



UNDA THE ROTUNDA

BY SEN. VICKI WALKER

The Scarlet Letter

'A' is for accountability

Imagine being handed a check from the state of Oregon for hundreds of thousands of dollars that provides tax incentives to your business to either locate here or expand your current operations. Imagine further that the money comes with relatively few strings attached: If you're in an enterprise zone, you only have to increase employment by 10 percent and invest \$50,000 in buildings or equipment; if you're in the free-for-all-world of economic development, your check is a ticket to unfettered, unencumbered spending that promises little in the way of jobs or economic development. And if you're wondering who pays for it all, take a look in the mirror.



The Oregon Legislature long ago bought into the theory that tax breaks – or tax expenditures as they're known in the tax code – are good for the economy. According to the 2005-2007 *State of Oregon Tax Expenditure Report*, the most recent count lists 352 tax breaks: 120 relate to property taxes, 195 to personal and corporate income taxes and 37 to other state tax programs. Many of these are benefits provided to the less fortunate among us or are opportunities for citizens to do good things and benefit society as a whole. We have tax credits for alternative energy production, energy efficient appliances, hybrid automobiles, health care expenses, child care and dependent care expenses and affordable housing, to name just a few.

These types of credits are easy to track and to hold people and business entities accountable for. Where we get into trouble is when we write checks to large corporations and businesses under the guise of economic development, holding press conferences about all the great jobs we're providing to the state and then not following through on ensuring they have met their commitments.

According to the Oregon Revenue Coalition, a broad-based group of organizations concerned about such things, Oregon now gives away more in tax breaks than we collect in taxes. In fact, tax breaks are actually growing faster than revenues, a trend the 2007 Legislature is on track to continue. There seems to be no consistent policy analysis that is used to assess these "great and wonderful" giveaways of your tax dollars, particularly as they relate to corporate interests – until now.

Enter SB 518, a bill I modeled after the Illinois Corporate Accountability in Tax Expenditures Act that Gov. Rod Blagojevich happily signed into law in 2003. The bill will provide an annual unified development report listing all state aid, tax expenditures and giveaways under our development assistance programs. All state subsidized corporations must file a report, and all the detailed information about salary levels, number of jobs provided, health care benefits and other information is available to you, the taxpayer, on the Internet.

The pinnacle of the bill, however, is this: Corporations that default or fail to meet their job projections must repay all state subsidies received during the year of the default. You might not be surprised to learn that many of the promised jobs were low-wage jobs without benefits or that companies would promise jobs at one wage level and then cut salaries at another.

And you might not be surprised to learn that the business community is all-atwitter about SB 518. According to a *Portland Business Journal* story Feb. 9, Senate Republican leader Ted Ferrioli went so far as to call my bill passive-aggressive behavior, saying it would cause "the beneficiary of the tax benefit to wear a scarlet letter that brands themselves as guilty."

Maybe so, Sen. Ferrioli, but quite frankly, I don't give a damn. If a business takes our money – whether it be in taxes or lottery dollars – that business should be accountable for how they spend it, because in my book "A" is for Accountability.

It's time that Oregon join at least 10 other states with similar laws that ask business to show us the money. And if they're worried about SB 518, what will they think of SB 783, my bill that brings accountability and responsibility to state enterprise zones? Quick, grab the defibrillator – I think their hearts have gone atwitter again. Until then, I'll see you on the front lines – I'm having too much fun!

Vicki L. Walker of Eugene is a state senator representing District 7.

How to Be Happy

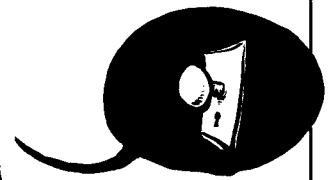
"the cure"

drawn by Shannon Wheeler
caption by Matt Speer

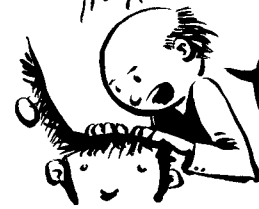
TO THE DOCTOR
I EXPLAINED
MY HEAD WAS HAVING
ACHES AND PAINS



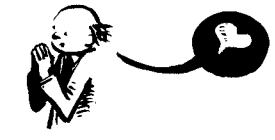
"I SEE THE CAUSE"
THE DOCTOR SAID
"YOU HAVE A DOORKNOB
ON YOUR HEAD."



HE TURNED THE KNOB
AND SAW WITHIN
A PIGEON PLAYING
VIOLIN



"TAKE IT OUT!"
I PROMPTLY CRIED
BUT THIS REQUEST
WAS SOON DENIED



THE PIGEON PLAYED
SO BEAUTIFULLY
THE DOCTOR SAID
"JUST LEAVE HIM BE."

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRAGEDY IN THE NUMBERS

The Lane County commissioners gave us all a Valentine. On Feb. 14 they unanimously passed a resolution urging our congressional delegation to "reduce the number of U.S. troops engaged in wars and to take action to provide federal financial support targeted for the welfare, safety and health of returning veterans affected by their participation in war, their families and communities."

This resolution came from the Mental Health Advisory Committee, a volunteer Lane County committee charged with advising the Board on community needs and priorities for mental health services.

In the course of our research into this issue, we discovered mental disorders are reported in more than one in four returning soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan; almost 1,700 service members returning from the war this year said they harbored thoughts of hurting themselves or that they would be better off dead; more than 250 said they had such thoughts "a lot"; nearly 20,000 reported nightmares or unwanted war recollections; more than 3,700 said they had concerns that they might "hurt or lose control" with someone else; and the Veterans Benefits Administration has a backlog of 400,000 pending claims.

I look with great disappointment at these figures and can see, as you can, the tragedy within. I hope both the city of Eugene and the state of Oregon take up this call for relief from the horrors of war and ask our federal government to step up and pay for the damage they are doing to our friends and our neighbors, and to end this nightmare today.

Tim Mueller
Lane County Mental Health
Advisory Committee

CHAINSAW SOLUTION

Logging industry front group Oregon Forest Resources Institute recently staged the conference "Forests, Carbon and Climate Change" at OSU to promote their solution to global warming: more logging!

Has the logging industry finally turned over a new leaf, or is this just the latest propagandist?

The U.N., NASA and the British government's Stern Review on climate change blame logging for one-third of the human-made carbon emissions released into the atmosphere. The idea that those who caused the devastation of one planetary ecosystem, our forests, will now lead the charge to protect other planetary ecosystems would be hilarious were it not such a dangerous — and brilliantly concocted — lie.

Fanning the flames of fire hysteria, logging interests insist our native forests are sick and in need of "thinning" (i.e. logging) on an unprecedented, landscape-wide basis. Conveniently enough, these proposed thinning projects would produce a large amount of woody debris. Industry's intention is to build biomass energy factories that must be fueled by a constant input of organic matter to remain economically viable, resulting in escalated logging.

Industry's spin in a nutshell: Not only are they "fixing" forests, they're turning "waste" into a clean, renewable energy source. This deceit undermines the efforts of those genuinely invested in tackling global warming.

The reality hiding behind the green curtain is that "forest biomass" extraction is the latest ploy to continue plundering our forests — this time stripping the fragile understory, a vital part of an intact forest ecosystem.

Josh Schlossberg
Native Forest Council

NEW HOPE FOR SANITY

It is wonderful news that environmental activist Jeff "Free" Luers will have his prison sentence reduced thanks to the Oregon Court of Appeals ruling that he was improperly sentenced to 22-plus years for an incident that resulted in minimal financial damage and no harm to life.

While the actions that landed Jeff Luers in prison were wrong, his harsh and excessive punishment has been a tragic embarrassment to the state of Oregon. That we punish misguided but well-intentioned activists for burning cars worse than sexual predators and seriously violent criminals is shameful and inexcusable. A sentence reduction for Jeff Luers