

After the horrendous hate crime in Eugene of torching homeless black James Lemmon, we need to pay attention. Being homeless is not safe. The failed government we have experienced has led to many thousands of our citizens being homeless. One homeless advocate knows of 18 homeless persons who have died of exposure.

For about 20 years Oregon was governed in the interests of rich people. The rich gave themselves great tax cuts so they could “provide more jobs in Oregon.” Instead they sent jobs overseas and pocketed great profits. This ruined the economy.

The rich reached the maximum of damage against the poor by ending the welfare program called General Assistance, taking away a pitifully small rent payment for more than 3,000 poor disabled Oregonians, sending them into homelessness. Homelessness hits persons with disabilities the hardest. Finally the last injury was the initiative that defunded needed taxes passed by the Legislature for ongoing education, human services and public safety. We are soon threatened by another initiative that must be passed with a yes vote or more needed services will be lost.

Early on our legislators hated alcoholics and substance abusers. They excluded them from all help, leaving them homeless longer than most.

Then they hated taking care of the mentally ill and mentally incompetent and left many mentally disabled people homeless.

Then they hated taking care of abused children and teens and left thousands of Oregon school children homeless.

Then our jails filled with people we hated,
and we turned them out into our community,
homeless.

Beyond these more easily recognized populations among the homeless are people who in recent months just lost their jobs.

All of our programs to help the homeless are filled to capacity. Now our communities criminalize people sleeping outside and living in vehicles.

We need safe, legal nighttime places for the homeless Oregonians.

The one "homeless shelter" in Eugene is strictly religious. It excludes many, including the disabled (who have no place to go). Many who have stayed in the shelter do not experience it to be safe.

Our state, county and city do not even provide temporary shelters in Eugene or Lane County.

We need legal, safe parking places for those homeless people who live in vehicles. We have only very few and very temporary legal parking places for those who are poor. Of course it would be better if we had a warm, dry place indoors.

We need supervised buildings for all mentally ill and mentally incompetent homeless people. Many are wandering the streets and face a police ban from being in downtown Eugene.

Most citizens think all homeless people are substance abusers and alcoholics. Such people are just a visible minority. Even so, it is better for the community by far if the minority of acting out substance abusers and alcoholics are not left homeless in Eugene and Lane County. They endanger other homeless persons and do damage to the rest of Eugene.

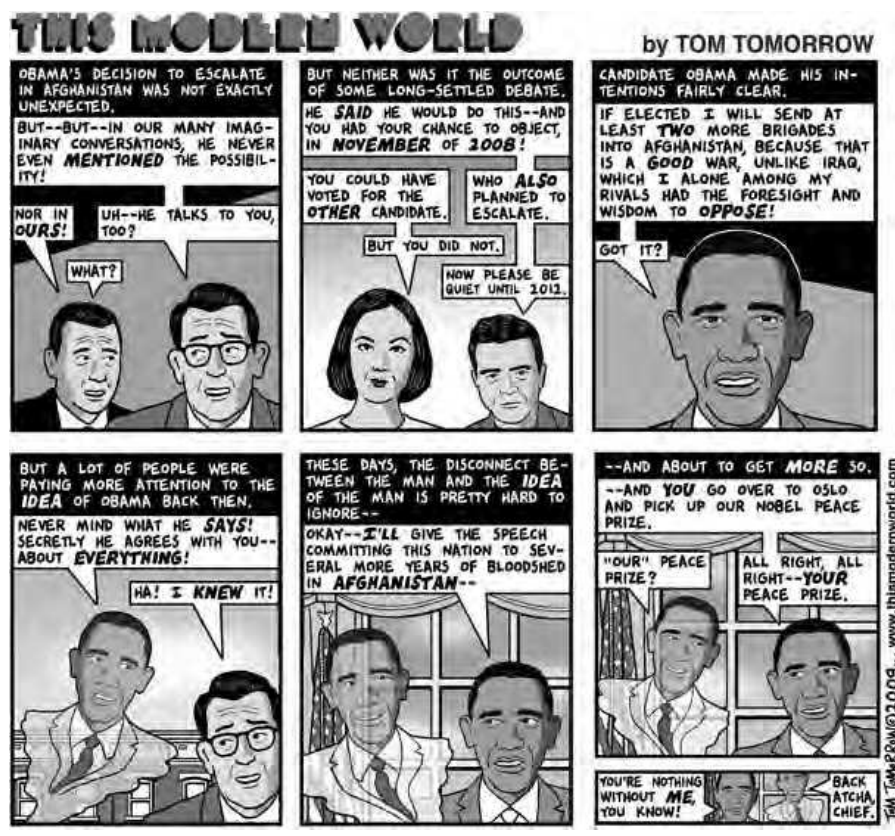
We need buildings opened for those who have lost jobs, lost apartments and lost homes. They are the newest homeless people in Eugene.

We need supervised overnight shelter for children and teens who do not feel safe “going home” to violence and abuse.

In October, 14,593 people receiving Food Stamps in Lane County had zero income – no money for rent. How many are homeless? We just don't know, but it is way more than the 2,000 that has been the official guess.

Rain and cold are now upon us. We are our "brother's keeper." The new Legislature began to take back some of the tax cuts to the rich. More fair taxes are needed. Let's also get and use stimulus funds to provide temporary and permanent housing and jobs. We can do it.

Jerry Smith, MSW, of Eugene is a retired social worker and a longtime volunteer and advocate with programs that assist the homeless.



SOLAR'S BENEFITS

After reading Warren Weisman's (Viewpoint, 12/3) negative assessment of solar power, I felt the need to supply some facts and corrections.

The energy payback time of photovoltaic panels is one to three years, meaning that during their 20 to 30 year lifetime photovoltaic panels produce 10 times more energy than is required for their manufacture. This value has improved substantially over the past decade and will continue to improve.

Photovoltaics produce low-voltage DC power, but this can be easily transformed to high voltage and/or converted to AC to power anything that runs on electricity.

When looking at potential to offset fossil energy use, solar beats energy crops hands down. Consider a comparison with corn-based ethanol. An acre of corn can optimistically provide 430 gallons of ethanol, or 10.1 megawatt-hours of energy, enough to drive a 30 mpg car about 13,000 miles. Using Weisman's own numbers (15 percent efficiency, 200 W/m² average solar energy), an acre of solar panels will annually produce 1,060 megawatt-hours, or more than 100 times more energy from the same land area. Given that electric motors are three times more efficient than internal combustion engines, the ultimate gains could be even greater.

Covering 1.5 percent of the contiguous U.S. with 15 percent efficient photovoltaics could supply 100 percent of our energy needs. This is roughly equivalent to the U.S. built area (buildings, roads and paved areas). With conservation this could be reduced substantially. The best biofuels would need to cover 50 percent or more of the contiguous U.S. to supply the same amount of energy. Wind energy is cost-effective in some areas, but even with maximum implementation it could not supply all of our energy needs.

Weisman's concerns about expense, emissions during manufacturing, toxic wastes and end-of life disposal are valid, but they can all be overcome.

by developing economies of scale, using green energy for manufacturing, changing manufacturing processes and developing recycling technology. Thus, solar panels are at present bound by economic and engineering challenges, not by “inescapable laws of physics,” and photovoltaics will play a prominent role in our carbon-neutral energy future.

Mark Luterra
Corvallis

SEPTIC SPRAWL

In your Nov. 19 "Slant" section, you advocate for keeping small towns on septic tanks as some sort of cure for sprawl. A home needs an acre of land to be permanently served by a septic tank. Expanding a town with one-acre lots is the ultimate in sprawl. This would gobble up farmland at 10 times the rate of more compact cities with sewers.

Assuming you really want small towns to be frozen in size, what should the current residents who live on one-fourth acre and one-half acre lots do? They have no room to replace a failing system.

Nancy Nichols
Deadwood

REFLECTIONS

To the UO: As to the sunlight dilemma between the dorm and the Long House, the magic solution: Do it with mirrors.

Vince Loving
Eugene

OFF TO THE RACES

Mark Harris' turgid prose is insufferable and his political ideas are increasingly backwards as one would expect from someone who wholly bases his approach on identity politics.

Harris' ardor for Obama bloomed most recently in the Nov. 25 *EW*, in which he compared the non-white kids trick-or-treating at his house with the U.S. president who just expanded the war in Afghanistan. Only Harris doesn't tell us that; he says, "Some of them have been the