

## EDITORIAL

### **TITLE: A Thorny Rose**

Maybe Winston Churchill was wrong when he said, “Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried.” Maybe democracy is fatally flawed, especially when democracy is attached to its essential partner, capitalism. At least, that’s what a couple of hundred thousand progressive, anti-corporate transplants in Multnomah County would have you believe. That’s what their leader Erik Sten would have you believe.

The results of a decade of anti-corporate policies in downtown Portland are in, and of course, they’re not pretty. In 1990, a business survey reported 110,000 jobs in the city’s financial westside core, the heart of downtown. In 2004, the Portland Business Alliance survey found 82,497 jobs in downtown Portland, a loss of almost 30,000. A loss of 30 percent of the jobs in the city’s downtown core is huge. Big numbers. A depression. And remember that during most of those years—the 90s—the metropolitan area, the region and the nation were thriving.

Karl Marx wrote in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “History repeats itself the first time as tragedy, then second as farce.” The tragedy (under Katz) was the loss of jobs from 1990-2004; the farce (under Potter) is the city leadership’s current response to the economic crisis. The place has become a cartoon.

In May, the Oregonian’s front page headline and accompanying photos sensationally juxtaposed Columbia Sportswear CEO Tim Boyle and Portland Mayor Tom Potter, with the CEO telling the politician to “fix the city.” Above and below the fold were these two stories: Commissioner Randy Leonard taxing cell phones, and city council unanimously voting to make all elections publically funded.

Only days earlier, the Oregonian reported, in a poll conducted by Tim Hibbitts, that Tom Potter’s approval rating neared 70 percent. And that 70 percent approval rating is exactly the problem.

What ails Portland, when you add up the votes, is nothing more or less than this: 200,000 transplants, backed up by willing native accomplices, who have moved here to try to turn an area of 2.3 million people into an experiment that until recently has only been attempted in towns the size of Eugene, Ore., or Jackson Hole, Wyoming—towns one-tenth the size of the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan area.

How is the experiment working? So far, so good. Because, in military terms, the no-growthers, the latte leftists, are in control of the key real estate, the region’s center (Multnomah County), the high ground, something military generals, especially Civil War generals knew to be critical. Control the center, and it is difficult to counterattack.

So can a mere 200,000 or so voters who want to opt out of the world economy really deny the interests of a vibrant area of 2.3 million? No. But Multnomah County isn’t just a

thorn in the side of those dwindling business owners who still remain there. It's also become a metropolitan problem, a regional problem, and a federal problem, which means our leaders, both in government and in business, are beginning to think creatively about how to prune back the Rose City and its surrounding county.

Multnomah County is a federal problem because it concerns President Bush. By a vote of 4 –1 the city council voted in April to pull out of the Joint Terrorism Task Force. The problem deepened when the city council vote threatened the closely cultivated relationship between the President and Oregon's Jr. Senator, Gordon Smith. Smith met privately with Mayor Potter on a recent Portland Business Alliance trip to Washington DC about his council's recent "stunt" and to explain to Potter how cooperative or uncooperative the Bush administration might be in future dealings with Portland. Votes have consequences.

Multnomah County is also a regional problem. It's fast becoming a problem for Washington state governor Christine Gregoire. Washington state, home to 10 Fortune 500 companies, is ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation in per capita income (Oregon 36<sup>th</sup>) and annually exports \$34 billion dollars worth of goods (Oregon \$11 billion). Washington state is committed to the global economy and committed to providing the infrastructure needed for a newly vibrant region of their state, Clark County. In the last 10 years the population of Clark County has risen from 250,000 residents to 400,000. More than half the increase in population has come from the Portland area, and many of those who moved possess high incomes and personal wealth.

The vibrancy of southwest Washington is directly on the radar of Washington officials. And despite the fact that Gregoire took office and remains in office under the most unusual circumstances, she still found time to express the bottom line vision of her state—that Washington remain in the forefront of the global economy.

Gregoire explained it simply when she endorsed Washington State University Vancouver as one of the state's newest four-year universities. *"Washington citizens must have the educational opportunities they need to compete for good jobs that Washington's economy has created. The expansion of the WSU and UW schools in Clark and Pierce counties responds to regional workforce needs and contributes to the state's economic vitality by preparing highly educated, well-trained workers."*

Word from Olympia is that Washington state leaders are not about to have the fastest growing area of their dynamic state not served by adequate infrastructure—and that goes beyond higher education. Gov. Gregoire and Washington leaders want to build a third bridge, potentially a toll road, across the Columbia River to serve the growing thousands of commuters who live in Washington but still commute to Oregon for work. Washington's leaders are concerned about speed, about moving their residents from "home to work" and "work to home," about keeping up with the rhythm of the global economy.

Oregon leaders, however, led by Multnomah County's Cong. Earl Blumenauer, responded to the Evergreen state's ambitions. Their answer: No. Their solution instead is to remodel the Interstate Bridge, and, of course, include a light rail lane, a bike lane, a dog lane, and a fern lane.

We jest about the fern lane, ...okay, and the dog lane, but barely.

Oregon's response to Washington's vision was what you might expect from residents who don't want to be part of the global economy, who are content living in a state with only one Fortune 500 company. As usual, Oregon's governor, Ted Kulongoski, remains cowed by the no-growth Multnomah County mob. But stay tuned, because the fight over "crossing" the river will dramatize, in a way that maybe no other debate has done to date, the differing ambitions of the "globalists" vs. the "no-growthers." Sadly for Oregonians, on this the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "Lewis and Clark" expedition, it is Washington state that owns the expansive vision closer to Jefferson and Lewis.

Here in Oregon, Multnomah County is especially a thorn in the side of its neighbor counties, Washington, Clackamas, Yamhill, Columbia, and Hood River. Problems multiply when the Portland City Council attempts to buy Portland General Electric, expanding both its charter and its debt obligations, or when leaders continue to aggressively pursue a failed multi-billion dollar light rail experiment. Governor Gregoire is thinking speed. Portland and county leaders are thinking "quality-of-life." Some quality. Some life.

The question lingers. Can 200,000 transplanted radical "no-growthers" in Multnomah County convert a vibrant region of 2.3 million people to their way of life? The answer (assuming Churchill was right) is no. Market economies are too intelligent to put up with the nonsense that is Multnomah Country forever. Somehow, someday, they will be dislodged; the goey center will not hold. Real world trumps fantasy world.