

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Vote by Mail update — A Guest Editorial —

By Ruth Burleigh, former mayor of Bend; William H. Williams, President and CEO of Bear Creek Corporation, Medford; and John Byrne, President Emeritus of Oregon State University.

Let's review two key numbers:

1. Estimated number of Oregonians who support Vote-by-Mail for all elections: Nearly 2 million (70 percent of voters).
2. Estimated taxpayer savings, per year, of Vote-by-Mail: Up to \$2 million.

The Vote-by-Mail Citizens' Commission, twelve Oregonians from all areas and affiliations in the state, spent six months gathering information and listening to testimony about Vote-by-Mail. The commission overwhelmingly supported its adoption for all elections.

For 15 years, Oregonians have voted by mail. It's increased turnout. It's met the highest standards of integrity. It's saved millions of our tax dollars.

Last year, as the nation watched, Oregon held the country's first Vote-by-Mail election for a federal office, electing a new U.S. Senator. Not a shred of evidence suggested any problems — and turnout shattered all previous records for a special election.

There will always be Oregonians who dislike Vote-by-Mail, and we respect their sentiments. But even many of them recognize the folly of maximizing voter confusion and wasting millions of dollars.

Many Oregonians tell us they used to oppose Vote-by-Mail, but now like it. As one recently explained, "I can sit at my kitchen table, on my time, and go through all those ballot measures and candidates so that I'm as knowledgeable as possible. No more surprises at the polling place."

Other Oregonians tell us they'll never like Vote-by-Mail, but they recognize that most Oregonians do. "Let's just do it, and get on with things," said a La Grande man.

The only place in Oregon where we see people who used to support Vote-by-Mail...even champion it...but who now are diehard opponents is in the Oregon Legislature.

The Legislature now has a chance to decide on a Vote-by-Mail bill, HB 3086. What does the bill do? It simply lets Oregonians decide the issue for themselves in May 1998 - at the next polling place election.

Senator Randy Miller used to be Vote by Mail champion. He now opposes it and, as chair of the Senate Rules and Elections Committee, he holds the fate of HB 3086 in his hands.

The Oregon Senate has 30 members. Nearly two-thirds have indicated they will support this bill...if they get the chance.

Senate Pres. Brady Adams could use his authority to allow a vote on HB 3086, but will he?

Call and find out. Sen. Miller can be reached at 503-986-1713. Sen Adams' number is 503-986-1600.

Remember: The money it costs to run elections is our money. Tell them they're entitled to their opinions, but the choice shouldn't be theirs...it should be ours.

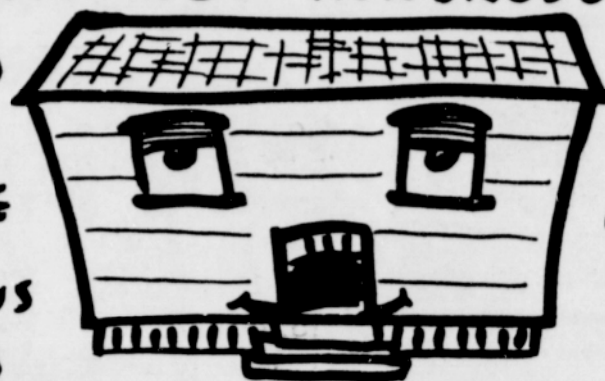
SO I'M AN OLD BUILDING ...

THAT DOESN'T MEAN I'M NOT CAPABLE - AFTER ALL IN EUROPE, THOUSAND YEAR OLD BUILDINGS ARE CONSIDERED GREAT! ON THE EAST COAST, BUILDINGS HUNDREDS OF YEARS OLD ARE USED DAILY...

BUT HERE

SOME OF US BUILDINGS

50-70 YEARS YOUNG ARE CONSIDERED DECREPIT!!



IN VERNONIA WELL BUILT ONLY

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

THE INDEPENDENT

RELIGION - JUNE 97

CREATE COMMUNITY!

— PRESERVATION IS PROGRESS TOO! —

The Josi Report

By Rep. Tim Josi
Oregon Representative, Dist. 2

After the 1995 legislative session, I was appointed to an interim Transportation Committee charged with the task of analyzing ODOT's efficiency. We were also asked to determine the need, if any, for an increase in taxes used to fund Oregon's highway system. When this legislative session started in January I was also appointed to the Transportation Committee.

Rep. Bob Montgomery, one of the most conservative Republicans in the legislature, chaired both committees. I remember him stating at the beginning of the interim committee that he was against any increase in gas taxes unless it was demonstrated to him that ODOT was operating efficiently. And he was not sold on the need for raising gas taxes even if ODOT had turned itself around. What Rep. Montgomery and the rest of the committee found was an agency in the process of becoming leaner and more efficient. We also found that Oregon's highway system was in the process of falling apart because our gas tax had not been raised since 1991. Compared with our neighboring states we don't measure up when it comes to investing in our highway system. Here is how we rank in total equivalent cents per gallon; Oregon - 27.2 cents, Washington - 91.7 cents, California - 88.6 cents, Idaho - 51 cents, Nevada - 77.3 cents, Arizona - 67.1 cents and Montana - 56 cents.

As a result of our findings, the Transportation and Revenue Committee developed HB 3163 which is a funding proposal designed to reverse the deterioration of Oregon's roads, bridges and transit systems. It includes a 3-cent increase in the gasoline tax in each of the next three years, with an equivalent increase in the weight-mile tax paid by trucks. The plan would increase the current \$15-a-year vehicle registration fee to \$35. And it would impose a new monthly "access fee" of \$1.20 per month on subscribers of telephone service.

The access fee is a controversial aspect of the proposal. Because of a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 1980, income from gas taxes and vehicle registration

fees is dedicated to roads. Revenue from the access fee could be used for other transportation-related purposes. HB 3163 would dedicate these funds to pay for 100 additional state troopers, high-speed rail planning in the Willamette Valley, and transit programs for the elderly and disabled.

The trucking industry would like to scrap the weight-mile tax system and replace it with a flat per-gallon tax on diesel fuel. They argue that Oregon's truck taxes are already among the highest in the nation and that the weight-mile system is inefficient and vulnerable to evasion. They are correct. However, the Transportation Committee voted 4-3 against their proposal. The advantage of the weight-mile system is that the tax each truck pays corresponds closely to the damage it does to Oregon roads. Any system for taxing trucks should preserve that principle.

Nationally recognized estimates of damage to our roads is allocated on the following split: 60-percent for cars and 40-percent for trucks. Currently, Oregon's truckers are the closest in the nation in paying for their share of the damage to our highways; through the weight-mile tax system they are paying for 38-percent of the damage caused to our roads. I voted against their proposal because it would have shifted the cost of maintaining our roads onto the backs of the motoring public.

Now the trucking industry is lobbying hard to kill the entire bill. I am receiving postcards from trucking businesses throughout my legislative district. The postcards state in bold letters that "they are opposed to any increases in Oregon's Truck Tax, Oregon's trucking industry will not stand for being the highest taxed in the country any longer." Legislators are faced with a dilemma: Is it right to align Oregon with the other states in having the motoring public pay a disproportionate share of the damage caused to our highways?

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