

Editorial

Frogwater Themes

Do you suppose there's a good Oregon Pinot that goes well with froglegs? Because here in "progressive Oregon" the frog should be just about finished boiling.

You've no doubt heard the saying: "Put a frog in boiling water, and he'll try to jump out, but put a frog in cool water and turn up the heat a little at a time, and he won't notice the heat and try to get out until it's too late.

Advocacy groups in Oregon have been adept at turning up the heat on issues a little at a time, and Oregon media has (unwittingly?) played along, choosing topics, headlines, photos, words and phrases that facilitate agenda changes seeping in slowly...but effectively.

Key themes are these: Money and business are bad. Use of natural resources is bad. Religion is bad.

In a state still leading in unemployment, in a state still not clear of a debilitating recession, in a state where job gains have not yet caught up to the years of job losses, one might expect a more practical outlook on economics. In a state so proud to be progressive, one might expect more tolerance, less bigotry. But the frog is already chest deep in very hot water.

Frogwater Theme One—Money and business are bad.

The state's leading newspaper took two opportunities recently to pound home this favorite theme. First, Portland mayoral candidate Jim Francesconi was chastised for collecting too much money, too aggressively, from too many businessmen. Almost anywhere else in the country political watchers would likely view Francesconi's 2,000+ contributors as exceptionally good politicking, evidence of his determination to win and his ability to connect with important constituencies.

Our take—money is the mother's milk of politics. Always has been; always will be. There is nothing wrong with making political contributions. In fact, more people should make whatever contributions they can afford and make their voices heard.

Early and complete disclosure is the best way to avoid the potential corrupting influence of money. But efforts to take money *out* of politics usually send the game underground. In the '90s, Oregon's campaign finance reforms, limiting contributions to \$100 per person, instead became an effective incumbent protection plan. They were later ruled unconstitutional. This year's presidential campaign will offer solid evidence that you can change the rules, but the game will remain the same. McCain-Feingold campaign finance reforms to curb soft money campaigning are being widely and wildly circumvented, with international financier George Soros leading the charge on a number of liberal causes.

Second, the same newspaper laid into the University of Oregon for spending private dollars on athletic recruitment. But the University's football program makes money, bringing dollars into the college, not taking them out. Academics may take a backseat in the media spotlight, but these expenses cause no harm to academic programs. It's entirely likely that U of O's successful athletic programs have been a tremendous asset to the school's reputation, helping to draw better students in both athletics and academics.

Our take—sometimes you've got to spend money to make money, and that's okay. If private dollars are being used as seed money to build a money-making athletic program, and NCAA rules are being followed, then all's well.

Frogwater Theme Two—Use of natural resources is bad.

Sen. Wyden and others recently crafted a plan to designate vast areas of Mt. Hood National Forest as a national park. There's a thought—close off all additional uses of this outstanding natural resource, and instead invite gajillions of outside visitors to tramp through it and park their RVs and campers on its slopes.

Meanwhile in southern Oregon, timber from the state's worst forest fire, the Biscuit Fire, still lies on the ground, burnt and insect damaged—wasted—while local residents struggle to find work and feed their families. First it burned, now it rots and decays, rather than being harvested for jobs and profit—a continuing insult to any productive, working person.

Our take—a quote from southern Oregon rancher Stacy Davies, “All true wealth begins with the natural resources of the land. All economies are built on the wise use of resources.”

Yes, things like ranches, ski resorts, golf courses, restaurants, lumber mills, and mines may look “ugly” to some, but to others they mean jobs, security, a way of life, a means to life in Oregon.

That's right, *extracting* resources, to use a favorite phrase of radical preservationists, is perfectly fine, especially when done in a sustainable manner. Lots of things are ugly—steaming heaps of cow dung, hernia surgery, bus exhaust—and we still tolerate them to achieve important objectives. Self-absorbed urbanites should simply avert their eyes to the realities of natural resource use, if their over-sensitivities are offended by someone else's productivity.

Frogwater Theme Three—Religion is bad

This is also a local favorite, brought to the forefront by molestation charges against the Catholic Church and more recently by the gay marriage debate.

Multnomah County's decision to proceed with gay marriages spawned protests and a recall effort against commissioners who turned the Oregon Constitution on its head with

their illegal, preemptive interpretation of the law. *At the least*, it appeared these commissioners would face the music at election time.

But one candidate, a former Baptist minister, may not get support from many in the Portland community because he's a member of the Christian Coalition. Let's see now—a fascist who flouts the law or a former minister? Which one is scarier? Religious intolerance apparently has reached a point here where it is outright unacceptable to be Christian. Isn't that why this country's first settlers left Europe—to avoid just that sort of religious bigotry?

God forbid that based on your religious beliefs you state out loud in polite company that a fetus is a living baby, or that assisted suicide is murder, or that gay unions are not marriages. These views will not be tolerated. And by the way, don't bring God up at all. Freedom of religion has nearly ceased to matter in this state.

These themes are near to a full boil in Oregon, and it may be a good time to look for a nice Pinot to go with those froglegs. But the solution is quick and easy—an ice cold bucket of truth, stated *repeatedly*, clearly, coolly:

Money and profits are not bad—business and economic growth are good things, natural resources are the base of economic growth. And organized religion is a positive community force.