

MERKLEY TAKES STAND AGAINST MONSANTO

Oregon's Sen. Jeff Merkley has joined the march against Monsanto, in the U.S. Senate anyway. While Eugeneans plan their May 25 rally against chemical giant Monsanto here in Lane County, Merkley has taken a stand against loopholes and secret provisions aiding the biotech company in Congress. He has introduced an amendment to the Senate farm

bill that would override a provision that has become known as the Monsanto Protection Act.

According to Merkley's office, the rider requires the U.S. Department of Agriculture "to grant a temporary permit to any farmer, upon request, to plant genetically modified crops, even if the crop was found to be potentially harmful by a court." The statement says that the provision, known informally as a rider, "explicitly grants the USDA the authority to override a judicial ruling stopping the planting of a GMO."

SLANT

- **No big surprise** in the defeat of the Eugene city services fee on this week's ballot. What are the lessons to be learned here? For starters, the opinion polling that encouraged this measure did not include any of the objections that were easily anticipated. Pollsters could have asked, "How concerned are you about this fee increasing the gap between rich and poor?" Or, "How concerned are you about the impact of a \$360 a year fee on Eugene's many struggling small businesses?" The poll did not ask residents about other options in making up the projected \$6 million deficit: Would they pay a fee to support upper-level management salaries and benefits, restore the City Hall building fund drained by the new police headquarters, or make up for the many millions of dollars lost to tax breaks for developers?

We Eugeneans tend to be pro-government people who appreciate the dedicated work of our career public servants and elected officials. But we also demand transparency, accountability, efficiency, social justice and sustainability. We're not there yet. Last week we wrote about the need for an *independent* performance auditor to look at every aspect of our city government. Such an auditor could, over time, bolster public confidence that best practices are being followed, our city staffing and salaries are at the right levels, our urban planning is state-of-the-art, and our public investments in private development have real and measurable benefits. Then voters might just say "yes" to new sources of revenue.

- We recommended a "no" vote on the **Lane County public safety measure**, but it's OK that it passed. Our property taxes are too low and public safety is underfunded. Our concern is that this money would be better spent on the social services that would prevent the need for jail beds in the long run. We hope the County Commission and administration don't take this vote as any kind of support for their management. Sheriff Tom Turner gets the credit for passing this measure. He got help from the fact there was no organized opposition to the county tax levy, unlike the city fee measure. That makes a difference in elections like these when turnout is so low.

- Given Oregon's long tradition of **free speech and protest**, we hope ag-gag bills aren't coming our way. States like Utah have made it illegal to film farm and agricultural operations — the same sort of films that have exposed cruel and unhealthy factory farms violating the law. Here in Oregon we still have anti-treesitter bills lurking in the Legislature, HB 2595 and 2596, which targeted protesters in the Elliott State Forest. The bills passed the House, but the more restrictive bill HB 2595 died in committee this week leaving the Cascadia Forest Defenders with HB 2596 to fight. Over in Eastern Oregon the

Jordan Valley Rodeo had an animal rights activist arrested for videoing its controversial horse-tripping event (see the lively discussion on our blog), a practice also awaiting its day in the Legislature. If the meat industry has nothing to hide, they won't mind being documented, and if the timber industry truly wants a "healthy forest" it just might have to put up with some healthy protest. A protest is not a terrorist act; it's a time-honored tradition of our democracy.

- Notice *The New York Times* section called "Summer Stages" May 19. In Oregon they listed the Chamber Music Northwest in Portland and the **Oregon Bach Festival** in "Portland, Bend, Ashland, Corvallis, Florence and Eugene." We would change that order, putting the last city first where it should be.

- It's tough to imagine **Curly without his cowboy hat** in the old-timey musical *Oklahoma*, but the entire cast of Roosevelt Middle School kids tossed their hats in the second half of the May 19 performance. Musical Director Carol Sinclair told the full house during intermission that dreaded head lice had been sighted backstage. Hats, brushes, combs, all had to go. It really didn't matter. The show was great fun, done by one of four casts that sent more than 80 middle schoolers to the stage under the direction of Richard Leebrick. Final performance is Thursday, May 23.

- The **Nobel Peace Walk Park** in Alton Baker Park is taking shape and we're hearing some debate about the plaques honoring Henry Kissinger, Theodore Roosevelt and Barack Obama. Kissinger has been accused of war crimes and Roosevelt and Obama have supported military interventions for questionable causes. Local peace activist Peg Morton tells us, "Let's remove those who seriously compromise the vision from our Nobel Peace Park," and "When I visit this Peace Park I want to learn about and be inspired by people who I can truly call my peace heroes." The park only honors American Nobel laureates and is the only park of its kind in the U.S.

We queried John Attig, the project chairman, and he says Kissinger is indeed the most controversial figure among the Americans honored, and "his presence has cost the Nobel Project some donations." He notes that the much-maligned Kissinger also has a legacy of big successes on world peace and nuclear disarmament. "We chose not to second-guess the selection committee in Oslo," he says. "They are human and make mistakes. The ones they make can be used in the classroom as a teaching opportunity about human perfection." Agreed.

- Watch out, gearheads! EPD says that **bike thefts** are up 67 percent this year, and a bike is stolen about every 10 hours. Could be time to invest in a better lock.

SLANT INCLUDES SHORT OPINION PIECES, OBSERVATIONS AND RUMOR-CHASING NOTES COMPILED BY THE EW STAFF. HEARD ANY GOOD RUMORS LATELY? CONTACT TED TAYLOR AT 484-0519, EDITOR@EUGENEWEEKLY.COM

WEB 2.0 MANIFESTO AUTHOR AT LCC

Jaron Lanier is known as "the father of virtual reality." *Smithsonian Magazine* calls him "the spy who came in from the cold 2.0" for his criticisms of the digital world that he helped create. Lanier is coming to Lane Community College May 23 and 24 to speak as part of the school's "Reading Together" effort that creates cross-campus conversations over books in common.

In his 2010 book, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*, Lanier argues that like the way that the size and dimensions of railroad tracks determines how fast and how big trains will be for years to come, choices about software design now could create "defining, unchangeable rules" for future generations. He writes that he wants "a new digital humanism" before the decisions of software engineers lock user behaviors into place.

Lanier critiques web anonymity and the threats to intellectual property and calls online culture "a culture of reaction without action" in his controversial book.

Reading Together coordinator Eileen Thompson says the program brings notable scholars and authors to campus to speak one-on-one with students. Thompson says that not only has Lanier's book created vibrant faculty and student conversations on campus, but by bringing in a high-profile software researcher and developer it is also a "terrific opportunity for Lane to engage with local community members connected to the regional high-tech industries or those who are studying computer technology at any of our local colleges and universities."

Lanier's new book *Who Owns the Future?* comes out this month.

Computer scientist, composer, visual artist and author Jaron Lanier will give a public lecture and book signing at 7:30 pm May 23 at the Center for Meeting and Learning, LCC Main Campus. — *Camilla Mortensen*

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