dénouement. The House had concurred on the Human Resource budget, without changing the Senate version; and the House and Senate agreed on the last major pieces of the revenue package. We still have to vote on a PERS successor plan and a few other substantive bills that have been held hostage during the session, but we could do that in a few hours. Higher education and K-12 were the only two major budgets left; the train had left the station.

Then everything derailed last night in a fascinating Senate procedural fight. At this time of session, bills move rapidly, and unanimous consent is required to suspend the rules to hear these bills quickly. One of our throwback customs, dating back to horse and buggy days, is that each bill gets three readings over three days. If we don't suspend the rules, we can't hear bills as they immediately move out of our committees or as they come over from the House.

The Republicans got their panties in a bunch and threw a hissy-fit because Courtney refused to immediately sign the revenue package and get it right over to the governor's desk for his signature. The R's insist on this happening before they will be willing to suspend the rules for immediate action. Why? Because if we are still in session then the governor has to sign the bill within five days. But, if he receives the bill after the session, he has 30 days to take action. And, if he takes that long, it shortens the amount of time that right-wing groups have to gather signatures to put the revenue measure, especially the progressive income tax piece of it, on the ballot next February. Those rascally Republicans, the revenue measure is not even out of the



Capitol yet, and they're already counting the days to get signatures to overturn it. Well, at least they didn't refer it straight to the ballot, as they did with Measure 27.

So that's why I'm home instead of getting done in Salem today. Hell, I might even still be up there when you read this on Thursday! Those rascally Republicans, those cold-blooded, austere, hard-hearted, mean-spirited, cheap, penurious, parsimonious paragons of fiscal responsibility, efficiency, godliness and small gub'ment, are wasting \$21,000 a session day because of this little snit - but, what the hell, it's only Aug. 24. The next state revenue forecast comes out this week - we've never been in session for a September revenue forecast before - not in the last 144 years - let's hang around. We may have to start another series of budget cuts and borrowing anyway. And they say we're citizen-legislators, amateurs. Ha!

Speaking of penurious parsimony, I just read Rep. Dennis Richardson's suggestions for the PERS successor plan. This is the evangelist/trial lawyer who beat a moderate incumbent Republican, Cheryl Walker, in a primary last year in southern Oregon because she had the audacity, the gall, she had the balls, I mean she had the eggs, to vote against a bad anti-choice parental notification bill last session. This is also the guy who wanted to stick all future teachers, police, firefighters, all local and state government workers, into a cheapskate defined contribution plan.

It seems Dennis is a little persnickety about the name of the plan: "The name proposed for the successor plan is totally partisan and must change." He doesn't want to call it the Oregon Retirement Plan (ORP), because Republicans have already voted down ORP three times. He likes the "Oregon Defined Employee Retirement Plan" which he refers to as ORDER. As acronyms go, it sounds like ODERP to me. Don't get me wrong, I like the idea of "defined employees"; it sure beats the alternative. Dennis reasons that the successor plan "could then be publicized as a bi-partisan plan for all future state employees, designed to: Bring ORDER out of PERS." And people say trial lawyers aren't creative. My counterproposal was the Bargaining Unit Retirement Plan, or the Fair Alternative Retirement Transition?

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