

NO MORE FLAT TAXES

No! No! No! Eugene citizens do not want another flat tax that punishes the middle class and the poor. We do not want to continue down the road of flat taxation! \$240 added to the utility bills annually is not much for someone making over \$100,000, but for the many making less than \$20,000 or even \$30,000 it is difficult. The conservative Heritage Foundation continues to advocate flat taxation as well as tax write-offs while schools and public services are cut. The separation between the rich and the poor grows larger. I hope everyone contacts their city councilor and asks them to reverse this punishing trend.

Ruth Duemler
Eugene

A GENTLE SOUL

I wish to say goodbye to Sweet Pea [see news story and letter 1/24]. He was my friend for a couple years now. Last summer I commissioned him to compose a drawing for a very dear friend; much of the specialty in that was because she was a good friend to him as well. The finished product was met with delight in the three of us. I had it matted and framed and she owns a beautiful reminder of the gentle soul we loved.

Dan McQuillan
Eugene

LANE COUNTY CABAL

I am outraged to learn about Lane County board members considering big raises for their two highest-paid employees! I don't care if salaries are the same or not in other counties. This county is in dire straits. Working people are barely surviving, EWEB is gouging us as we conserve more energy, and it is time that employees and elected officials in public agencies feel some of the pain that the rest of us feel.

Stephen Dingle accepted his position at the current salary. County Administrator Liane Richardson just got an automatic 3 percent raise, and apparently from now on, she will get another automatic one of up to 6 percent annually. If Human Resources, Richardson and Dingle don't think their salaries are competitive, they should please find work somewhere else. I know there are competent people out there who would love to make over \$150,000 a year, and might even really care about what happens to the people of this county while doing it!

The board is cutting every program (except their own salaries) and has plans to ask taxpayers for more money. They refuse to consider raising pathetically low taxes on timber interests mining our forests, and Richardson, with the three conservatives and their business cronies, has been running roughshod over Lane County citizens for years! It's like a secret cabal. I'm sick of it!

No more executive raises in local governments until we *all* see better days. Nothing less will do!

Robin Bloomgarden
Eugene

FLAMING REGRESSIVITY

\$10 a month out of a Social Security Check of \$670 is beyond outrageous. I live in a really old, drafty, roof-leaking apartment building. All I can afford. Ten more bucks from the company that threatens to terminate my electricity if I am late with payment and as little as 25 cents short. I kid you not.

I had to take custody of my 13-year-old granddaughter. They cut my food stamps in half. I have a masters in public administration. I did not use it to get rich. I used it to fight City Hall as a volunteer or work for low-paying nonprofits. Before my degree at age 50, I worked 30 years in factories, low-skilled office work and print shops.

Part of the reason my Social Security check is so small is because some of the companies I worked for never paid into my Social Security. For many reasons I can't go back and make them pay in now.

Even if you made the tax a flat percentage by use, those in my living circumstances would pay much more than those who can afford more expensive, modern, energy

efficient, re-insulated living quarters. That's called "flaming" regressivity.

How about a few-dollar increase to all those new tenants who are lining up to fill all that new office space downtown?

Pat Hadley
Downtown Eugene

UO HAD LITTLE CHOICE

What other choice did Oregon football have? No proven head coach would come here to face the NCAA sanctions likely to come for illegal recruiting for which his predecessor was accused. It should be no surprise that Oregon's only valid option for a new coach would come from its current staff.

Mark Helfrich knows the long-term challenges because he has been on the staff since the departed guy first was head coach. That covers the years of illegal recruiting. Can anyone doubt Helfrich also was in on the cover-up? Was there really a national search for a new coach as prescribed? If so, in the short time they had, it must've been conducted on the internet.

Sanctions or not, Helfrich will not be in mourning. He was to be paid under \$400,000 as an assistant next season. With big cash from irresponsible donors, UO football is likely to pay him near the millions it obscenely paid his predecessor.

MIC CHECK BY CATHERINE SISKRON

Sleep Deprivation

EUGENE VIOLATES BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS

The tents are back. Set up by SLEEPS (Safe Legally Entitled Emergency Places to Sleep), the tents are reminders of two basic biological needs: the need for shelter and for sleep. These needs go with being human, and they are denied to the unhoused in our city.

Eugene prides itself on being a caring, inclusive community. And yet we have a caste of untouchables. As a community, we criminalize homelessness and violate the most basic human rights. We have laws that make it illegal to do in public things that people experiencing homelessness have no private place to perform. These are simple human needs, such as sleeping, sitting or standing for extended periods of time in any given place ("loitering"), and "trespassing" by leaning on a building or sitting on the edge of a planter.

In her Dec. 10 commemorative statement, Navi Pillay, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, focused on Articles 19, 20 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) — the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, to peaceful assembly and association and to take part in government.

Pillay noted that millions of people around the world are demanding civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. "They are asking," she said, "for an end to a situation where governments simply decide what is best for their populations without even consulting them. They



are asking for their right to participate fully in the important decisions and policies affecting their daily lives ... [They] have been making it clear they are fed up with their leaders treating them with disdain and ignoring their needs, ambitions, fears and desires." It is this disdain for the needs and rights of the majority that SLEEPS and Occupy Eugene are challenging. Some of the human rights violated in our community are even more basic than having a voice in public affairs.

Article 25 of the UDHR states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health

and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

Contrast this international ideal with the reality reflected in these local statistics:

- 7,218 homeless people sought social services through Lane County programs between July 2011 and April 2012.
- 2,882 shelter beds were set up at the Egan Warming Center during 15 nights of extreme weather at 10 faith-based sites.
- 2,285 homeless students attended public school in Lane County during the 2010-11 school year.

And the numbers of unsheltered are increasing. The

unhoused include families with children, veterans with PTSD, the mentally ill, addicts, runaway youth and impoverished elderly. What happens to them on the 350 nights when the Egan warming shelters are not open?

Conrad Barney, a homeless activist, has been on a hunger strike since Dec. 11. He says one of the biggest problems of being homeless is sleep deprivation. In fact, sleep deprivation is not only a violation of basic human rights (Article 25 of the UDHR), but a common form of torture used on prisoners of conscience and frequently used to break suspects in criminal cases. Sleep deprivation causes anxiety, paranoia and disorientation. It undermines a person's ability to function. It is a form of cruel and unusual punishment to which the homeless are subjected on a regular basis.

In rousting the homeless, the police are enforcing city anti-camping laws. It is up to the citizens of Eugene and the City Council to wake up to the fact that these laws violate not only Article 25 of UDHR, but also the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids cruel or unusual punishment.

Please write to your councilor in support of SLEEPS' modest proposal that the camping laws be lifted. SLEEPS advocates for commonsense policies that would allow the unhoused to sleep safely in designated dry areas and to be provided toilets and garbage receptacles.

Changing these laws will benefit all Eugeneans. Currently the laws push the unhoused out into the wetlands and wilderness areas where there are no toilet or garbage facilities. Fecal matter, another "unavoidable consequence of being human," is spread by rainfall and contaminates groundwater, creating a public safety hazard for both the housed and unhoused.

The city of Eugene is currently forming a Commission on Homelessness. The tents are back to remind us that the task before the commission is complex. Changing the (anti-)camping laws and exclusion zone laws is only the beginning.

Catherine Siskron is a longtime peace and social justice activist.