

Pain Compliance

Tasers used against the poor and unstable

Police Tasered my neighbor recently outside my front door at Parkview Terrace in Eugene.

When Tasers were introduced in Eugene, they were trumpeted as the way to stop the police from having to shoot armed people, and we were told they would not be used just as a way to make people behave.

Well, my neighbor Ken was Tasered by the Eugene Police. He was standing against my apartment's outer wall, wearing only pants and muttering to himself. As far as I could tell he was unarmed and was not threatening anyone though he seemed to have lost it. I don't know the details that got him Tased.

No doubt in my mind that someone needed to attend to him. As a former state hospital mental patient, I have seen many instances of men being subdued. Hell, I was several times. But thankfully no one used a Taser, which would have greatly aggravated my emotional disturbance but sure would have made me compliant.

This was, as far as I can tell, not an instance in which anyone was in danger though Ken needed help. Tasers, when administered to distraught muttering people, sometimes kill. This was an instance that a person was Tasered who had, as far as I know, committed no crime. Being emotionally disturbed may be, in its way, a civil wrong, but using Tasers is unnecessary force when used against nonviolent distraught people. I think.

As it happened, I was carrying a camcorder, but I didn't use it. The Tasing happened too fast. The person Tasered, by the way, was totally unfazed; he just kept standing there, so the closest officer just handcuffed him. A comment from the officer with the Taser seemed to indicate that he was close to Tasing again.

This isn't an official complaint. I watched the way Tasers were slid into the city, and I have absolutely no confidence that I will ever be able to do anything about them or the way they are used. No one listened to the fears of the very poor that they would be used against them when they were most vulnerable. I was on the city's Police Commission when Tasers were introduced. They weren't on the agenda, so the community couldn't weigh in. At the first meeting of the committee to look at the "introduction" of Tasers, the police chief announced that he was starting them.

I just want to say I saw a Tasing of an unarmed distraught man who was not threatening anyone, as far as I know. And if he did, it was the muttering of an obviously distraught person. I saw no weapon, nor did I hear a threat from Ken. He seemed unable to speak coherently, and I had to wonder if it was mental or medical.

Tasers were introduced as a way to save lives, but they are being used as pain compliance on the poor and the powerless. We need effective crisis intervention training (CIT) in Eugene.

There may be facts I am not aware of, but of those I am aware of, I think the poor have a lot to fear from the police. We need a psychological response team, not an armed police team, to respond to out-of-control people as is done in hospitals. The head of the state's mental health system says stun guns are never used there.



Hugh Massengill's report regarding a Sept. 5 incident is courtesy of MindFreedom Lane County News email list, which reaches more than 500 people concerned about human rights and the mental health system. Massengill is a psychiatric survivor who has been a activist in Eugene in the field of mental health. He is also a veteran and has served on the Eugene Human Rights Commission.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

that beautiful spark of optimism, curiosity and hope made me realize that the darker times really bring out the best in people.

*Christian Park
Eugene*

COMMISH PAY RAISE

Thank you Bill Fleenor and Pete Sorenson for doing the right thing. Just because we received another check from the federal government we still need to come up with a plan as to what we do in four years.

This little 3 percent raise now puts the commissioner's annual salary at more than \$74,000. There are five commissioners, plus staff, plus benefits. That means that we are paying the total commission probably in excess of \$500,000 per year. And where is the leadership? So far I have seen two options: Cut staff and services or raise taxes on the poor and middle class. Rob Handy is right to say it was "outrageous" that the three commissioners would vote for raises just after having laid off 7 percent of the county employees this spring. These are the same commissioners that attempted to impose an income tax.

Bobby Green indicated that those on Social Security got a 5.8 percent increase. I don't think so! My Social Security increase was just 1 percent.

Fleenor is right; "Leadership starts at the top; so does sacrifice." If the five of them can't lead us to a sustainable solution, perhaps they should do as other counties and reduce their number to three commissioners. With the \$200,000 saved they could at least give back some jobs and services to those of us paying taxes.

*Ron Davis
Cottage Grove*

IT'S THE BEST

Thank you, Eugene! Thank you for recognizing the Community Center for the Performing Arts/WOW Hall as the "Best Live Music Venue" and "Best All-Ages Hangout." Founded by members of our community, the historic WOW Hall provides a space for everyone to enjoy the arts. We pride ourselves as a premier venue for local and touring performing artists. In addition, we offer a community space for educational activities including classes and workshops. In all of our offerings, community members are vital to our success.

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*Liora Sponko
Board Chair, WOW Hall*

CAN'T HAVE IT ALL

I look forward to the day when politicians will not merely admit climate change is real — but will redirect highway expansions funds to public transit, ban clearcuts and discuss how "economic growth" is the problem, not the solution. Pentagon think tanks have released reports on the "security" implications of climate change, and that is part of the reason for the bipartisan shredding of the Constitution. See www.oilempire.us/peak-fascism.html for details.

EW's interview with Rep. Peter DeFazio (11/6) had a lie worthy of George W. Bush. DeFazio claimed "We're not about to begin a major new initiative of building a whole bunch of new freeways in this country" In reality, the 2005 SAFETEA-LU transportation law had 80 transportation corridors listed as national priorities, including the widening of I-5 from Canada to Mexico. SAFETEA-LU included about a quarter trillion dollars for countless bypasses, road widenings, outer beltways and the I-69 "NAFTA Superhighway" from Indiana to Texas. A map of these corridors is at www.naftahighway.org

The difference between the Democrats and Republicans on transportation is that while both want more road pork, most Democrats want road pork plus transit expansions and most Republicans just want the road projects without the transit. But the economic and energy crises mean we cannot have "all of the above." A sincere approach to climate change and peak oil would redirect highway expansion funds to public transit, Amtrak and road maintenance (not expansion).

Politicians who get more than 80 percent of the vote and lack a major party challenger don't have public pressure to tell the truth.

*Mark Robinowitz
Eugene*

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