



A leading rough design for a new city hall north of the park blocks

A big part of the \$1 million the city will spend in the next phase of City Hall planning will apparently go towards convincing voters to vote for it. City consultant Jonah Cohen said the city team will use the money for “detailed polling” and “bond strategy” work. “The intent with that is to determine what the public is interested in and what might motivate them to vote for this.” The consultants will also give tours of the current building,

“so that people just understand the need.”

Using taxpayer money to campaign for more taxes is illegal in Oregon, but the law contains loopholes and is rarely enforced.

Councilor Chris Pryor claimed money to campaign for the new City Hall is “public information” and “not for any sort of advocacy.” He did, however, predict that the public will criticize the expenditure. “That seems like a lot of money.” — Alan Pittman

PETITION TO END THE WAR

Eugene PeaceWorks is circulating a petition to cut war funding and end the war in Iraq. The petition, addressed to Sens. Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith, and Rep. Peter DeFazio, says: “We the undersigned demand that you vote and work actively to stop all future funding of the U.S. occupation of Iraq and begin the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops.” It can be downloaded from eugenepeaceworks.org

In light of the current political deadlock on resolutions, cutting funding is “the only practical way of stopping the war,” says Phil Weaver of PeaceWorks. “In March a new \$100 billion supplemental war funding bill will be coming up for a vote in Congress. If Congress simply votes it down, there will be no way the Senate can filibuster it or Bush can veto it.”

Republican rep, but out of power). The first bill is HB 2007, called “The Oregon Family Fairness Act,” which would allow same-sex couples some of the legal rights granted to married opposite-sex couples. Senate Bill 2, “The Oregon Equality Act,” would ban discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in housing, employment, public accommodations, education and public services.

Not coincidentally, Basic Rights Oregon (BRO), the statewide LGBT advocacy group, hosts a lobbying “Day of Action” Wednesday, March 7 at the Capitol. BRO’s Melissa Cherniak says that she expects about 500 people at the noon rally and several hundred taking the day off work or school to lobby the lawmakers.

To sign up or for more information about the Day of Action, go to www.basicrights.org or call (503) 222-6151. If you’ve already signed up and you need to talk carpool, call BRO’s Thom at the same number.

EQUALITY ACTION

Two new bills have LGBT activists excited about the Democratic Legislature’s ability to make strides in state civil rights, something cut off last session by former Speaker of the House Karen Minnis (still a

CONSUMER PROTECTION

The Oregon House recently passed a series of consumer protection bills that will limit the fees charged by payday lenders, put a cap on the rates of interest on car title loans,

March on the Capitol

UO students join rally for education funding

STORY AND PHOTO BY DARRICK MENEKEN

If it wasn’t Bob Dylan playing the harmonica last Thursday morning, I have no idea who it was. Either way, it certainly should have been Dylan. I was, after all, about to depart for a political rally on Salem’s doorstep Feb. 22 when I noticed the sound escaping someone’s headphones. With that, I contorted myself into the tight confines of a school bus bench seat and readied for the drive north.

Yes, Dylan and his followers from the tie-dyed ’60s would be proud of us, I thought, amazed that as a 30-year-old graduate student I’d never before marched on a capitol building, state or otherwise.

After loading up on the UO campus, our long yellow bus and a twin — each carrying about 25 university students — grumbled toward rain-spattered I-5. While a couple in front of me swapped stories about riding the bus as kids, a woman farther up used a pocket knife to slice open an avocado then carefully cut bite-size pieces into her mouth. Behind me, raspy harmonica music continued. I felt like I was back in the Blue Light Special, that old hulking van my church youth group used to take on road trips to Mount Lassen. Had someone given me a wet Willy, I’d have been right at home.

Unlike those teenage trips, however, this one wasn’t about downhill skiing and sneaking away for clove cigarettes. Instead, those of us on last week’s road trip were skipping school for a better cause. Last week’s rally wasn’t about ending the war — though it’s safe to say most in attendance would land on that side of such a debate — but instead was held to demand increased state funding for higher education. In Salem, we streamed off the buses as the chants began. Thankfully, the rain had stopped somewhere on the highway.

“Hey, hey. Ho, ho. High tuition has got to go.” A rally organizer in a bright red shirt led the call-and-answer from a podium atop the Capitol steps.

Inside, however, many lawmakers kept to their daily routines, ignoring the effort. Others showed support by exiting via the large spinning doors in front of the lobby.

The big fella himself was even on hand. Gov. Ted Kulongoski, spoke to more than

500 boisterous students huddled under the cold shadow of the Capitol’s imposing stone walls. The place felt more like a bullion depository than a source of open government.

“The opportunity to afford a higher education has slipped away from too many young people in Oregon,” the governor yelled from the Capitol steps, saying that his 2007-09 budget will reverse a downward spiral in post-secondary education. According to staffers, the governor hopes to start with a 17 percent funding increase for community colleges and a 15 percent boost for public universities. That money would fund better classrooms and residence halls and increase the number of professors.

The governor also wants to increase the Oregon Opportunity Grant through a new financial aid program called the Shared Responsibility Model. Funds would be raised by increasing the corporate minimum income tax, something that hasn’t happened since 1931, when annual tuition at the UO was less than \$80. Today, full-time in-state tuition runs about \$6,000 a year.

“If we enact this program, we can ensure everyone who wants to go to college, will go to college,” Kulongoski said. “In order to stay ahead, we need the best-educated, best trained, most-skilled workforce in the country. But, to accomplish this, we must again invest in Oregonians — and that begins with investing in their education.”

Dean Braa, a sociology professor at Western Oregon University and a former U.S. senatorial candidate, followed, saying, “We have got to get part-time and adjunct faculty pay way up.” He said professors can leave Oregon for better pay in just about any other state. Braa demanded that students take the next step and storm the building. He even gave directions — right for the House, left for the Senate — and said that by not going inside we would be leaving too soon.

As he finished, the crowd erupted, and a kid seated beneath the podium flipped over a metal garbage can and banged on the bottom like a bongo drum. I thought there might be a mass run for the halls behind those spinning front doors. Instead, a few minutes later the rally was over. Some went inside, but those of us from the UO were instructed to get back to our yellow submarines. We had a schedule to keep, afternoon classes to catch.

As I moved slowly down the steps, a woman with a dark mustache mumbled something on her way up. “Come down here more often,” she said. “Because you can make it on one side, but it’s the opposite side you’ve got to convince.”

As I got back on the bus, I wondered what a young Bob Dylan would do.



Education supporters gather at the Capitol

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