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Closure threat: It's not over

By **MARY BOTKIN**

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Once again we have temporarily dodged a couple of bullets – but the gun is still loaded and pointed at you.

That is how I view the outcome of the recent fifth Special Session (SS5) of the Oregon Legislature, and the threat of prison closures and massive layoffs. I understand that some of you may not agree, but I believe this was a very real threat, and I believe it continues to be a threat as we look ahead to the 2003 Legislature and the critical Jan. 28 special election on the temporary income tax increase that was referred by SS5.



MARY BOTKIN

It is common to hear — from people both inside and outside of Corrections — the following comments: “I don’t believe they would ever really close seven prisons” or “Don’t worry, they’ll never close our

prison. They’re just trying to scare people.” Well, I have been lobbying your Corrections issues for AFSCME since 1986, so let me tell you this: I’m scared.

Would lawmakers close seven state prisons? I don’t know that they would, but they might have to. I can certainly see them closing two or three. The fact is, when you cut through all the rhetoric from both the political right and left, we do have a very serious financial crisis in the State of Oregon. Something has to give, and if state revenues continue to fall and legislators continue to hold K-12 education virtually harmless, human services and public safety will take a major budget hit at the state and local government levels. There’s simply no other way.

Here are some specifics from SS5. The Legislature reduced state agency budgets by \$48.2 million in targeted cuts that are happening right away. In addition, \$310 million in targeted and across-the-board cuts were identified in the event that the temporary tax increase measure fails on Jan. 28. State agencies — including the DOC — are poised to implement these budget cuts if voters don’t approve the temporary tax increase. While funding for these programs will remain



OPEN OR CLOSED? — Columbia River Correctional Institution in NE Portland is one of the state prisons on the DOC’s possible closure list. Rumors abound regarding CRCI. One rumor says the state picked it because it would be easy to re-open as it’s new enough to meet code issues; another rumor has the state selling the institution to Multnomah County for a new jail.

intact until then, the problem will get worse — much worse. Our concern is that the level of cuts will be increased as the budget hole continues to grow and the time needed to balance the past and future deficits is reduced.

The complete list of budget reductions can be found in the disappropriation

bill, House Bill 5100. A copy of **HB 5100** is available on the Legislature’s website at www.leg.state.or.us. To reach the total amount of reductions you must add both the target cuts on pages 1-7 to the across the board cuts listed on pages 7-16.

Do I think things are (See **THREAT**, Page 2)

Don’t forget Public Safety Conference

The second annual Oregon AFSCME Public Safety Conference is scheduled for Oct. 12-13 in Portland.

Council 75, in conjunction with the Corrections and Criminal Justice Coalition (CCJC), will host this conference to provide training and workshops targeted for Oregon AFSCME public safety members.

Any last minute questions should be directed to Stephanie Swan in the Portland office at (503) 239-9858, (800) 792-0045 or sswan@afscmecn75.com.

Sizemore loses civil suit; more charges possible

Will **Bill Sizemore** eventually be one of our “guests?”

While Sizemore faces a myriad of legal problems, thus far they are all civil trial issues. However, it’s not completely off-the-wall to think that Sizemore could face a criminal proceeding, according to union attorneys.

The Oregon Education Association (OEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT-Oregon) sued Sizemore and his Oregon Taxpayers United organization under Oregon’s racketeering laws. OEA and AFT-Oregon claimed that Sizemore and OTU had knowingly used forged signatures to place Measures 92 and 98 on the 2000 ballot. Additionally, the two education unions

charged that Sizemore illegally moved money from the education foundation portion of OTU to the political side, amongst several other charges.

A Multnomah County jury agreed, and ordered OTU to repay the two unions over \$800,000, the amount they spent fighting Measures 92 and 98. Under RICO laws, damages are tripled, meaning Sizemore’s organization owes about \$2.5 million.

Again, those are civil court proceedings. But state and federal prosecutors closely monitored the case, and the Oregon Attorney General’s office says it’s launching an investigation of its own.

During the trial, it became apparent that Sizemore had been pretty cavalier

about financial matters involving OTU. He switched funds from the organization’s educational foundation to the group’s political action committee, a definite no-no. He also runs an “independent” signature-gathering business, I & R, that contracts back to OTU for gathering signatures for his initiatives. Sizemore admitted that he has never filed a tax return for I & R, claiming he didn’t need to because it never made a profit. But later he explained that he took the end-of-the-year balance in I & R and paid himself with that money, maintaining that I & R “didn’t make a profit after it paid me.”

The end of this recent trial may just be the beginning for Sizemore.

• Threat

hopeless? Of course not. But do I need your help? Absolutely!

It was no accident that during the most recent special session, Sen. David Nelson (R-Pendleton) and Rep. Bob Jenson (R-Pendleton) issued a joint press release saying they would oppose any prison closures. That press release was partially a result of your union’s political influence with those two lawmakers, **but more importantly, the result of dozens upon dozens of phone calls and e-mails**

from AFSCME members at EOCI from both Local 3361 and Local 2376.

What we need to remember is that Nelson and Jenson are just one vote apiece in each chamber. As much as we admire their stand, just because they issue a press release saying “no prison cuts” doesn’t mean it is so. Without a significant tax increase, they will have to make choices between their local schools, community college, human services and our prisons. Our challenge is

making sure they make the right choices. We need to follow up with these two legislators, and we need to send our message to other legislators as well. Many of you have already taken the time to do so, and I thank you. It does make a difference.

Unless the general economy perks up at a rate three or four times the rate it has dropped the past couple of years, we face a harsh 2003 legislative session. Right now, a little over three months before that session begins, I can guarantee you that you’ll be hearing from us. You will hear pleas for phone calls and e-mails. You will hear pleas for DOC employees to come to the capitol to testify or to lobby legislators privately — yes, even on your own time.

When you hear those pleas, don’t turn a deaf ear. We work very hard for you in Salem, and I’ll stand on my record any day as the longtime lead lobbyist for Corrections issues on behalf of AFSCME

members. But there are times I simply cannot do it myself. There are times when legislators want and need to hear from “real” people — DOC employees who actually work behind the locked doors. So when we put out a call for help, it’s because we truly need your help. Please respond like your job depends on it — as it very well might!

Rest assured, AFSCME will scratch, claw and fight with every ounce of political strength we have to protect our state prison system. I do not want you to be pessimistic and think everything is bad. By the same token, we must guard against complacency, and protect what is ours.

Incidentally, in a future issue of the *Jailhouse Journal*, I will be sharing with you our Corrections-related agenda as it is developed for the 2003 Oregon Legislature. If you have thoughts about the upcoming session, please contact me via e-mail at botkin@afscmecn75.com.



STATE FAIR — Corrections employees again did child fingerprinting at the AFSCME/AFL-CIO booth at the Oregon State Fair in late August as a public service.