

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Independence Day, 1996: What is next?

The ideal of Independence requires resistance to the herd spirit now so widespread, to our worship of quantity and indifference to quality, to our unthinking devotion to organization, standardization, propaganda, and advertising.

Daniel Gregory Mason, Artistic Ideals, 19277

Tomorrow we — our nation, our state, our community, ourselves — will celebrate the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Much has happened in the 220 years since that declaration. Where do we stand today?

Has the herd spirit already taken over in Oregon? Before you say "no", take a look at the state's current priorities: Increased spending on prisons; decreased spending on education; closure of 65 state parks. In spite of those who want to blame the government for this situation, it behooves us to remember that these issues were decided by the voters.

It was the voters who approved measures to expand the prison system and require inmates to work — measures requiring more money than good schools.

It was the voters who approved a measure to cap school taxes at \$5/thousand of assessed property value, giving big business a huge tax break while helping to promote conditions that will keep those new prisons occupied.

It was the voters who said no to a measure that would have allowed a small amount of gas tax to be spent on parks — guaranteeing inadequate funds to maintain Oregon's most outstanding, and most visited physical features.

In each case, there were voices explaining the future consequences of these decisions. And in each case, a majority of the voters listened only to the big money campaigns that conned people into thinking that prisons would make Oregonians safe; that a good educational system could be maintained for more students with less money; that all gas taxes should be for roads and none for the destinations reached by those roads. In other words, as long as somebody screams long enough and loud enough about how our tax money is "wasted", why bother to evaluate those claims.

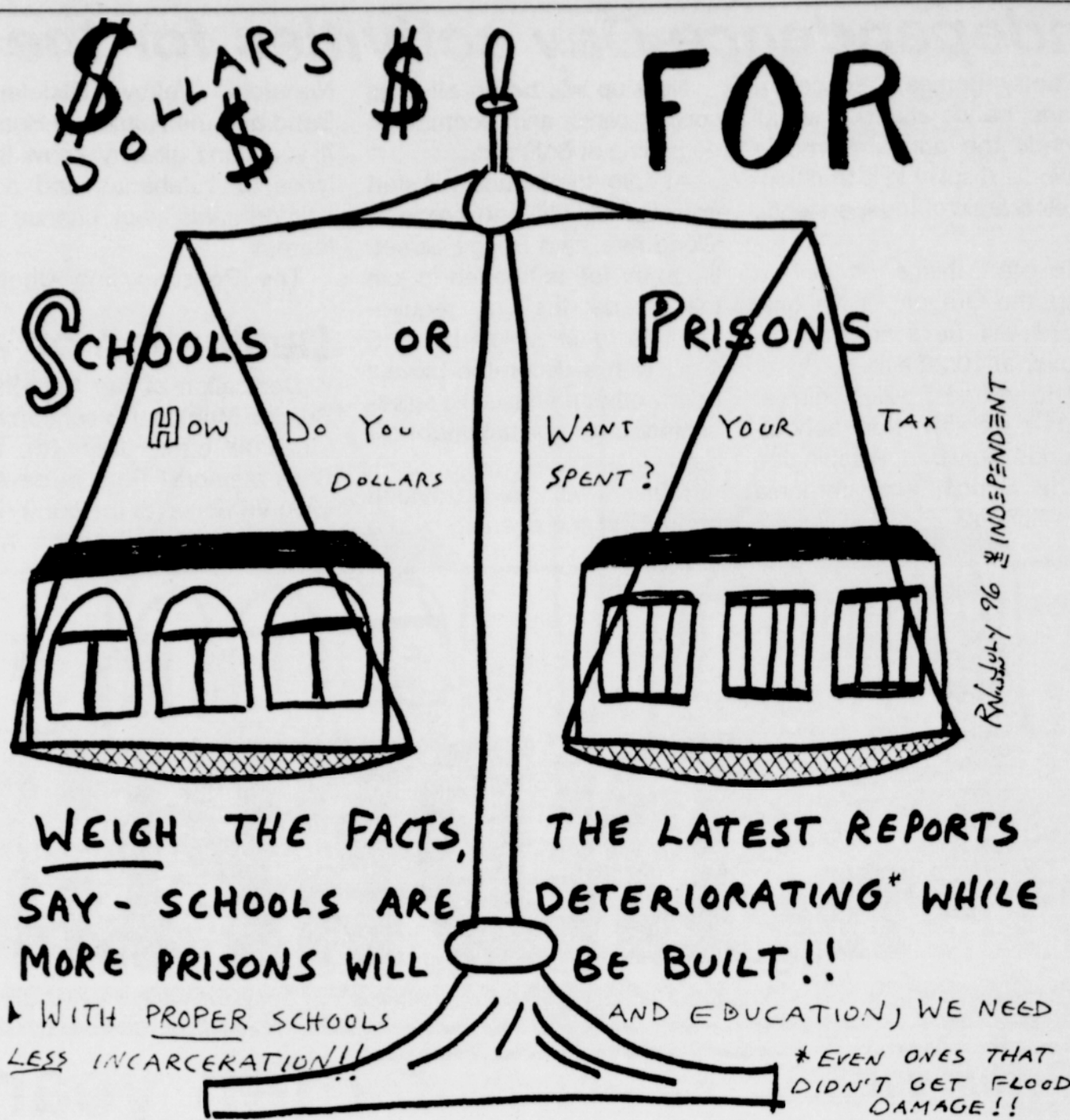
Is this the herd spirit?

Our founding fathers never suggested that democracy would be easy...and it isn't. Majority rule is the basis of our government and most Americans wouldn't want that changed.

But democracy requires thinking voters, people who will analyze what is said and what is written, people who can listen to a voice of caution even if it isn't as loud as a television commercial. Without that, voters can even be talked into rule by the minority, as Oregon voters were when they approved a two-thirds majority as a requirement for legislative tax increases. Now, with only one-third plus one, the minority can rule.

Independence was hard won and freedom must always be defended, but they're worth the effort.

It would be a shame to throw away 220 years of effort to herd spirit.



Thoughts on Independence & Freedom

What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence? It is not our frowning battlements, our bristling sea coasts, our army and our navy. These are not our reliance against tyranny. All of those may be turned against us without making us weaker for the struggle. Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in us. Our defence is in the spirit which prized liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands everywhere. Destroy this spirit and you have planted the seeds of despotism at your own doors. Familiarize yourselves with the chains of bondage and you prepare your own limbs to wear them. Accustomed to trample on the rights of others, you have lost the genius of your own independence and become the fit subjects of the first cunning tyrant who rises among you.

Abraham Lincoln
Speech, Edwardsville, Illinois, Sept. 11, 1858

Freedom is an indivisible word. If we want to enjoy it, and fight for it, we must be prepared to extend it to everyone, whether they are rich or poor, whether they agree with us or not, no matter what their race or the color of their skin.

Wendell Wilkie
Radio Address, Oct. 20, 1942