

OPINION

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The Portland Observer
USPS 959-680
Established 1970
4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.,
Portland, OR 97211



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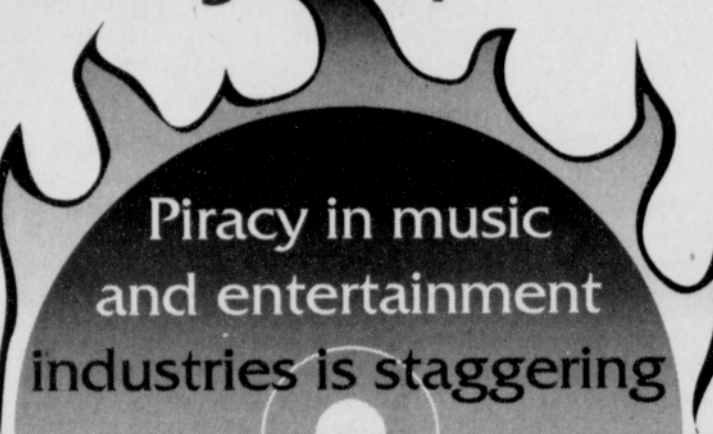
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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Portland Observer PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208
Periodical Postage paid in Portland, OR Subscriptions are \$60.00 per year
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Buy It, Don't Burn It

BEWARE Changing Tax System Fails



Piracy in music and entertainment industries is staggering

When the boundaries expand, so too must the rules. The issue of copyright infringement through illegal downloading and duplication of copyrighted material — be it music, movies, books or other goods — is critically important and often

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr. and the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition are greatly concerned over the growing issue of piracy in the music and entertainment industries through the illegal downloading and duplication of copyrighted materials.

Each month more than two billion music files are downloaded from the internet and 60 percent of those are burned onto CD-

Rs. "We live in an age of rapidly expanding technology and innovation. And with all the convenience, possibility and promise this technology brings, we also encounter new problems and challenges. When the boundaries expand, so too must the rules. The issue of copyright infringement through illegal downloading and duplication of copyrighted material — be it music, movies, books or other goods — is critically important and often overlooked," Jackson stated.

"For some, this issue may simply be a matter of education — the fact is, most people don't even realize that unauthorized downloading or duplication of copyrighted material is illegal. Just because you have a nice computer with Internet access and a CD burner does not make it any less so. Most people wouldn't walk into a record store and steal a CD. Piracy is no different, yet its prevalence is staggering," continued Jackson.

"The ramifications of these practices are much broader than most people realize. It affects everyone from the artists and songwriters to the large-scale consumer electronic and technology companies. But those hardest hit by this form of wholesale theft through illegal copying are the small urban record stores, the young artists trying to break into the industry and even the truck drivers and laborers who transport and distribute the music we love.

"We owe it to everyone affected by this form of theft to educate our friends and family on this important issue. Do the right thing — buy it, don't burn it."

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BY CHARLES SHEKETTOFF

The recession that began in 2001 has resulted in new calls for Oregon to revamp its tax system to add more "stability." Most of Oregon's tax revenues come from the personal income tax, supplemented in small part by the Lottery and corporate income taxes. When the economy turns sour, so does the state's primary revenue stream.

The demand for stability is a straw man for a change in our tax system that may not lead to improvement or better-supported public services, and is a thinly veiled attempt to duck the real culprit in Oregon's revenue misfortune. Some of the loudest demands for stability are coming from the same people who sold the legislature and the voters the so-called "Education Stability Fund" that will barely fund education and will add little stability during the next downturn.

The Education Stability Fund gives stability a bad name. Years ago the Legislative Assembly adopted seven "guiding principles" for Oregon's tax system: (1) ability to pay; (2) fairness; (3) efficiency; (4) even distribution; (5) equitable; (6) adequacy; and (7) flexibility.

Oregon can address stability without raising taxes by converting the kicker refund into a source for future rainy days.

Stability was not part of the mix, and that's not surprising. The economy is not stable and never will be. During better-than-expected times, Oregon sends unanticipated tax revenues primarily to our wealthiest residents. Adding insult to this fiscal injury, the Legislature is loath to save for rainy days.

The state's kicker law and reluctance to save during good times made Oregon uniquely unprepared for the decline in state revenues. During the unprecedented economic growth of the 1990s, Oregon sent \$1.4 billion back to Oregon taxpayers instead of saving it for a rainy day fund. About two-thirds of that refund went to the wealthiest taxpayers.

If Oregon had saved all the unanticipated revenues since first distributing them in 1985, our rainy day fund would have \$2.8 billion today. The rainy day fund would have provided Oregonians with stability, without resorting to new or increased taxes.

While Oregon's tax system has tremendous room for improvement, Oregon can address stability without raising taxes by converting the kicker refund into a source for future rainy days.

The next time someone tries to sell you new tax in the name of stability, tell them you have a better prescription for making Oregon's system stable and able to weather future rainy days.

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