



UNDA THE ROTUNDA

BY SEN. VICKI WALKER

Paranoia Abounds

Lions and tigers and bears ... oh, my!

It's been an interesting two weeks at the Capitol. We listened to five hours of testimony on March 12 regarding SB 2 – the bill banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing, public accommodations, etc. For many, the bill was about honoring and respecting diversity in our everyday lives so all Oregonians can enjoy legal protection from discrimination. For others, it was the ultimate infringement upon their religious beliefs. At one point I wondered aloud whether the conservative religious groups believed they owned God.



The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights under the U.S. Constitution states in part that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The 14th Amendment clarifies that states may not exempt the tenets of the U.S. Constitution. And while the Supreme Court has made several rulings on *how* the religious clause should be applied, their efforts to actually define what a religion *is* for First Amendment purposes is a work in progress.

For purposes of SB 2, however, the language of the bill uses the term *bona fide church or sectarian religious institution*, which is based on state and federal statutes that define those terms for tax purposes, labor law, tort law and other court rulings. In addition, Article I of the Oregon Constitution bars use of taxpayer dollars for religious institutions, so Oregon courts have long been called upon to define what exactly that definition entails. If a church or sectarian religious institution believes homosexuality is a violation of its moral code, SB 2 doesn't change the right to hold those beliefs. What SB 2 does do, however, is tell that organization that if it has a commercial enterprise not directly related to its religious purpose – such as an apartment complex, assisted living facility, a restaurant – it may not discriminate against others who use the facilities but do not share the beliefs.

The Oregon Legislature has been trying to pass a nondiscrimination law like SB 2 since 1973. We had testimony from over a hundred individuals, but two in particular – a constitutional lawyer and a lesbian – had both testified in 1973. I'm dismayed they've had to fight 34 years to bring equality to all Oregonians. I was so discouraged by the opposition's testimony that passage of SB 2 would corrupt the moral values of our citizens and subject us to all sorts of horrible consequences that I ordered a copy of *Lions and Tigers and Bears - Oh My*, a parable written by Art Jackson that challenges us to look at our biases and stereotypes as it relates to diversity and inclusion. I hope by reading it I can gain a better understanding of the paranoia gripping the opposition.

On another note, for our comic relief we had the antics of Senate Minority leader Ted Ferrioli (R-John Day). Unhappy that he made himself and his caucus irrelevant by refusing to participate in negotiations over a state rainy day fund, Ferrioli threw a tantrum by staging a walkout on March 8, denying the Senate a quorum to conduct business. Nineteen senators were locked on the Senate floor for two hours while we awaited knowledge of the whereabouts of the missing Republicans. At least two were excused to attend an Oregon State Beavers baseball game to present SCR 3, a resolution the Legislature passed to celebrate the team's national championship last year. Neither senator was aware of the leader's shenanigans.

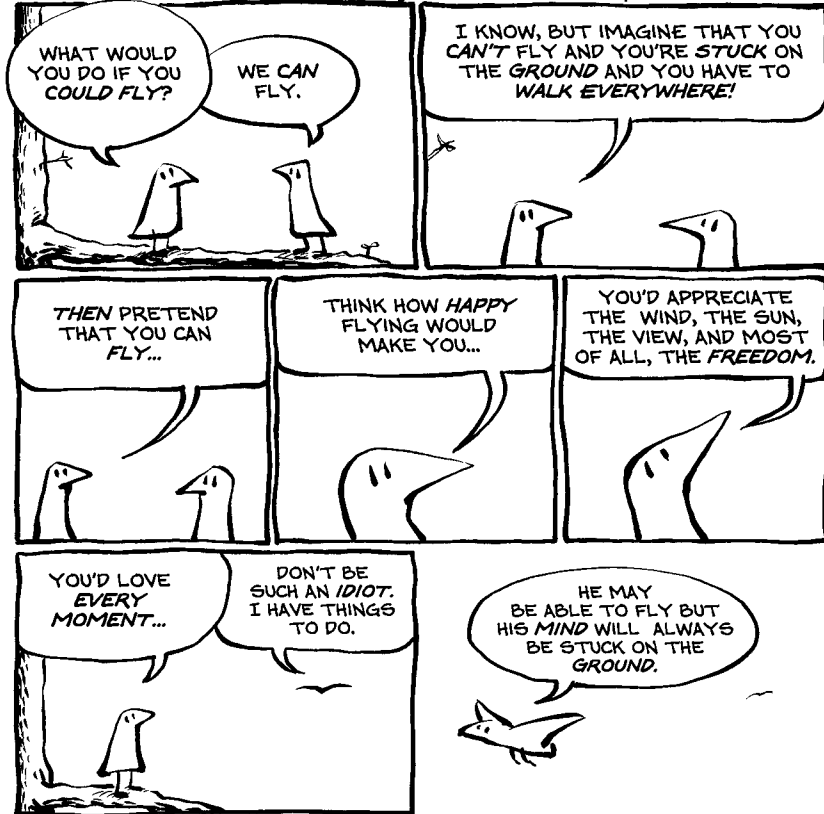
Timing of the rainy day fund vote was crucial. Senate Democrats held Republicans' feet to the fire by launching our own measures to send the matter to the May ballot. Senate President Peter Courtney had no choice but to find the absent members, or the Senate bills would miss the deadline to make the ballot. After the governor agreed to send state troopers to the ballgame to locate the two we knew about, terse calls were placed to Ferrioli, who found his way back to the chamber so we could finish our business. The Senate then made history by passing the rainy day fund measures on March 15, putting approximately \$290 million of the corporate kicker into the fund. Ferrioli apologized to the members, calling his actions a "teachable moment." I have a strange feeling we may see more such moments in the weeks to come.

Until then, I'll see you on the front lines.

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

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ANTI-WAR COUNCIL

Kudos to Eugene's mayor and the majority of our city councilors who showed broad vision and strong leadership by adopting a resolution urging Congress to vote against further funding of the Iraq occupation by U.S. forces — except for funds necessary to carry out a safe, rapid and orderly withdrawal of American troops and to support Iraqi reconstruction efforts.

In adopting this resolution, our mayor and most councilors looked beyond Eugene potholes to Iraq foxholes where our soldiers lie in harm's way. They offered a way out of this misdirected neo-conservative adventure — tagged on *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart* as the "Mess in Mesopotamia" — which has cost more than 3,000 American lives and 23,000 wounded over the past four years. It has also cost our nation over \$400 billion dollars and our city more than \$100 million dollars to date. Enough!

A message for the minority of councilors who chose to stay high-centered in Eugene potholes and keep their heads buried in Iraqi sands: The train left the station on this issue last November. Next time heed the call: "All aboard!"

Benton Elliott
Eugene

JUST SAY LOCAL

I moved to Eugene eight years ago because of the unique community that encompasses thousands of creative local businesses and individuals in addition to our precious environment that offers much diversity. I didn't move here to live in a condo, view films in a megaplex theater or be concerned about which parking garage I could park in.

We don't need any outside developer telling Eugene how or what to develop. We have extremely dedicated, educated, skilled individuals in our community who have made thousands of suggestions to our city council through the years on how we envision our downtown.

It's time for the city council not only to

listen to the citizens of Eugene but to control our own development. Local government can provide a much needed boost to relocalization efforts by removing obstacles such as zoning ordinances, subsidies to corporations and home owner association restrictions. Local government can buy land and still require energy conservation. Our local government can use zoning and land use policies to have a thriving downtown. Our local government needs to drive change.

We can build a resilient economy with solar and wind power, use renewable energy and prevent pollution. Landholdings are appraised for their cash value, not for their value in preserving community and enhancing education.

Our city council must avoid crossing irreversible thresholds that damage the life systems of Earth while creating long-term economic, political and moral arrangements that secure the well being of present and future generations.

Planet Glassberg
Eugene

MANIPULATIONS

Last month I attended "Forests, Carbon, and Climate Change," a conference sponsored by Oregon Forest Resources Institute. Instead of proposing genuine solutions such as conservation, the conference enabled the timber industry to strengthen its grip on our native forests. The conference should have been called "How the Timber Industry Can Profit from Global Warming."

Most presentations were based on the myth that forests' capacity to store carbon is threatened by wildfire. This myth opens the floodgates to aggressive forest management, which conveniently implies necessary logging and thus an anticipated timber supply. For example, one presenter favored wood over steel as a "green" building material because fewer fossil fuels are used in the manufacture of wood. However, the speaker failed to address the source of wood (our forests), present one of many truly sustainable build-