

SST no hope

By Bill Deiz

The vote on the SST appropriation is set for some time before the end of this month. Exactly when is uncertain, but the outcome is of paramount (if only temporary) importance to the future growth of the Boeing Co. which is developing the plane, and to the cities of Seattle and, to a lesser extent, Portland.

In the past few weeks Oregonians (and other Americans) have been exposed to a barrage of publicity about the SST, most of it designed to "win them over" to support of the project... We've seen material featuring an American flag with the caption "build an American SST" and we've seen ads emphasizing that the Soviets already have an SST prototype that is capable of flying.

It's been estimated that the Russian plane will be ready for operation this Fall; that the British-French Concorde will be on the market within four years, and that the American version will take at least eight more years before it, too, is commercial. Meanwhile, American companies like Pan Am are talking about buying the Russian plane to keep their competitive edge.

The American project carries a price tag of roughly 1.3-billion dollars—that is the "development" phase of the project. Right now Boeing is short some \$800 million of that amount, and it is this figure Congressional leaders must decide whether or not to appropriate.

Strangely, with all the hoopla lately over the SST (the American version), little has been said about similar hoopla five years ago about a dissimilar, though also quite costly project. At that time the American people were warned that it would be unwise to "change horses in the middle of the stream" regarding our rapidly-deteriorating position in Vietnam; that we were committed and, that no matter what the ultimate consequence of our actions, we had better make the best of a bad thing. So we stayed and it's not hard to see where that is getting us. "Pacification" has been replaced by "vietnamization"; respect for the neutrality of other nations has been replaced by "protective reaction" that heady term that allows us to support military operations directly and indirectly in Cambodia and Laos...ad infinitum.

Now I don't mean by all this that I wish to compare the development of an American SST with the American role in Southeast Asia. I only wish to state that a prime argument used for continuation of the SST project today—that we have committed so much now it would be too costly to shut the project down at this point—smacks of the same type of argument that justified our presence in Vietnam at a time when most Americans were turning against the war.

Still unanswered is the question: Is it really worth it to have our own SST? True, it would mean jobs for depression-ridden Seattle, as well as for recession-ridden Oregon—an estimated 1100 jobs in Oregon alone. But let's look ahead for a minute. What happens if our SST is unable to compete commercially with other SST's? Those other countries will have plenty of time to improve their products BEFORE our first-generation product even hits the assembly lines.

So what if it's an economic flop? Those 1100 jobs will vanish overnight. There will be no more government appropriations for this white elephant; Seattle will be faced with an even grimmer economic situation, etc. etc.

And its chances of success? We are now eight years behind the Russians, four behind the British and French. We must build a



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vastly superior plane in every category to pull business away from the established leaders. How many more billions will that take?

At a time when the government is cutting back its services, when "people" programs are facing shortages of money, when ecological problems threaten to destroy us, it seems just a little strange that building our own version of a plane that is already being produced has taken on such great importance.

Aside from the dangers the plane may or may not pose to the environment, we should consider, once again, its ultimate price tag. Vietnam is teaching us the futility of pouring massive amounts of money down the drain in an effort to save an inherently hopeless situation.

We have seen billions diverted from schools, housing, jobs, slum clearance, health and welfare because of the war. Are we ready to gamble again, and risk losing more billions just so we can claim the distinction of having our own Supersonic Transport?

Let's hope not.

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Xavier Tightens Belt

It's a rare college these days that isn't in serious financial straits, and none of the college are hurting more than the small ones, the private ones, the church-related ones and the black colleges have had it, right?

Wrong. The 36 member institutions of the United Negro College Fund are showing some imaginative responses to the troubled times. They do, indeed, have serious money problems, and other difficulties to boot, but they're far from washed up, and many of them appear to be entering a period of vitality stimulated by new leadership and a spirit of optimism.

Xavier University of Louisiana is one of the. Three years ago, the 46-year-old New Orleans institution—the only predominantly black Catholic college in the country—chose Norman C. Francis as its new president. The beginning of institutional revitalization predates his tenure as president, but Francis has stepped up the pace, and Xavier is not into the kind of basic changes that both hurt and heal. By the end of this decade, it could all add up to an inspiring success story—or to funerals in the history of higher education. Francis is betting on a success story.

Norman Francis is something of a success story in himself. He used to shine shoes around the hotel in Lafayette, La., where his father was captain of the bellmen. Young Francis entered Xavier as a student in 1952 then broke the color barrier at Loyola University's law school, and went on to become Xavier's dean of men and then its vice president. At 37, he became the first black person, the first male, and the first lay Catholic, to be president of Xavier, which had been founded and operated by the Sisters of the blessed Sacrament, a religious order dedicated to the education of students from racial minorities in America.

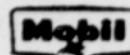
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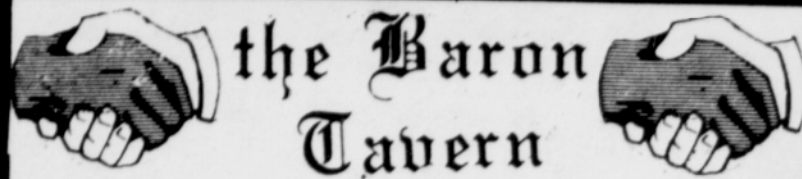
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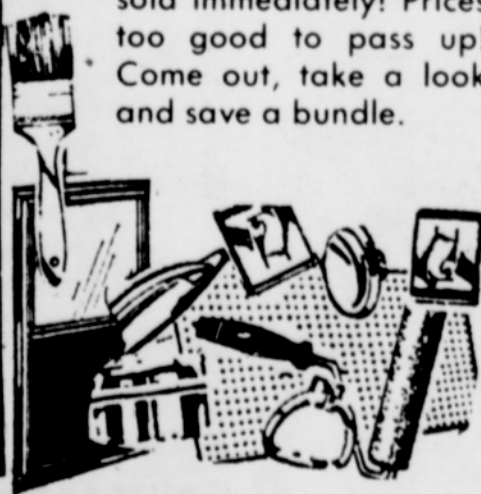
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