

revised to increase employees' take home pay.

- For individuals who don't qualify for the "making work pay credit," a one-time payment of \$250 will be made in 2009 to qualifying retirees, disabled persons, SSI recipients, disabled veterans receiving VA assistance and railroad retirement beneficiaries. This payment is expected to be made in May or June of this year by the individual's respective government agency.

- Employees covered by an employer health insurance plan who were laid off between Sept. 1, 2008, and Dec. 31, 2009, are eligible for a 65 percent subsidy towards their COBRA health insurance premium. This provision also covers "mini-COBRA" laws which differ by state. In Oregon, employers are generally subject to these provisions for up to six months (instead of nine months for COBRA employers) if they employ between two and 19 employees. The assistance is tax-free. Employers are required to notify employees (and prior employees) of this benefit by mid-March.

- The tax credits available for attending post-secondary schools have been significantly enhanced for 2009 and 2010. In addition to increasing the amount of the credit, books and other course materials in addition to tuition now qualify. The credit previously phased out for taxpayers with adjusted gross income between \$50,000 and \$60,000 (\$100,000 and \$120,000 for joint taxpayers). That range has been increased to between \$80,000 and \$90,000 (\$160,000 and \$180,000 for joint taxpayers).

- Eligible first-time homebuyers (those who have not had an interest in a principal residence in the three years prior to purchase) are allowed a credit equal to 10 percent of the purchase price of a principal residence purchased between Jan. 1 and Dec. 1, 2009, or \$8,000, whichever is greater. The credit is subject to recapture if the residence is sold within three years. For purchases in 2009, a taxpayer can elect to treat the residence as purchased on Dec. 31, 2008, thereby providing an immediate infusion of cash to the homebuyer to help with the down payment and other costs of purchase.

- Up to \$2,400 in unemployment benefits will be tax-free in 2009.

- Funds funneled to local school districts are being used to reduce the number of days cut in this year's school calendar. Additional funds are available for schools in poverty status and for special education programs.

The Cottage Grove Blackberry Pie Society can be reached at blackberrypie@gmail.com

ACTIVIST ALERT

- LRAPA is holding a public information meeting on the **Seneca Cogeneration Plant** from 7 to 9 pm Thursday, April 2, at the Red Cross building, 862 Bethel Dr. in Eugene. This is not

an official public hearing, but at least one public hearing is expected to be held in June. Seneca Sustainable Energy, LLC, is seeking an air contamination discharge permit from LRAPA. The power plant would be constructed to the north of and adjacent to the existing sawmill facility owned and operated by Seneca Sawmill Company on Highway 99. Comments and letters asking for public hearings can be sent to colleen@lrpa.org or call LRAPA at 736-1056.

- **Martin Baron**, editor of *The Boston Globe*, will deliver the UO School of Journalism and Communication's annual Ruhl Lecture at 4 pm Thursday, April 2, in the EMU Ballroom, 1222 E. 13th Ave. The lecture is free and open to the public. Watch for Suzi Steffen's Q&A with Baron online this week.

- A "**sweat-free ordinance**" for the city of Eugene is being pursued by a coalition of social justice organizations, kicking off with an event from 6 to 7 pm Friday, April 3, at 180 PLC on the UO campus. A recently revived University Students Against Sweatshop, chapter at UO is bringing two workers from Latin America who will speak on this issue. The "Economic Stimulus Tour" is calling on Oregon to "end tax dollar support for sweatshops and to help build an economy based on good jobs." For more info, email stepuporegon@gmail.com or essn@efn.org

- UO will host a free public conference on **HIV/AIDS in Africa** Friday and Saturday, April 3-4. The gathering examines why are the highest levels of HIV infection and AIDS deaths are in sub-Saharan Africa, and why it's such a difficult problem to solve. Keynote speakers include Julie Overbaugh, HIV/AIDS research scientist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle; Pauline Peters, lecturer in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School; Michael Kaplan, executive director of the Cascade AIDS Project in Portland; and Deo Niyizonkiza, executive director of Village Health Works. More information on the conference is available at africa.uoregon.edu

- The independent film **America the Beautiful**, taking a critical look at our cultural attitudes about the ideal body, will be shown at 6 pm Tuesday, April 7, at Columbia 150 on the UO campus. The film is sponsored by UO fraternities and sororities with ASUO and the RainRock Treatment Center. Eating disorder specialist Carolyn Costin will be available for questions following the showing.

- A **special Brewhaha** gathering with Congressman Peter DeFazio and former secretary of state Bill Bradbury will be at 7 pm Tuesday, April 7, at Cozmic Pizza downtown. The topic is "Cap and Trade-aganza: Clash of the Climate Titans" and more lawmakers may be joining the panel. The free event is sponsored by the Lane Bus Project, the Healthy Climate Partnership and *EW*.

- It's been more than a week since the Eugene City Council met in closed executive session to **suspend the police auditor** indefinitely without explanation. No public vote was taken, and we suspect this public inaction was at the advice of the city attorney who was present. The council and mayor need to provide the public with an immediate justification for their suspension and secrecy. If not, the information void will continue to be filled with speculation. Why was this questionable accusation against the auditor taken so seriously? Why was there a presumption of guilt? Who voted for this suspension, and who voted against it? What do they have to hide? Eugene didn't elect its leaders to act in a dark closet.

- Kudos to Eugene City Manager Jon Ruiz for hiring an **in-house city attorney**. The change from letting the private law firm Harrang Long Gary Rudnick P.C. monopolize all the city's legal work should have happened a long time ago. The private contract cost twice what Salem spends on its in-house legal staff. Harrang Long's work for developers and big business raised too many concerns of potential conflicts of interest. The city will still have to work to make sure the Harrang Long attorney hired to do the in-house work and oversee outside work doesn't favor his former employer and works for the city's best interests, not just the city manager's.

- Rumors that the **proposed Seneca biomass generator** is just one of several planned for Lane County are not true, at least not at this time, according to LRAPA Director Merlyn Hough. Hough says he's heard of others proposed around Oregon, such as the Rough & Ready Lumber biomass boiler in the Cave Junction area. Hough says there are "significant incentives for renewable fuels in place or in the works, and some of them are co-gen," but if the Seneca plant ends up being built, he figures "it's unlikely we'll see more" in our area.

EWEB is studying the proposed project with an eye on buying the electricity it generates. Such a contract should include additional environmental monitoring and pollution controls.

- Meanwhile, the **first public meeting** regarding the Seneca plant is Thursday (see Activist Alert), and folks on both sides of the issue are getting riled up. Eugene appraiser and conservative EWEB Commissioner John Brown sent an angry email to City Club President Carmen Urbina after walking out on the City Club March 20 talk by LRAPA's Hough and Dr. Larry Dunlap (see Slant last week). Brown complained that the presentation "turned out to me to be a one-sided portrayal of a proposed project, the Seneca Biomass Project ... In keeping with what you deem as a fair and balanced programs, etc., why did you allow this to occur?"

The Seneca project came up primarily in questions following the formal presentations. Brown was also irked by flyers on tables that pointed out the tons of various pollutants that would be emitted by the project and urged people to call elected officials "and let them know we don't want this additional brown air and pollution in our community."

Brown also complained about a pattern of "disrespect" shown by City Club members "toward views that differ from the general populace ... The crowd is many times rude and disrespectful to those whom they do not support," citing the Jim Torrey vs. Vicki Walker City Club debate in 2006.

In a conciliatory email to Brown March 24, City Club Program Committee Chair Mary Leighton invited Brown to join an April 1 committee meeting "to advise [us] on how to do a better job of covering divergent views."

Brown is overreacting. The City Club program was advertised as being about LRAPA, not Seneca, but Seneca's proposal is what people wanted to talk about, and it's directly related to LRAPA's role in our county. This is what the free exchange of ideas is all about. As for the club's Program Committee, looks like they are doing a good job lately. No need for apologies or concessions to pressures from either side of the political spectrum.

There was a time when the City Club was seen as an irrelevant mouthpiece for local corporate PR and the Chamber of Commerce. No more.

SLANT includes short opinion pieces, observations and rumor-chasing notes compiled by the EW staff. Heard any good rumors lately? Contact Ted Taylor at 484-0519, editor@eugeneweekly.com

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