

VOLUNTARY TAX

Did you vote “yes” for the recent school tax measure? If we all sent a check for the amount we would have paid, or any amount, we could save some jobs and preserve school programs.

Mail checks to Eugene Education Fund, PO Box 1015, Eugene 97440. Mark the bottom left of the check for “4J staffing,” or “(name a school) staffing,” or divide your contribution such as “50 percent 4J staffing and 50 percent (name of school) staffing.” To donate online, look at the Eugene Education Fund website. All donations are tax deductible.

Perhaps some people who voted no might still like to make a contribution that would support the staffing of a specific school. Or soften the impact of prospective drastic cuts.

So, just do it. Write that check now. Garrison Keillor said, “Nothing you do for children is ever wasted.” Let’s do this for children and for the quality of life in our community.

*Paulette Thompson
Eugene*

UNBALANCING ACT

It is all so clear now, makes me wonder why I didn’t think of it: Just increase federal taxes and we can solve the budget deficits in all 50 states. Makes me wish I would have stayed in school and gotten a Ph.D. in political science rather than a BS in accounting and a CPA license. I am certain I will never be an advisor to Congress.

*Mike Tayloe
Springfield*

FACTORY FARMING

Free press advocates have been

outraged recently by bills in Florida, Iowa and Minnesota legislatures to prohibit the possession and display of videos of factory farming. Yet, for the meat, dairy and egg industries that push for these bills, the prohibition makes perfect sense.

A year ago, undercover investigators exposed Texas E6 Cattle Co. in Castro County chaining dairy calves in tiny wood crates and bludgeoning their skulls with pickaxes. Last June, Cal-Cruz Hatcheries in Santa Cruz, Calif., were found grinding up and suffocating live chicks. In August, Iowa’s Hillandale Farms and Wright County Eggs were forced to recall 550 million eggs for Salmonella contamination. If I was running one of those operations, I certainly wouldn’t want people with cameras anywhere near my facilities.

Filthy conditions and cruel practices are likely to remain legal and commonplace on U.S. factory farms, and their operators will continue to avoid public exposure. Our only option as consumers is to stop subsidizing these conditions and practices at the checkout counter by shifting to wholesome, cruelty-free vegetables, fruits and grains, as well as grain- and nut-based meat and dairy substitutes available in every supermarket.

*Edward Newland
Eugene*

SALES TAX

Governor Kitzhaber was right. The way we fund schools in this state has to be changed. What we are currently doing is not working — and it hasn’t been for the last 30 years. During that time however, it did correct the economic gap between the

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



rural and urban schools, which was good.

The band-aid approach of a city income tax was recently soundly rejected. It is a whole state problem. There may be some waste in the administration of school funds, but getting rid of that would not solve the massive problem of lack of funds to properly run the school system.

What we need to do is give all of us in the state a chance to vote on a new tax that will correct this 30-year-old problem. It has to be a tax that can be used only for education. It has to be subject to our approval, both in initiating it, or changing it in the future.

We could call it a dedicated education tax based on consumption. It would be in the state constitution and couldn’t be

changed without our vote. We would be back to the previous way where we voted on school taxes, only we would do it on a state level, instead of by each city.

Yes, there are some who would call this a sales tax, that’s what it was called in 2002, when Sen. Carter submitted it to the legislature. They ignored it then, but it was a good idea, and even a better idea now. About five percent would cover everything from pre- kindergarten through community college, and it would have built in funds for income variance. Let’s ask the legislature to give up their supervision of school funding and leave it to us. What do you think?

*Bob Cassidy
Eugene*

Viewpoint BY ROBERT BUSSEL

The Threat of History

Gov. LePage, meet Ms. LeClair

Back in March, Maine Gov. Paul LePage ordered the state’s Department of Labor to remove a mural depicting scenes of working-class activism and union struggles from the lobby of the agency’s administration building. A spokesperson for LePage explained that the labor murals did not reflect the governor’s pro-business agenda and asked why there were no paintings on display of L.L. Bean, the founder of the famed outdoor gear firm based in Maine, whom she described as a “job creator.”



This is not the first time that conservatives have displaced labor art from public buildings. In 1994, when Republicans gained control of the House of Representatives, they removed a painting showing images of the epic 1912 Lawrence, Mass., textile strike from the hearing room for the House Subcommittee on Labor and Education.

So what’s behind these efforts to cleanse the public record of the visual history of worker militancy and labor activism? Although promoting a business agenda is doubtless one motivation, I believe that there is another objective that is far more disturbing.

What conservatives really fear, I suspect, is that contemporary workers might draw on this history for insight and inspiration, see parallels between the past and the present, and gain a deeper appreciation for the critical role that unions have played in creating economic fairness and social justice. Greater social awareness of this history also threatens to undermine conservative arguments that while unions might once have been necessary, they are no longer relevant given the expansion of legal protections for workers and a more enlightened employer approach to labor relations.

The painting showing images of the 1937 strike that LePage ordered removed is a powerful example of what it means to deprive us of these vital historical

memories. This strike, which I learned about while writing a biography of Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) leader Powers Hapgood, involved thousands of shoe workers, many immigrant women of French Canadian descent, who sought to improve their poverty-level wages and stop their supervisors from engaging in sexual harassment. One of the strike leaders was a French speaking stitcher named Alexina LeClair, whose powerful speechmaking and singing led strikers to nickname her the “sweetheart of the CIO.” Noting at a union meeting that she was given good work until she “refused the attention of the boss,” LeClair eloquently summarized the aspirations of the strikers: “We will earn a living and not simply an existence.”

Due to intervention by the courts and intense employer resistance backed by local police and the Maine National Guard, the strikers failed in their organizing effort. Nonetheless, the issues they raised – the right to a living wage, freedom from sexual harassment, insistence that employers respect the right of workers to organize, demanding that immigrants deserved a chance to achieve the American Dream – remain highly relevant during a time when we are suffering through the worst economic downturn since the Depression. Through the stirring example of Alexina LeClair, we are reminded that unions can help ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. Her rallying cry, that working people deserve “a living and not simply an existence,” speaks to the visionary hopes and aspirations that have often guided working-class activism and trade unionism. These are the kinds of memories that LePage and his ideological allies are attempting to erase from public awareness.

Yes, an honest account of our history should acknowledge the contributions of pioneering business figures such as L.L. Bean. But it should also include recognition of working people like Alexina LeClair. During these hard times, LePage could learn a lot from LeClair, a fellow Franco-American whose story represents an integral part of our shared history that deserves to be told.

Robert Bussel teaches history and directs the Labor Education and Research Center at the UO. He is the author of From Harvard to the Ranks of Labor: Powers Hapgood and the American Working Class.