

SLANT

• **The city is in a fiscal pickle** with major cuts in city services behind us and more to come, but how do we go from sour pickle to sweet pickle? Eugene City Manager Jon Ruiz and his staff have come up with a set of fees (in lieu of new taxes) that would cost each household in the city up to \$240 a year, with partial waivers for low-income households. The city is currently facing a \$6 million budget gap and the proposal would generate about \$7.5 million a year, eliminating the gap and restoring some services that have already been cut. The money would come from shifting about \$4.5 million in the general fund for parks operations and maintenance to stormwater fees, adding \$10 a month to EWEB bills. The second source would be a separate fee of up to \$10 a month, which would require a vote of the people.

We can think of many reasons to nix these fees. Flat taxes are regressive and exacerbate the gap between the rich and poor, EWEB does not appear eager to become the collecting agency for the flat fee, and we're not sure the polling that indicates support for these fees (but not for property taxes) is an accurate predictor of election results. But what other practical options do we have for restoring and maintaining essential city services? These fees would be permanent, stable sources of income, as opposed to a five-year property tax levy that may or may not survive voter re-approval down the line. The new revenue stream would earmark about \$700,000 for human services, and some of that money could be used to leverage state and federal grants to help the homeless.

Let's have a lively, Eugene-style debate about our options here. A public hearing on the stormwater fees was held Jan. 22 and a City Council public hearing on the flat fee will be Feb. 4, followed by a council decision Feb. 13 on whether to refer a measure to the voters in May.

• **Taxes, taxes everywhere?** The **Lane County Board of Commissioners** wants your input on taxes, too. The much-publicized releases of prisoners from our underfunded jail have been leading up to two public meetings on public safety at 5:30 pm Tuesday, Jan. 29, and 9 am Jan. 30 in Harris Hall. The County Commission may take action on a temporary, dedicated tax levy on Wednesday after the meeting. Come give your input. Public safety doesn't just mean the jail, it means re-entry programs, domestic violence counseling and much more.

• As Lane County gets ready for its annual homeless count on Jan. 30, we think not only of the living, but of the **houseless people who have died** on our streets this year. The latest death we heard of is "Sweet Pea," aka Michael David Rister, who was known for selling his art in front of Circle K and Pita Pit (see this week's letters and news). Sweet Pea's friends want answers as to who did this to him and also as to why the story of those who fight and die on our streets are rarely heard. Rister made headlines in 2009 when he was Tasered by police and again in 2010 when he was involved in a fight, but his death last week, caused by a beating, his friends say, was not noted by the media. This is one more reason to support groups such as SLEEPS, Occupy Medical, CALC and others that try to help the houseless and often voiceless people of Lane County.

• **Worst air quality** we've seen and smelled in a nutria's age, and those of us with wood stoves are keeping them cold so as to not add to the bad air in our neighborhoods. We are dutifully huddled instead around electric space heaters, running up our EWEB bills. Meanwhile, the biomass incinerator-generator operated by Seneca Jones is happily and profitably cranking out air pollutants 24/7 and worsening our choking smog. Our Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA) approved this beast over the objections of local physicians, conservationists and several elected officials, and we are all paying for it. "Particulate pollution is approaching levels that are unsafe for sensitive individuals," reads LRAPA's website this week. "Please curtail the use of wood stoves and fireplaces." There are no such restrictions on the biggest wood stove of them all.

• **Chip Kelly fans** might have some fun, or not, watching *Silver Linings Playbook*, an Oscar finalist playing now in Eugene theaters. Set in Philadelphia, Kelly's new hometown, the movie spends lots of time on the outrageous fan culture around the Eagles, Kelly's pro team.

• From the bleachers: **Winning ugly is beautiful.** We better start paying attention to the Oregon Duck men's basketball team, which has clawed into the Pac-12 lead and the top 20 in the nation. It's an unselfish squad, with six players averaging roughly 10 points per game. But scoring points is not where this team excels — the Ducks play fierce, disruptive defense that leaves opponents looking like they would rather be doing something else. The Ducks are not always pretty when they have the ball, but they make opponents look really ugly. And winning always looks good.

SLANT INCLUDES SHORT OPINION PIECES, OBSERVATIONS AND RUMOR-CHASING NOTES
COMPILED BY THE EW STAFF. **HEARD ANY GOOD RUMORS LATELY?**
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lighten up
BY RAFAEL ALDAVE

Don't you think that the way Chip Kelly darted from the Ducks to the Eagles makes him look flighty?

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