

letters

SKATER GIRLS

Thank you for your focus on the “Girls of WJ” (*EW*, 05/09). I commend them for carving out a space for themselves. As a lifelong skater, my first-ever broken bone happened at the WJ while trying to impress — I mean, keep up with — a rippin’ skater girl.

Dan Lockwood
Eugene

REBEL OR DIE

Climate disruption has become so apparent that many politicians and even corporate executives have begun saying that we can’t continue business as usual. Meanwhile, after a few palliative gestures, they are continuing business as usual.

Scientists who have been predicting for three decades that rising temperatures would cause the extreme weather events we are currently experiencing now tell us we have only a decade to prevent uncontrollable climate chaos. During these three decades concerned individuals have circulated petitions,

lobbied legislators, campaigned for climate candidates, filed lawsuits, organized boycotts and led marches to urge action on this crisis.

The stunning lack of progress from these efforts and the urgency of the situation would dictate that a new approach is in order. Non-violent civil disobedience is a tactic of last resort when an individual sees an injustice and the powers that be are not addressing the problem.

That is why a new group calling itself Extinction Rebellion has organized in 33 countries, including a chapter here in Eugene. Governments and economic systems that do not act to protect citizens cannot be supported and must be disrupted from business as usual.

Regretfully, it has come down to this. Consult your conscience and act accordingly.

Carolyn Partridge
Eugene

NRA TOADIES

“Run! Hide! Fight!”

These are the instructions our kids are getting in a school drill to prepare for an active shooter. Our kids are braver than some legislators who run for cover when their constituents ask why they don’t support gun sense legislation. They hide in the deep pockets of the NRA who fund their campaigns.

And they fight with all their might to obstruct the changes proposed in common-sense laws that would make us all safer from gun violence — red flag laws, expanded background checks, safe storage of firearms.

Instead, our kids take on the shooters themselves as Kendrick Castillo did in Colorado and Riley Howell did to save the lives of fellow classmates in North Carolina.

Shame on legislators who care more about getting elected than they do about the lives of our children. Vote them out!

Bobbie Cirel
Eugene

SLASH AND BURN

Dried-out piles of slash, hundreds of acres of barren land and soil erosion make it difficult to see how industrial timber and clear-cutting are allowed these fire-prone days.

Add the spraying of carcinogenic substances and the unstable economics of boom-and-bust practices, and one has to ask whom does this really benefit. The Dorena fire last Friday was a dangerous and unpredictable blaze; the risk to Thurston would be several-fold if the “Pedal Power” sale goes through.

The Oregonian’s February series “Polluted by Money” reports on Oregon’s dubious honor of being number one in the country for corporate contributions per capita. Could this account for our county commissioner’s languid and backseat stance on these issues? Or for the BLM, time and time again, putting out plans that over-harvest, spray and clearcut?

Last I checked, these are public officials and agencies paid for by public tax dollars and are servants of the public.

Local and Vocal

VIEWPOINT BY BOB WARREN

Killing the Initiative

TIME TO CHANGE THE TAX BREAK

“We did not lock in the design of the building... We didn’t know that what [Capstone] proposed would be so different from what they built. There was no one in the city who was watching over the illustrative image on the building permit set and then what was actually built.”

— Eugene Senior City Planner Nan Laurence, 2016

It is past time to kill the Multi-Unit Property Tax Exemption (MUPTE), which exempts some multi unit housing projects from property taxes for ten years. Or at the very least put some enforceable clawbacks in place for non-compliance. And make it non-transferable. Developers should not be able to include it in the selling price.

Out of state real estate developers know a good thing when they see it. We give away the property taxes, they build and then sell for huge profits and the new owners continue to pay no property taxes. Meanwhile, while the city gives away millions of dollars to out of state developers, it proposes taxing workers to pay for public services.

How many more massive student housing and up-scale luxury hotel/apartment projects do we want to exempt from paying property taxes? The Capstone project (13th and Olive) should, in itself, have put an end to the MUPTE, but then along came Brian Obie’s boutique hotel, apartments and shops at Fifth Street Market.

Enough is enough.

I was never invested in either side in the battle over getting a city auditor. I did not support it, mostly be-

cause I thought it was too expensive, but I was impressed by the dedication and dogged determination of the petition gatherers. Unlike paid petition people, they believed in what they were doing. They made good points about accountability, and they deserved a fair up or down vote. They did not get one.

The City Council put its measure on the ballot to defeat the citizen initiative. It was a tactical decision to kill a legitimate citizen’s ballot measure. And it sets a precedent that jeopardizes the citizen initiative process. Why work for a year or more, organize hundreds of volunteers, spend months gathering signatures and then, when it makes it to the ballot, have the City Council just kill it? So why did they do it. What was the council afraid of?

The Capstone project is a poster child MUPTE example. The developer promised an attractive, vibrant street scene. We ended up with a Soviet-era housing project on Willamette, Eugene’s “Main Street.”

And, being student housing, it did nothing to address Eugene’s affordable housing problem. And then after two years, the (out of state) developers sold it, making millions on the deal. And the new (out of state) owners continue to pay no property taxes.

I suspect there are other projects the city would just as soon not see audited. The City Hall teardown/rebuild/public square/farmers market debacle might be one. The ongoing riverfront, full employment for consultants, project might be another. And I suspect there are a lot of skeletons in the Urban Renewal District’s closet. But my money’s on the MUPTE.

Is anybody else sick and tired of hearing that a project does not “pencil out” if they have to pay property taxes?

Maybe what they really mean is, if they have to pay property taxes, they will have to settle for a more modest return on their investment. The investors would make money at a slower pace.

I’m thinking if the project does not “pencil out” while paying taxes, maybe it should not be built at all. There is a public benefit to those taxes, like funding public safety. I wonder if the projects “pencil out” for the public without them? For one, I would rather tax real estate developers than minimum wage workers.

Of course, I could be way off base here, and I hope that I am. I would like to learn the MUPTE has been great for our community and that the benefits outweigh the costs. That it has created affordable housing, and jobs, and increased commercial investment. That it spurred development in our downtown that would not have happened without it. That it was not just a huge waste of public money and a windfall for developers.

That would be great.

One way to prove it would be with an audit — a fair, impartial and independent audit. How much money did we give away, and what did we get for it? And was it worth it? That is something the city could do, but I’m betting they won’t. Maybe they don’t want to know. Maybe they fear an audit would show the MUPTE as nothing but a costly boondoggle, wasting tens, or even hundreds, of millions of taxpayer dollars and getting little or nothing in return for it. We know developers love the MUPTE, it “pencils out” nicely for them.

It would be nice to know if it “pencils out” for the rest of us as well. ■

Bob Warren retired in 2012 as the regional business development officer for Business Oregon for Lane, Lincoln, Linn and Benton counties.