

Opponents have courted money from radical right-wingers in 9.12 Project Lane County and Americans for Prosperity. They are in the “hell no!” camp, and they still offer no feasible plan for saving our town and protecting its people.

I implore you: Put community first and politics second. It is enough (for now) that the measure’s built-in assistance program shields low-income households from paying it.

Steve Coatsworth
Vice Chair, Lane County Young
Democrats
& Jefferson Westside Neighbors

CHECK THE FACTS

I can understand the frustrations in “believing” that the city is holding priority programs hostage unless this “fee” (tax) is passed.

And I am dismayed that the city’s underlying statement is sending the message that they are willing to contrive, demonstrate underhanded dealing and continue non-transparent government, to do whatever or say whatever in order to get their way.

People, please check the facts:

Why is there never a mention of a gap or financial crisis at those meetings where City Hall is giving out millions of

dollars worth of tax breaks and subsidies? Somehow a fiscal crisis never seems to emerge when they are giving money away. The proposed cuts are “tabled” for a year — but the fee (tax) is permanent! There is no sunset clause!

I am not alone at being irked at the tax “forgiveness” on developments. It really angers me that they do not pay their share, and that taxpayers are saddled with it. That’s part of the problem here!

There would be no need for this tax fee if the developers paid what they owed both in financing, property taxes and infrastructure. It’s got to stop!

The movement towards honesty and transparency in government is what needs to continue, not this fee!

Terry Steiner
Eugene

EDUCATION DEFORM

It’s been 30 years this week since the “Nation at Risk” report came out calling for reform of America’s public education system. The “reformers” with the financial backing of the top 1 percent (Walton, Gates, Broad foundations) have pushed for standardized testing, charter schools, teacher accountability, vouchers, standardization of curriculum and the destruction of the teacher unions. This

corporate agenda was presented as panacea for our schools. This deform has been a total failure and has put public education, the foundation of our democracy, at risk.

Teachers, parents, students and communities affected by these deforms found themselves marginalized and on the sidelines of the educational debate. The wealthy ideologues with deep pockets have dominated the discussion and have pushed forward their agenda. Poverty and inequality, which are the driving forces behind achievement and opportunity gaps, have been ignored.

It’s time for change. The tide is turning against the deform movement across the country. Recently in Eugene, teachers and parents strongly objected to common schedule decision made by 4J administration. We need to continue to speak out on issues affecting public education here in Eugene and the state of Oregon.

At 7 pm Thursday, May 2, at Kelley Middle School a public discussion on “The Future of Education in Oregon” will take place. This forum is organized by IDEA (Institute for Democratic Education in America). It will feature a variety of voices and ideas on what Oregon’s public education should look like in the future. Come and speak out.

Pete Mandrupa
Eugene

WHY OREGON?

I thought it was only in states like Alabama and Mississippi that had flat taxation to make the poor poorer and the rich richer. I only hope that somehow our state’s proposed progressive income tax is passed and it demonstrates what is fair taxation to our elected representatives at every level of government. California did it!

Ruth Duemler
Eugene

PEOPLE AS OBJECTS

Lots of good stuff in the April 18 *EW* about women: films about sex trafficking of women and girls, a symposium on ending gender violence, an article on ending gender violence, what progress we are making. The keynote speaker at the symposium who wrote *Killing Us Softly* spoke about the role of advertising in the objectification of women. It seems to me that this is not even Humanity 101 — it is humanity preschool that teaches us that when you objectify someone — or a group — let’s say people of color or women — they become “less than” or “not real people” and can be abused in all sorts of ways that we would never dream of doing to our own, same group.

Now give a good look to the American Apparel ad on the full back page. What do

VIEWPOINT

BY LEONARD EPSTEIN

Sustaining the County Jail

BUSINESS AS USUAL WILL BECOME EVEN MORE COSTLY

Having worked in two jails and one federal prison, I understand the importance of adequate institutional staffing for safety, security and efficiency. But in conjunction with deliberations about whether to support a tax levy to increase jail funding, I believe citizens would do well to contact their county commissioners about how any short-term funding solution should be coupled with a plan to rein in correctional costs that otherwise will undoubtedly only increase over time.

The current tax proposal would already require maintaining 255 jail beds, even if the levy is not sufficient to cover the costs (at which point there would be a need to tap into general funds that might impact provision of other social services). In short, there are many more people who could be incarcerated if jail capacity increases, and just increasing capacity will “grow the business” and quite likely require more overhead and requisitions later on. In this regard, there is even the real risk that future tax revenues could decrease because of changes in Lane County’s economy. A solution to the current problem, then, would do well to actively pursue steps to reduce jail space demands and lower costs.

There are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce jail space demand and lower correctional costs:

- Consider increased use of house arrests (ankle bracelets) to decrease use of jail space.
- Maximize a pretrial services program to allow selected individuals to be out of jail on supervised release (checking in with the probation office daily) while awaiting court dates. Other community agencies around the county are currently using screening tools to determine which individuals are good candidates for remaining out of jail while awaiting the trial process.
- Consider turning several expensive county jails into a regional jail, potentially with oversight from the state to avoid jurisdictional dispute.
- Review medical delivery system procedures for potentially significant cost savings. One county jail received large savings by having the medical provider of services cut costs by installing an x-ray machine, EKG and increasing physician presence in the jail, which all helped to reduce unnecessary care and transports to a hospital. Review of policies and procedures for the purchase and administration of medications (perhaps especially psychotropics and pain medications) may also help reduce costs.
- Promote alternatives to incarceration, where appropriate (nonviolent crimes), with options including the use of mandated counseling, restitution, fines and community service.



- Develop sustainable jail projects. The Multnomah County Sustainable Jail Project, for example, reports achieving a savings of \$400,000 by switching supplies from disposable to reusable cups; using recycled twine to wrap laundry; and capturing, treating and recycling water used to wash clothes and bedding. A number of its upcoming objectives include saving money by digitizing the law library, decreasing jail energy and working with food contractors to buy more local food.

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- A vegetable garden planted and maintained by county inmates and correctional staff could save significant money on inmate meals.
- Find ways to reduce costly and unnecessary overtime pay.

Whether voting for or against the current county jail tax measure, the citizens of Lane County need to see plans developed and implemented that offer alternatives to incarceration and that will lower jail costs. As good as the current jail system may be, there is *always* room for improvement, and all relevant parties involved in the correctional system and its funding should be finding new ways to make the system more efficient and cost-effective. Without efforts to make significant changes in “business as usual” — and even more so if the economy doesn’t improve enough to increase tax revenues over the next five years — one can only expect that there would be a need to support a higher number of jail inmates at an even greater cost per inmate once a five-year levy period might be done. ■

Leonard Epstein of Eugene is a retired psychologist.