

CONTROLLING OUR FOOD

Our busy lives leave us little time to consider the sources of our freedom. In a world awash with iPads, smart phones and other technological marvels brought to us by global corporations, our tendency to leave the thinking to others is understandable — but there are moments when things change, when the way things are going just feels wrong.

Jackson County in southern Oregon has a booming organic food industry. But genetically modified crops (GMOs) developed by Monsanto and others are making it impossible for farmers there to grow organically. The pollen from the GMO plants contaminates nearby organic crops and ruins them. So Jackson County folks put a county ordinance banning GMO crops on the ballot. Local organic farmers, consumers and organic food manufacturers took action to protect the most successful and fastest growing sector of an otherwise depressed economy in the Rogue Valley.

But Monsanto lobbyists in Salem sponsored a bill, SB 633, which would forbid Jackson County or any other local government in Oregon from regulating not only

farm crops, but anything to do with farm crops — and trees as well. SB 633 would prevent Lane County from helping finance organic farm-based businesses, like the county's support for Hummingbird Wholesale, now at the heart of our thriving natural food industry. Monsanto wants to not only control our seeds, but our entire food system, and they see successful, independent local organic farmers and food processors as a threat. SB 633 passed the Oregon Senate, and has moved over to the House.

If you agree it's time for Lane County to join over 100 communities around the country in passing a community bill of rights to protect our families' health and to defend our local economy from domination by corporations like Monsanto, please join us at 11 am Saturday, May 25, at the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza to learn more about Monsanto, SB 633, and the future of our health and our community. Join the March Against Monsanto.

*Fergus Mclean
Dexter*

MISTAKES WERE MADE

Just six months after the elections, the Democrats nationally and in Oregon

have gotten themselves into a political position wherein the Republicans can blackmail them for just about anything. The Republicans are filled with fury because they know that their time is short. House Speaker John Boehner has said that he will not cooperate with the Obama administration because Obama is arrogant. The Republicans want to bring an untimely death to the Obama legislative agenda. In their rage against all things Obama, the Republicans will once again play to the most malignant, racist, homophobic and desperate wing of the congressional Republican caucus.

In Oregon, the Republicans will not allow the state to collect billions of dollars in provider tax and federal matching funds because they want to obstruct the Democratic governor's budget while trapping the Democrats into alienating the state employees even more than they have already by forcing the Democrats into further attempts to illegally tamper with the PERS retirement system.

Mistakes were made is the mantra that was delivered to us by President Ronald Reagan during the Iran-Contra scandal. This will be the epitaph for the Democrats

and Republicans of this election cycle. It's up to us who vote (think youth, seniors, women and minorities) to change the membership of the Legislature and the Congress. If we can replace failed representatives with functional ones, then we shall have less gridlock, fewer partisan disputes, and more progress solving our real problems.

*Gerry Merritt
Eugene*

COLLECTIVE EFFORT

Five weeks ago I clicked a link on Facebook to join the local March Against Monsanto, an event being held in more than 330 cities all over the world.

The threat to our food supply is quickening. Monsanto Corporation and its lobbying group in Salem, Oregonians for Food and Shelter, have swiftly moved SB 633, which would take away local control over our food supply.

This corporation is now afforded the same rights that our founders fought the British Empire to win for us. With its mighty dollar as a shield, it has purchased the very rights they now so aggressively try to strip away from you and me.

HOT AIR SOCIETY BY TONY CORCORAN

Of Bankruptcies and Turkeys

HOW TO KEEP LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AFLOAT

Looking back in my legislative rearview mirror, it's amazing to think about issues facing the 2013 legislative session that weren't even imagined in 2003. Facebook and social media protection for workers, for example, or protecting human placentas from overzealous right wingnut hospital administrators, or drones. Ah, did I mention a collapse of the housing market? This 77th edition of Salem's Hot Air Society will have to consider another daunting problem: local government bankruptcies in Oregon.

We've all seen the Orange County and Stockton, Calif., bankruptcy proceedings from a distance, and more recently Detroit, Mich. Other states have recognized the need to monitor the financial condition of local governments and, on occasion, intervene. The objective of state intervention can either be preventive, to avert a financial crisis; reactive, to mitigate damages and service disruptions; or a combination of these. Preventive intervention can include technical assistance grants or loans, whereas reactive intervention could involve state takeover of the local government. States with these powers generally have laws or other programs in place, enabling them to intercede when a crisis occurs or if indicators identify potential problems.

For example, Kentucky law allows the state to force local governments to take action, such as ordering them to raise taxes or reduce expenditures. If they don't comply, the state can take legal action or take over county operations. Recently, after Kentucky detected that one of its counties was heading for fiscal crisis, it ordered the county commission to raise taxes and reduce expenditures. After the commission refused to follow the directive, a state circuit court ordered the commissioners jailed for contempt. Upon release, the commissioners

apparently took swift corrective action; probably the bad jail food helped.

Michigan recently passed a law that empowers the state treasurer to place governments determined to be in the greatest distress, like Detroit, in receivership overseen by an emergency manager who has authority to do whatever is legally necessary to restore the financial health of the local government.

This week three of Oregon's O&C counties voted on public safety levies to keep their jails operating and maintain at least a minimal sheriff's patrol. Patrol forces are bare bones; jail inmates are routinely freed because there's not enough staff; prosecutors don't have enough resources to charge misdemeanor cases and officers are in danger because they can't count on backup. O&C counties face the loss of a federal subsidy, which expired, and local taxpayers have refused to make up the gap. There is a legislative task force chaired by House Majority Leader Val Hoyle and Minority "Pope" Bruce Hanna, but their proposals range widely. There are several bills that would allow the state to create its own safety net for the rural timber counties. One bill would have the state take over such county functions as elections, building code enforcement and taxation. The most controversial would allow the governor to declare a state of emergency, then impose a local tax to pay for public safety. No one really knows how it will look right now, but most are assuming a worst-case scenario in which counties cannot provide basic services. Stay tuned.

Switching from the sublime to the ridiculous; last week I was one of three judges to vote on the 2013 Golden Gobbler Awards, given biennially to the five worst bills introduced each session. I've been invited to do this for 10 years now, along with two of the funniest people in Salem (despite the fact they're lobbyists), Marla Rae and

John Chandler. The event is hosted by another longtime lobbyist, Mark Nelson. The intention of the party is one night of bipartisan abuse, to be distinguished from the partisan abuse endured daily since January. Legislators, their spouses and staff, lobbyists and longtime state legislative workers: a cool gathering.

This year, four runner-ups each received a frozen rock Cornish game hen:

HB 2559: "Automatically terminates obligation to pay spousal support upon death of either party." It's needed, OK?

HB 2613: Authorizes Oregon Racing Commission to allow bets on races previously held. Really? What if you have a photographic memory?

HB 2393: Limits chicken murders: the "chicken choker" bill. Enough said!

HCR 14: Designates trillium as the state flower. The judges thought it should have been marijuana.

The winner of the frozen turkey: HB 2352: Relating to Boring and Dull Day. Boring, Ore., and Dull, Scotland — sister cities. No brainer: too easy. Bring on 2015! ■

Former state sen. Tony Corcoran of Cottage Grove is currently a state employee and his observations in this column are those of a private citizen.

