

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

How to help the Japanese

Many have been riveted to the news about the 8.9 earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Seeing pictures of all the destruction and reading about the number of deaths and injuries is heart wrenching.

If you want to send money to the Japanese tsunami relief effort, be sure your money actually gets there and helps someone. Read the article on page 1 about scams already occurring to get money that does NOT end up in Japan.

Many good agencies can use your help, however. One that does good work and is based in Portland, is Mercy Corps. Working with their Japanese partner, Peace Winds, they are setting up "balloon shelters" that can house 600 people, and sending emergency tents, water, food and blankets. To get updates from Mercy Corps, you can text "corps" to 30644.

You can also text "redcross" to 90999 to make a \$10 donation to the American Red Cross, text "japan" or "quake" to 80888 to donate \$10 to the Salvation Army. To get \$10 to World Vision, text "4japan" to 20222.

Don't know how to text donations, but want to send money? Be sure to verify that the charity is registered with the state. Get the name, address and telephone number of the organization. Ask exactly how the money will be used. Ask what percentage of contributions will actually be spent on the stated purpose.

Oregon Attorney General John Kroger has a lot of good information on his website about charitable donations and organizations. Go to <http://www.doj.state.or.us/charigroup/index.shtml> for tips, a charity database, and information on how much of the money collected by each charity passes on to those it is designated to help.

The only thing Japan and Vernonia's Flood of 2007 have in common is that, in both cases, recovery will take years. If you can, consider a monthly amount to help over a longer time frame.

To allay fears: Oregon Emergency Management says there is no cause for concern about radiation from the Japan nuclear powerplants reaching us here. No one is being advised to take precautionary measures and we are advised not to take any anti-radiation drugs as they can do more harm than good.

— NOTICE —

The INDEPENDENT publishes on the first and third Thursday of each month. Because March has five Thursdays, there will be three weeks before the next issue, on April 7, 2011.

The deadline for the April 7 issue is Friday, April 1.



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



Many people think "economics" is too complex for the average person. It really isn't, but there are two very important economic facts that should be clarified:

1. Social Security did not create the deficit.

The federal deficit was created by increased spending on two wars and Medicare Part D, while reducing income with big tax cuts for the wealthy (in 2001 and 2003).

Since the GOP needed to obscure their fiscal irresponsibility, and have long wanted to "privatize" Social Security, a dual purpose is served by describing Social Security as a "budget busting entitlement". This is a lie, not a misunderstanding.

Social Security does not, and never has contributed to the federal deficit. Surplus Social Security funds have been used to help pay for wars in Vietnam, Iraq, etc., but it is essential to note that the funds have been repaid on schedule. Like other pension funds, the trustees invest surplus funds to increase its value, but – unlike other pension funds – the money doesn't go to Wall Street. It is loaned to the federal government and is repaid in the same way as a loan from China. Does this provide a clue as to why the GOP wants to "privatize" Social Security?

An adjustment is needed to keep Social Security healthy and reliable beyond 2035 (The last one was in 1984.). The easiest way to do that is

to increase the top wage level to whatever the actuarial tables indicate is needed for the time span used. Currently, the tax is paid on the first \$106,800 a taxpayer earns in a year, and nothing on additional earnings. The loudly touted "need" to increase the retirement age or decrease the benefit is another lie.

2. Public employees did not cause the recession.

The recession was caused by greed. Already wealthy people (not all, just the greedy ones) and corporations wanted more, more, and more, so they contributed money to politicians for designer tax havens, and to weaken or eliminate regulations that interfered with their previously illegal financial transactions. These nearly valueless transactions, in conjunction with unaffordable sub-prime mortgages (which should also have been illegal), caused the Wall Street crash and the recession.

State pension funds are invested in Wall Street and lost value in the same way as those of individuals who invested their 401Ks in mutual funds or stocks. The loss of value didn't eliminate a state's legally contracted pension obligations, however. The pensions are deferred compensation for services rendered, and must still be paid, which means a state may need to use funds that had been budgeted for other, non-contract expenses.

According to many of TV's talking heads, Social Security and public employee pensions harm the economy, and must be cut in order to "share

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