

EDITORIAL

Giddy with Power

You were probably hoping to breathe a sigh of relief now that May is here. Your individual taxes are probably paid. Maybe you even got a return. And even though Tax Freedom Day, when Americans finally finish earning enough income to pay off their taxes, fell on April 30 this year, two days later than in 2006, at least it's behind us. Whew.

But don't get complacent. The Legislature is still in session — so hold on to your wallets. Despite the fact that Oregon already ranks as the 13th highest spending state per-capita in the nation (according to *Governing Magazine Sourcebook 2006* using U.S. Census Bureau numbers), and despite the fact that revenues are up by \$2 billion, Gov. Ted Kulongoski has proposed \$567 million in new tax increases.

“We are not only witnessing a flood of tax increase bills,” says Senator Larry George, R-Sherwood, “we are seeing bills to make it easier for future tax increases to pass, such as repealing the double majority property tax voting requirements.”

And don't expect relief at the federal level. An Oregon taxpayer would pay \$2,571 more in federal taxes under one Congressional budget proposal, with most of the increases a result of not renewing the Bush tax cuts.

According to Jason Williams of the Taxpayer Association, there are still millions of dollars in new state tax increases being considered. Over the last months the state Legislature has had public hearings to break the Measure 5 property tax limits, create an impact fee on new homes, create an excise tax on new home construction, create a real estate transfer tax, change the kicker tax refund so it would return less to taxpayers, renew the 3 percent utility tax on your electric bill, eliminate the double majority tax protection for special elections, raise the corporate minimum tax for just existing in Oregon as a business, increase the cigarette tax, increase the cigar tax, and place expiration dates (sunsets) on many of the tax credits the public enjoys.

“Not only are high taxes a problem in Oregon, but there are also hundreds of fees and other charges piled on,” adds Representative Linda Flores, R-Clackamas.

And did we mention the \$25 million in additional local taxes on the May ballot?

There is a strange irony in the voters' willingness to elect public officials with a stated agenda diametrically opposed to the voters' most recent expressions of public policy. In the past five years voters have twice turned back massive tax increases (Measures 28 and 30). How many times must voters deny tax increases before their elected representatives will listen?

One thing that seems to particularly irk Oregon voters is when they are pestered repeatedly to revote on the same issues — as though legislators are asking, “You didn't really mean that, did you?” Usually Oregon voters say, “Yes, we did mean it,” with a resounding vote count.

But having finally taken control of the House, Senate and governor's office and all the major state offices, giddy Democrats may have overplayed their hand. In addition to the massive tax increases and new government programs, Democrats are also challenging voters over the constitutional provision they overwhelmingly approved restricting marriage as between one man and one woman (Measure 36). And, at the top of Dems' list: a challenge to the voters' substantial reform of land use regulation that requires the state to either pay for the taking of the use of one's property or refrain from the taking (Measure 37). This voter reform was approved by an even greater margin.

Why would voters hand the reins of power to tax-happy Democrats who disregard their constituents' approved policies? Perhaps it is the low esteem in which voters hold Republicans after listening to their promises of fiscal responsibility, efficient government and less government intrusion on personal lives and then seeing them fail to deliver on any of them. Having said one thing and done the opposite, Republicans must shoulder a good portion of the blame for the two largest tax increases in the history of the state, the unprecedented growth in government expenditures, and the excessive health and retirement benefits for the public employee unions. Yes, these were all Democrat initiatives, but Republicans were in control. Even with virtually every Democrat voting for these "tax and spend" initiatives (and they did), the complicity of the Republicans was still required to give them a majority vote.

Now Democrats are in control and their goals seem to be to undo everything that you, the voters, have approved over the last five years. Frankly, there is little else of significance that they have tried to pass.

Democrats have also introduced legislation to gut the popular Measure 37. What has happened between the adoption of Measure 37 in November 2004 and now that requires nullifying your votes and discarding your rights under the measure? Only about 1.2 percent, or 730,000 acres of 61 million acres, of Oregon is currently developed. If every Measure 37 claim is approved (and they won't be) and if every acre of every Measure 37 claim winds up being developed (and they won't be), the total acreage developed in Oregon will still be less than 1.2 percent. But Democrats and their radical environmental supporters have gained the upper hand and are about to teach the voters a lesson — apparently you aren't smart enough to deal with land use issues.

Finally, legislation has been introduced to hinder your use of the ballot initiative. Apparently voters have been irresponsible in passing Measures 28, 30, 36, and 37. You have demonstrated that you can't be trusted with public policy, that you are not sophisticated enough to understand what is best for you, that you cannot be trusted to use the ballot initiative correctly. As a result, its use will be taken away from you.

Hold on to your wallets ... and your rights ... the Oregon Legislature is in session.