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Sales tax plans stir controversy



Steve Buel and Herb Cawthorne consider educational options at recent Portland School Board meeting.

by Rich Lochner
and Natasha Beck

Would a sales tax relieve high property taxes and boost Oregon's economy, as business and government groups say? Or would it be a new burden for poor and working people, as labor, farm, and community groups say? The sales tax, beaten six times at the polls, has risen again—and a majority of the state House say they could send it for voters' approval next November.

The public will get a chance to state its views on the sales tax at public hearings in Portland, March 28, at the Portland Building (1120 SW 5th at 7:30 p.m.). But just what would a sales tax do, and for whom?

Three sales tax proposals are now before the state legislature. The main backer behind each is the business-oriented Taxpayers for a Better Economy, state Representatives Tony Van Vliet (R-Corvallis) and Peter Courtney (D-Salem), and the Local Government Coalition.

Sales tax opponents fall into two camps: those who oppose the sales tax because it's regressive; and those who oppose taxes in general. The first group has organized into Oregonians United to Stop the Sales

Tax (OUSST). Members include the state AFL-CIO and several unions, the Oregon State Grange, the Oregon-Washington Farmers Union, the Gray Panthers, the Democratic Party, and the Oregon Citizens Party. Other groups opposing a sales tax that would make the poor pay more include Oregon Fair Share and the Black United Front. Anti-tax groups include the Oregon Taxpayers Union, which has backed three barely defeated tax limitation initiatives, and the Libertarian Party.

The sales tax plans share some common features. All would go into the state constitution, and could be approved or changed only by the voters. All would not tax necessities such as food, medical care, housing, and utilities. All would cut property taxes 40 to 50 percent, and limit future government growth. And all would be regressive—taxing lower incomes more heavily than lower incomes.

A 1980 California sales tax study showed differences between income classes: households making under \$20,000 spent 40 percent of that income on goods subject to the sales tax. (California has exclusions similar to those proposed in Oregon).

Based on these figures, a family making \$10-20,000 a year would pay about \$240 a year, or 1.6 percent of its income, with a four percent sales tax.

A family making \$75,000 and up, on the other hand, would pay \$760, or .67 percent of its income. If the poorer family paid the same percentage as the richer one, it would pay \$105, a difference of \$135. The same study shows a family pays more sales tax for each child it must provide for.

The sales tax is regressive because rich people can afford to save more than can hard-pressed low- and middle-income people. The sales tax also usually excludes some items used mostly by the well-off, such as legal services and private education.

Two Oregon plans deal with the fairness issue by a rebate scheme that would refund \$8 to \$40 per household member for those making under \$17,500. But it's still not equal: with a four percent tax, a family of four in the \$10,000 to \$12,500 bracket would get an \$80 refund, and still pay a higher rate than the \$75,000+ class. Critics also say many poor people who pay no income tax wouldn't apply for the rebate. (Please turn to page 6 column 1)

Buel seeks second Board term

Steve Buel, a member of the Portland School Board, believes a majority of the Board is "keeping Dr. Prophet under their thumbs, and not allowing him to really work and take care of the problems of the District."

This charge is borne out by the majority of the Board's refusal to allow Superintendent Matthew Prophet to conciliate the Jackson closure problem as he did successfully with the Tubman Middle School siting.

"I strongly support Dr. Prophet," Buel said. "He is doing a good job and could do more if he was given the freedom to make some of the changes that should be made."

One opportunity Prophet will have is to select a large number of new principals to replace those who will retire in the next year or two. "The key to better teaching is the principal," Buel said. The answer to inadequate teaching is the principal, he explained; principals evaluate the teachers and it is their responsibility to remove those who are not succeeding.

Evaluation of principals should also reflect the quality of education being provided in their schools. "This is a serious problem and one I've been talking about all along," Buel said. "There has not been a real evaluation of principals for

years; if you look at their evaluations, they are all the same. The people writing evaluations say about the same thing about all of them."

Selecting the right people for appointment to principalships will be a major factor in the District's ability to provide quality education.

Another deficit Buel sees is the broad differences in programs offered in different schools. Principals have had much leeway in choosing programs and staff. "I have developed a plan that Dr. Prophet is studying now that will change the way staff is allocated. It would create a basic elementary school including class size standards, physical education, music, improved library facilities, and certificated librarians. Then the individual schools could build on that basic program."

"This would ensure that every child, even those attending small schools, would get the same basic education."

Currently staff positions are allocated to the principal according to the number of children and the principal can determine what type of staff he wants. All adults in the building—including secretaries and janitors—are counted so the "FTE" ratio does not reflect teacher-student ratio or class size. This results in some schools having large classes, others having no physical educa-

tion, art or music teachers.

Buel counts many accomplishments in his first term on the School Board:

He proposed a task force on drug and alcohol abuse to assess the problem and make recommendations. This committee will meet for the first time on April 30th.

He persuaded the District to orient every staff member who has contact with children on child abuse so they can bring abuse problems to the attention of the authorities.

He successfully proposed centralization of counselling services, which not only rejuvenated the counselling staff, but for the first time is obtaining information on who drops out and why.

Buel persuaded the administration to set safety standards for playgrounds and equipment and to assign an inspector, as a result accidents have decreased.

The District's achievement policy in large part came from Buel's proposal that each elementary school emphasize one subject area each year for improvement.

An elementary school teacher, Buel's main concern as he serves on the School Board is providing quality education for each child in the District. He looks at every issue that comes before the Board with this principal in mind.

Parents, youth charge police abuse

by Lanita Duke

Portland police officers are charged with racism and insensitivity in the reaction to and treatment of six young people—four black and two white—last Friday night.

Around 9:45 p.m., March 18th, six juveniles between the ages of eleven and fifteen were touched with spring fever. Darryl McWillins, 14, explained the incident: "We were acting crazy, goofing off and doing silly things. We threw three rocks at a police car. We were walking home and came upon a policeman giving a guy a ticket. We ran to the alley on Ainsworth and Moore Streets. The police followed us and stopped me in that alley."

Darryl was accompanied by another youth, Frank Smith, 13.

"The police officer grabbed me by the neck and threw me down on the ground," Darryl received superficial cuts and abrasions on his face from the impact. During the course of being arrested the officer made obscene remarks to McWillins, the youth reports. "The officer said, 'Can't you find anything else to do on a Friday night, like be with your girl friend and get a h---on?'"

The parents and neighbors did not condone throwing rocks at a police car. However, the harsh treatment and obscene language was felt to be excessive and unnecessary con-

sidering the repentful nature of the boys once they were apprehended.

Mrs. McWillins said, "Darryl was wrong for throwing the rocks. But the way they apprehended him was just as wrong—such as putting his knee on his back, throwing him down and making that sexual remark to a 14-year-old boy. Another item is that all the boys that were picked up were black and the two white boys were told to go home."

The parents of one of the white youths involved, Nathan Maszy, 11, also believe that this was unjust. "All the kids were together. There was no reason for the police to single out Nathan and Donald Gibson, [13], to go home. It wasn't the idea that they didn't see a rock in Donald's or Nathan's hand. Frankie didn't have a rock and the police arrested him, anyway. The police never did see who threw the rock. All they know is that rocks were thrown and a group of kids were running."

The police took the four boys over to Frank Smith's home. His mother stated, "There has been so much happening in our neighborhood. I didn't realize the boys were involved until I saw Darryl getting out of the car in handcuffs. The other boys, Ricky, Faison, 13 and James Smith, 15, were in another police car and the officers refused to let them out until they had Darryl and Frank un-

der control.

"Darryl and Frank were not out of control. I began to ask them to take the cuffs off of Darryl and I noticed that they had the handcuffs on so tight, they couldn't take them off. They could not get one of the cuffs off. The Police kept saying something about it's getting that time of the year and with community relations the way that they are they didn't want to start this kind of thing. It seemed to me the police were saying to us parents that we were breeding a pot of summer violence."

"Again, I felt the treatment was too harsh and throughout their interaction with the police the boys were very remorseful and scared."

The neighbors, parents, and the youth who were involved all feel that if this incident had occurred in the S.W. Hills it would have been viewed differently. As a group of boys performing a very childish, thoughtless act, nothing more, nothing less. Instead, the police officers involved added insult to injury by treating the boys like criminals and showing preferential treatment to the white youths.

The Police Bureau spokesman said the police officers involved are not available for comment until the Internal Affairs complaint, filed by one of the parents, is cleared.

Educational Service District: Forgotten race draws few candidates

by Robert Lothian

The Board of the Multnomah County Educational Service District threw itself into the Jackson controversy when it ruled that the area had sufficient resources to run its own schools. Their decision helped pave the way for Jackson's secession, and the outcome of the March 29 elections, with three ESD positions contested, could influence whether other areas follow Jackson's example.

But besides its increasingly controversial boundary setting authority, ESD is also a large cooperative with a \$21 million budget. It provides computer services and school supplies at discount rates to the

County's 12 school districts, and funds special programs, including the outdoor school for sixth graders, a program for pregnant high school students, and nursing services.

Over half of ESD's budget is devoted to special education—handicapped, speech impaired, English as a Second Language (ESL) and talented and gifted programs.

After receiving recommendations from the various districts, the ESD Board, through its budget deliberations, has ultimate authority over the choice and extent of special offerings.

Dr. Howard Cherry, a North Portland orthopedic surgeon, is the incumbent running for Position

Five, Zone One, an area which covers most of North and Northeast Portland. Running against Cherry is Ron McCarty, a tax accountant and former restaurant owner.

Cherry found himself in the minority on the Board when he voted against the decision favorable to Jackson's secession. He fears it could be the beginning of a landslide secession movement on the affluent west side. This would be a "horrible blow" to the Portland School District, he said, because the loss of the affluent west side tax base would mean huge cuts for remaining schools.

"Very, very valuable" special programs should be kept, he said, but some may be threatened by the

outcome of wage negotiations which could mean cutbacks in other areas.

Cherry, who was a state legislator for 12 years, is also running as an incumbent for the Portland Community College Board.

McCarty's main concern is money. "We have to have fiscal responsibility," he said. "Monies must be spent wisely." Uncontrolled spending and waste are big problems in education, according to McCarty, and his job on the Board would be to "judge which monies are being spent foolishly" and do away with unnecessary programs. He was unwilling to specify what needed to be cut, however, saying he would have to be on the board for awhile to find out.

Alluding to the "tax revolution" and Ballot Measure 3, McCarty was concerned about the large number of foreclosures which he connects with high property taxes. He thought Ballot Measure 3 had technical problems, but he supports the idea of a property tax limitation "to keep people in their homes."

McCarty said he doubts whether he would support any new secession movements. "I need more facts," he said. "I haven't totally made up my mind."

John Sweeney, a tree trimmer with the Portland Park Bureau, is an incumbent running unopposed for the at-large Position Six. Sweeney feels that fears of a landslide secession movement are un-

founded. The ESD Board's decision in the Jackson case, he said, "was not a blanket approval" for all districts that might want to pull out. Each case must be judged on its merits, but "if they met the criteria I would tend to go along with it," he said.

Sweeney thinks the talented and gifted program should be expanded to include more than the present three percent of students who qualify for the more exciting and challenging subjects. It would provide an incentive, he said, for some students to stay in school.

Position seven covers the west side, and secession is the big issue there. Pat Dooling, vice-president (Please turn to page 14 column 3)