

PUT BACK THE BENCHES

I walk West Broadway several times a week. It should be a hub of commerce and activity. Instead it is in a sad state.

Ideally city planners would recognize this situation and make some attempt at remediation. Instead, the city seems intent on regressing. On my most recent stroll through downtown last week, I noticed that the nice benches formerly surrounding the corner of Broadway and Olive had been removed and replaced with bike racks. Now I am all for biking. I bike everywhere when the weather is agreeable. But that stretch of Broadway already has plenty of bikeracks. What's more, the new bike racks appear unusable, since they directly abut nearby concrete planter boxes roughly 3 inches away, not enough room for any bike. A row of similarly useless bike racks has been installed along the curved berm opposite Kesey Plaza.

The chief purpose of the new racks seems to be to deprive "undesirables" of any resting spot. This effort is completely misguided. Removing benches makes downtown less inviting, not just to "undesirables" but to everyone. This runs counter to the best interests of downtown, which needs more people downtown, not fewer.

The key to a healthy downtown is a populous diversity of all ages, backgrounds, classes and interests. That is the trait of every healthy downtown in America. Public benches can facilitate that populous diversity. Their removal retards it.

Please reinstall the benches.

Jane Jacobs
Eugene

TRUE LEADERSHIP

I am writing this letter to encourage people who work for a living to vote for Rob Handy for commissioner of Lane County. Handy has been a friend of working men

and women in Lane County and is not afraid of taking the tough stands that are needed in today's dire economic times.

Recently Handy proposed cutting the salaries of county employees who make \$90,000 or more by 15 percent to create some meaningful savings to help with the budget deficit. This would have generated a savings of \$1 million — a significant and substantial cut. When Handy made this proposal he was accused by other board members and the county administrator of "class warfare." How can people making \$90,000 per year suggest it is class warfare when they are being asked to take some cuts, but it is not class warfare when the front line workers are having to make huge concessions in their medical plans which affects not only those workers but also the quality of life for their families?

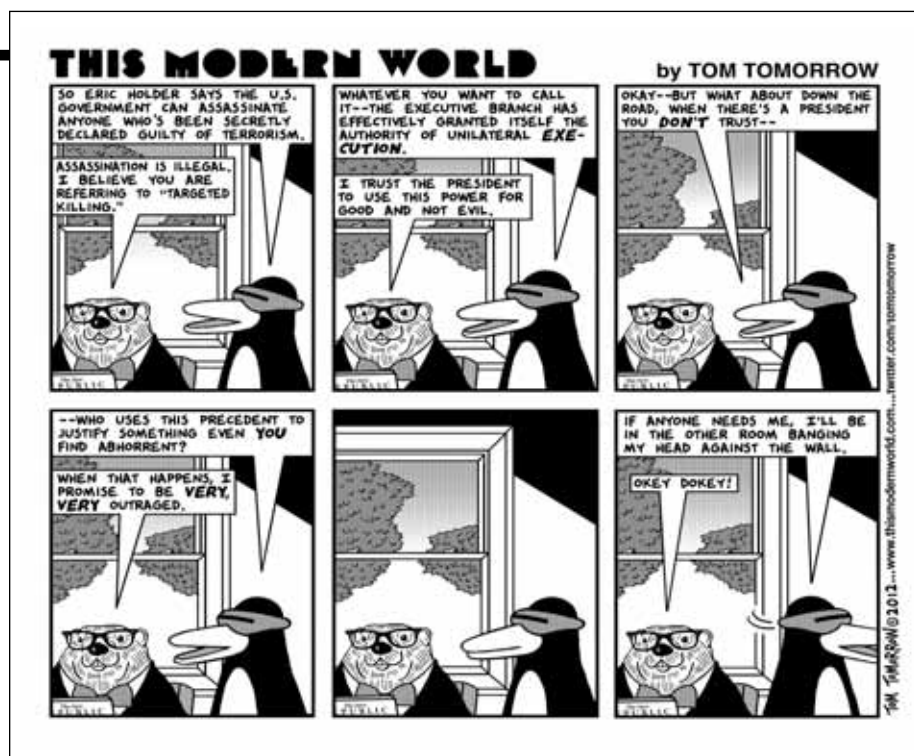
In some European and Asian countries leadership in corporations and government is defined by leaders taking the same proportional cuts that the front line workers are asked to take. The times do not need symbolic acts as proposed by some commissioners like Jay Bozievich who proposed cutting \$40,000 from the commissioners' expense accounts used for travel, postage and the like. It is time for true leadership as proposed by Handy.

Gary L. Lyle
Springfield

BUDGET-BUSTING IDEAS

The headline on professor Gordon Lafer's article on faculty unions (3/1) couldn't have been more true. I wholeheartedly agree. There is class warfare, the haves are *stealing* from the have-nots.

We are witnessing a disgraceful time in modern American history in which an entire class of indentured servants is being created. President Obama signed into law



a requirement that young people who have defaulted on their student loans be forced to give 15 percent of their income to creditors for the next 20 years of their lives.

More young people than ever before are defaulting because higher education salaries and tuition have outpaced inflation for the last 20 years. Professors are getting richer while students are getting poorer.

Lafer bemoans the cost accounting of the UO but mentions not one word about how his budget-busting ideas are going to be paid for. Presumably, he wants the rest of society to "buck up" and be more productive, yet abhors the idea of the best and brightest doing exactly that.

Who among us has not had an inspirational professor in a large lecture hall setting? Conversely, having intimate "one to one" with a poor professor (after most of the students dropped the class) can hardly be construed as "intellectual."

Did any of the union organizers ask that entire class of people who are going to

have those monumental student loans tied to their necks which they would prefer? Larger class sizes? Or living under a bridge the rest of their lives?

Rick Wilmath
Veneta

EDITOR'S NOTE: Obama's new student loan rules only apply to federal loans, lower the cap and provide for loan forgiveness over time. See The New York Times explanation at <http://wkly.ws/17u>

PRINT HIS NAME

I agree that people in the community should be encouraged to come forth and run for public office (Slant, 3/8). Let's make that path easier for them by at least printing the names of Betty Taylor's opponents. I happen to know that Juan Carlos Valle is eminently qualified and has done much for local government in the past. Let's honor him by at least printing his name instead of just referring to him as an "opponent."

Gary Apsel
Eugene

NOTES FROM THE RIVERSIDE BY MARK HARRIS

Coffee with The Preacher

Wrestling with 'compassion remorse'

When you're using drugs and it gets bad, you blame everybody but yourself. — Tom Sizemore, www.TheFix.com

I was having my favorite drug of choice, dark roast Sumatra, with a man I'll call The Preacher. We were in warmer climes, where we were surrounded by black people playing chess, typing on iPads and laptops, conversing over topics of the day, at Magic's Starbucks in L.A. I was asking his spiritual tactical advice.

I opened with: "Should you show mercy whether or not the recipient is grateful, or respects you as a human being?"

"The short answer is yes," he said. "On the vengeance is mine saith the Lawd, goes around, comes around tip." Chuckling ... "Them Klannish white folks givin' you grief in Eugene? Drop that cross, brotha ... But on the real, devil's in the details,

like Michel Martin says, tell me more."

"Well," I said, "I deal with people on both sides of the law: addicts, alcoholics, hopeless dope fiends, and dopeless hopefiends. Sometimes the seemingly law abiding ones are the worst. Its not like you can expect rational behavior from a crackhead, but permaspun crackheads with a steady jobs, be messin' with me and mine. You can't really say that you're recovered until you take responsibility for what you have done — on the pipe, and the dry crackhead behavior you engage in off the pipe. You understand I'm not just talking about cocaine, but people who do whatever they can to not be fully, consciously, human."

"Isn't it true there's a developmental delay while you are using?" The Preacher asked.

"One theory anyway," I said.

"So you are expecting rational, responsible, self-aware adult behavior from a criminal addict, who sounds like he got rich parents, or other resources, lawyers, co-dependent co-workers and bosses, to shield him from the consequences of his behavior, so now he can play 'straight' in a government job like a school or juvenile justice, and 'give back' to kids like he used to be, or maybe still is on the DL, and



you feel bad now, because you cut him slack then, and he's still behaving badly in some way?"

I asked him, "What would you do if an adult child on probation had shot one of your kids with a BB gun, slapped an ice cream cone out of a little girl's hand, and while appearing fawningly faux contrite, later bragged about it."

"Is showing compassion, giving him the benefit of the doubt that he might turn his life around, the right thing?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Yes, you showed compassion for this racist white dude, regardless of whether he's showing compassion, contrition or responsibility, then or now," he said. "Whether or not he'd have done that for your black children, were the situations reversed. You're just experiencing compassion remorse; you feel you've been taken advantage of."

Sighing, he added, "Ieshua tells us the adversaries show us how not to be. Give thanks that you know not to be like him, and your example shows how someday he might be better."

Amen.

Mark Harris is an instructor and substance abuse prevention coordinator at LCC.