

# SLANT

• **Dreaming about Eugene?** For this issue we asked a couple dozen local folks with a mix of interests what they would like to see happen here in the next few years. We expected half to respond, but instead nearly all did, often with great enthusiasm. It appears we are a community of big ideas and big dreams. We didn't have enough pages this week to run all the responses, so we plan to continue next week. Keep dreaming! And we welcome letters on this theme as we enter the New Year.

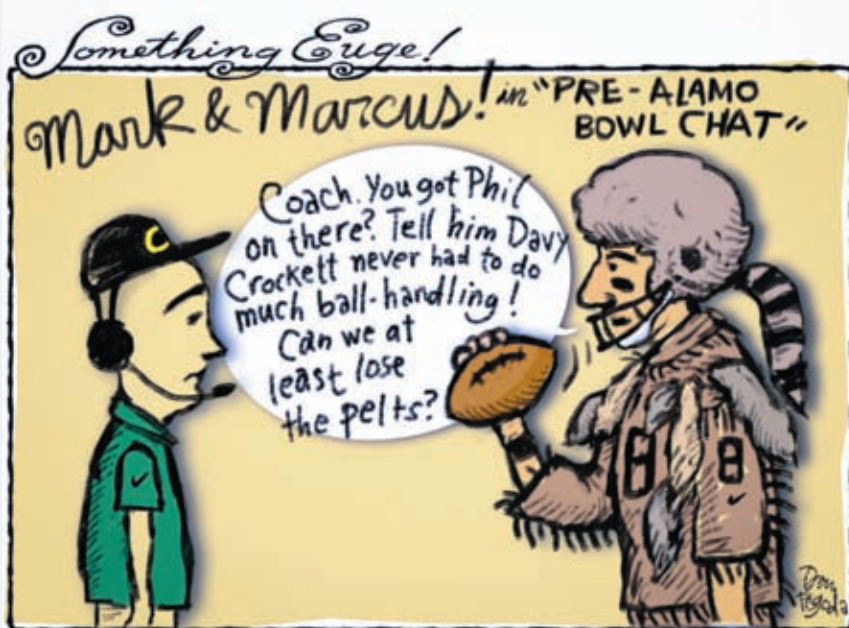
• Gov. Kitz is promising to **overhaul our state tax system** if he is re-elected; meanwhile, plans for tax reform are already being batted around in Salem. Sen. Mark Hass is proposing a sales tax in conjunction with tax rebates for the poor and an improved Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Any fair tax reform proposal is likely to get undone or diluted in our semi-functional Legislature, but it's been clear for decades that our tax system is painfully antiquated, full of idiotic tax breaks (each with its own lobby) and gives unfair advantage to large corporations and Oregon businesses that operate or bank outside our state lines.

Any species of sales tax, even one that makes fiscal sense, carries a cringe factor historically, but Oregonians now appear to be more open to the idea, particularly as a way to increase education funding, tax tourist spending and tap Oregon's billion-dollar underground economy. But beware! Replacing part or all of state income tax with a sales tax would be a boon for Oregon's wealthiest, no matter how the tax is tweaked around the edges. Thousands of Oregon's poorest residents don't even file tax returns so rebates or the EITC would be meaningless. Any legislation or ballot measure that exacerbates our shameful gap between rich and poor is bad policy.

• **Dawn Lesley's campaign** for the West Lane position on the Lane County Commission exceeded its goal of \$45,000 by the end of the year, according to an email she sent to supporters Dec. 19. Lesley is mounting a robust campaign to oust incumbent County Commissioner Jay Bozievich in 2014. Bozievich has Tea Party support and was a staunch supporter early on of fired county administrator Liane Richardson. It's good to see strong progressive candidates rising up to change the 4-1 right-wing majority on the County Commission. Lesley's campaign can be found on Facebook or see dawnlesley.com.

• From our **clean jocks department**: November and December are supposed to bring the best of the Duck football season, but this year the Ducks stumbled to two upset losses. Rather than visions of a national championship, we have been treated to snowballs, suspensions and arrests. Fortunately, other Ducks stepped up: The volleyballers battled in the NCAA tourney, the men's and women's basketball teams are off to roaring starts, and freshman cross country runner Edward Cheserek delivered that national championship. The New Year looks good, especially if the basketballers can continue their high scoring, winning ways. The competition gets stiffer right away because both the men and the women start conference play with tough road trips in January!

• Duck footballers are off to the **Alamo Bowl** Dec. 30 while the Beavers flapped off to



the Hawai'i Bowl Christmas Eve. OSU players and fans have been paddling around in the blue Pacific while UO players and fans will stay dry wandering along the famous River Walk that runs through San Antonio's downtown district. The scenic canal has given a huge boost to San Antonio's tourism, hotels, restaurants, shops and local artists. Architect Jerry Diethelm and others say such a canal would be a marvelous asset for Eugene, expanding our existing Amazon Creek canal. If you're going to San Antonio, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair — and send us photos and your observations. We've been envisioning the Emerald Canal for decades. Let's keep this idea alive.

• **Long-term unemployment** continues to plague Oregon even though our jobless rate has improved since it peaked in 2009. To date, Congress is not extending unemployment benefits in 2014, and if that happens, Oregon's economy will take another hit, more jobs will be lost and more Oregonians will seek public assistance. One of the factors that keeps the unemployment rate high is rarely mentioned: Millions of older workers are hesitant to retire, either because they lost investment equity in the Great Recession or because they fear the next crash. Optimists looking ahead a few years anticipate millions of jobs opening up and maybe even a labor shortage. But how do the long-term unemployed stay afloat until then? Cutting unemployment benefits now is a step backwards.

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