To Vaccinate or Not To Vaccinate
By Morgan Knorr

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In a land where your choice for a late drink is between a Chili’s and a deserted Buffalo Wild Wings, you could just die to get back to the city.

And in a city like Portland, I think it’s a safe notion that students at PSU are really affected by the diversity of an urban campus, and pride themselves in thinking critically.

At least, that’s what The Spectator is banking on.

Here are some hard questions us students are asking in this issue: Are flu shots worth it (pg 3)? Should we really call the administrative pay freeze “progress” (pg 11)? What rights do you have as a renter in Portland (pg 15)? These burning stories will do a great job warming up your critical-thinkin’ noggin after a cold winter break.

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Jake Stein
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-Pg. 4
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HAPPY NEW YEAR!
FROM, THE SPECTATOR
Not Sure If The Flu Shot Is Worth The Trouble? Read This.

Written and Photographed By Morgan Knorr
How effective are flu shots? Do we really need to go to the trouble of getting one? The topic of flu vaccinations is up for debate, an issue that many hold strong opinions about. There are lots of myths floating around about the efficacy of these vaccines, some suggesting potential harm inflicted by getting one. It is important to first get all of the information before taking a stance on the worth of the flu shot. I’ll clue you in on some common misconceptions surrounding this issue:

**Myth:** You can get sick from the flu shot
**Fact:** Some flu vaccines may contain live viruses, but many are comprised of viruses that have been “inactivated,” and are no longer infectious. The flu shot contains dead viruses, while the nasal spray contains weakened live viruses.

**Myth:** You don’t need to get vaccinated every year
**Fact:** The influenza virus is constantly changing; the strains of the virus vary each year. Thus, research is conducted to predict which strains will be most common during the next flu season. Experts then match the vaccine to the expected strains of the virus, and when matched correctly the flu vaccine can be substantially beneficial.

**Myth:** The flu is nothing but an annoyance
**Fact:** Influenza can actually be very dangerous, potentially leading to serious complications such as pneumonia. Each year in the United States approximately 200,000 people are hospitalized from the flu. According to the Center for Disease Control, the virus kills anywhere between 3,000 and 49,000 people yearly.

**Myth:** You can clear up the flu with antibiotics
**Fact:** Antibiotics are useful in curing bacterial infections, but as influenza is caused by a virus and not by bacteria, they will have no effect whatsoever, except to potentially weaken your immune system for later bacterial infections. However, it should be noted that the flu can sometimes come with secondary bacterial infections, including bronchitis, ear infections, sinusitis, or pneumonia.

**Myth:** Only those with weakened immune systems need the vaccination—the young and healthy are in the clear
**Fact:** Although young and healthy people are less likely to develop complications from influenza, they are not necessarily at a lesser risk of being infected by the virus.

Now, what about the efficacy of the vaccines? It varies with the seasons, as the virus changes, and the vaccine may not always be a perfect match for the current strain of influenza. However, recent research shows that during the more effective seasons, those who get the vaccination are at a reduced risk of about 60 percent for contracting the illness. Still, the seasonal variations of the virus raise the question of the vaccine’s overall efficacy. As Dr. Randy Horwitz, Immunologist and Medical Director at the University of Arizona’s School of Integrative Medicine, puts it, “We hope that these smart scientists who get together with the vaccine producers make the right call.”

Although the majority agrees that in order to remain protected from the virus you must get vaccinated every year, some research suggests that yearly vaccination may limit effectiveness. A study of 1,441 individuals in 328 households showed that among those who were not vaccinated the previous year, the effectiveness of the vaccine was 62 percent. Among those who were vaccinated the previous year, effectiveness was shown to be considerably lower at 45 percent. There was also no evidence suggesting that vaccination prevented transmission once one member of a household contracted the virus. This is only one study, but it is important to pay attention to both sides of the issue.

Who actually gets vaccinated? Many PSU students swear by their yearly flu shot. One student who gets a yearly shot believes that “it’s important to get flu shots because it goes beyond your own health to protecting those around you.” This is definitely something to take into consideration. If you do end up contracting the illness, you risk transmitting the virus to the potentially more vulnerable people that you may come into contact with.

Another student at PSU who gets his flu shot every year says, “The sickest I’ve ever been is a common cold. I’d have to say it works. Besides that, I like to live in the 21st century.” Another is in agreement about the effectiveness of the vaccine, stating, “I always get my flu shot. Why not up your chances of surviving a flu pandemic?”

In contrast, some students skip the flu shot. “My body will fight it, because that’s what it’s supposed to do,” says one student who opts out of being vaccinated. “I like to let my body do its thing.” This seems to be a fairly common stance taken by young, healthy individuals.

In reality, most of us will not get the flu, but it is still widely unpredictable. Vaccinated or not, on the low end of the spectrum around 5 percent of Americans will get the flu; at most around 20 percent of us will be infected.

It is up to you to take into account all of the available information and research regarding the effectiveness of flu vaccinations, and make the decision of whether or not to add a yearly vaccination to your health regimen.
How are these issues addressed in the Affordable Care Act (ACA)?

- It prohibits insurers from not covering individuals with pre-existing conditions.
- The individual mandate requires all individuals to purchase some form of health insurance or pay a penalty. The law also provides subsidies to help individuals with difficulty affording insurance. This provision is easily the most important to expanding healthcare coverage.
- The ACA also established an online healthcare marketplace that allows individuals to compare different health plans and to purchase these plans using subsidies if they are eligible.
- Expansion of the Medicaid system will include individuals with incomes up to roughly 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
- Reforms to the Medicare payment system will help close an insurance gap in the system and may help to decrease Medicare costs.
- Companies that employ more than 50 people are required to offer healthcare benefits to their full-time employees or pay a tax penalty.

In summary, the law aims to provide coverage to individuals by limiting the insurer’s ability to deny coverage, and ultimately reducing the cost of insurance. Additionally the mandate will force individuals to obtain insurance or pay a fine, forcing everybody to obtain insurance coverage or pay for the privilege of not having it.
What are the arguments against the law? Are these arguments realistic?

- The ACA imposes price controls on the insurance and medical industries. This is the main source of the argument that ObamaCare is socialistic or communistic. The economic reality is that not every free market functions efficiently. In this case rising medical and insurance costs excluded millions of Americans from basic health insurance. If the private market fails and exhibits a trend of increasing numbers of uninsured or underinsured people, maybe this market simply was not meant to be entirely private.

- The act requires employers with more than fifty employees to offer healthcare for their full time employees. This has led to the argument that companies will have a disincentive to employ more than 49 people and to the claim that the law will have an adverse affect on employment. House Republicans have also cited a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report and claimed that there was a predicted loss of 650,000 jobs resulting from the bill. However, it was later pointed out that this report actually predicted a small negative job-loss overall. Decreases in part-time or low-wage jobs caused by increased costs to employers would be mostly offset by new jobs in other fields. Also, by decreasing the cost of health insurance and protecting patients from being denied by insurance companies, the law will also result in people exiting the job market who would have retired but decided to keep working solely to keep their employee health coverage.

- Another common argument against the law is that it will cause increases in the current budget deficit. This argument is also unfounded; CBO estimates show the ACA mostly reducing the size of deficits over the next ten years.

- Lastly it is worth making a brief comment concerning the Supreme Court ruling on the ACA. The Court ruled 5-4 upholding the law by declaring that the individual mandate could be defined as a tax. The ruling curbed some of the law’s expansion of Medicaid as the court found it to infringe on State rights.

Government Shutdown and Opposition:

In October, Congressional Republicans voted and approved budgets that failed to fund the ACA. Democrats in the Senate proceeded to vote down these budgets. Since neither side was willing to budge on the issue this budget fiasco snowballed into a government shutdown. One Standard & Poor’s estimate claims that the shutdown resulted in a $24 billion loss to the economy. House Republicans have also voted to repeal the act 46 times. Some of the efforts and opposition surrounding the ACA are likely due to strongly held convictions, but it is becoming increasingly obvious that they are also part of a broader political agenda.

Impact and Implementation:

The CBO estimated an increase of 32 million in the number of people with health insurance as a direct result of the ACA, but later revised its estimate, subtracting 3 million people due to legal battles decreasing the original intended level of Medicare expansion. The law mandates the creation of regulated healthcare insurance marketplaces which will help correct market failures in the private insurance industry, extend coverage to otherwise excluded individuals, help prevent medical bankruptcies, and limit inflation of healthcare costs. There is evidence that subsidies will help to reduce the price of insurance premiums for many of the currently insured. Estimates also show a decrease in the federal deficit resulting from the law.

Although the predicted effects of the law are largely positive and will provide solutions to problems within the health industry, implementation of the law has not gone as smoothly as many had hoped. On Oct. 1, the opening day of Healthcare.gov, the website crashed and then continued to experience problems during the following month. However, on Dec. 1 the White House announced that many of the problems had been fixed and that the website should run smoothly for most users.

Only time will tell if the law lives up to its lofty goal of providing effective health insurance to millions of Americans in a way that is fiscally sustainable, but the evidence seems to favor positive results.
EVERYTHING YOU CAN LOOK FORWARD TO AND/OR DREAD THIS YEAR!

BY JAKE STEIN AND COLIN STAUB

TUITION FREEZE

Here's a biggie. Tuition is frozen for 2014. “Frozen” means, ultimately, you’ll be paying less. During Winter and Spring terms, there will be a 1.5 percent average reduction to what tuition was originally going to cost. Starting in Fall 2014, there will be zero increases in cost. This means the average Oregonian student will save $300-$400 this year. Who do we have to thank for this? The Oregon Student Association, and the Oregon Legislature for agreeing to the “buy down” of $40 million that made this tuition freeze possible.

NO RADIOACTIVE MONSTERS

A transport of radioactive isotope cobalt-60 had gone missing en route from a hospital to a radioactive storage facility in Mexico. Though cobalt-60 cannot be used to create a conventional bomb, it can be used in a “dirty bomb,” or more likely, the creation of a radioactive mutant capable of toppling the world governments. (Think Pacific Rim or Cloverfield.) Thankfully, this radioactive material was recovered before some mad scientist got his hands on a truck full of radioactive material.
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DEBT CEILING DISCUSSIONS

According to the agreement that pulled us out of last October’s government shutdown, the US has “borrowing abilities” extended until Feb. 7. What does this mean? Unless the Republicans and Democrats in Congress suddenly kiss and makeup, there will be another round of ruthless debt ceiling discussions. Possibly another government shutdown. On the upside, this means you can take a 16-day vacation and broadcast that pirate radio station you’ve always wanted to start, without worrying about the IRS or FCC. For more on this issue, see page 17.

ADMINISTRATIVE FREEZE

In addition to enjoying the tuition freeze, students can rest assured knowing the administration will not receive raises until 2015 at the earliest. This comes as the university attempts to manage the “budget shortfall” of $15 million. However, the pay freeze was announced only after the university tested the waters of academic departmental budget cuts, and was met with widespread outrage. So don't rest too assured: academia is still a secondary priority for this administration. For more on this issue, see page 11.

SRIRACHA SHORTAGE

As this issue of The Spectator hits stands, the ever-popular Sriracha hot sauce is in the midst of a 30-day prohibition on shipping out any products, the L.A. Times reports. This ban is the latest development in the legal battles which have plagued Huy Fong Foods, Sriracha’s manufacturer, since October. The original complaint came from residents living near the company’s Irwindale, CA factory. They claimed the plant was producing odors that were causing reactions in nearby residents. In a hopefully culminating move, an L.A. County judge has ordered the factory to stop shipping out its sauces for 30 days, beginning in mid-December. That means it will soon be back on shelves—though with any luck, this is not the first you are hearing of the Sriracha shortage, and you stocked up accordingly.
Progress Without Progress

What does the administrative pay freeze really mean for PSU?

By Colin Staub

In September, after a long, rigorous fight, the Oregon University System and the Service Employees International Union settled a contract that covers classified employees at all seven OUS schools. This is a wide-ranging group of job titles, from accountants to laundry workers to radiation protection technologists. The contract, which ensures salary increases in order to keep up with inflation and cost-of-living changes, was settled just days before a planned strike on the first day of fall classes. Announcing the deal, Portland State University President Wim Wiewel sent a campus-wide email that described the contract as “an important recognition of how PSU and the university system value our employees.”

Whether it values academics, however, remains to be seen. Later in the fall term, the administration announced that PSU has a $15 million budget deficit, and asked academic departments to identify 8 percent of their budgets that could be cut. The PSU department of Finance and Administration (FADM) blames the “budget shortfall” on a $15 million decrease in state funding, which leaves PSU unable to keep up with the increases in “the cost of wages, PEBB and PERS,” which it claims were previously offset by increased tuition and fees. FADM goes on to state that “any increase in compensation, including the outcome of collective bargaining, will impact the budget.” The administration’s philosophy is clear: the university is in a fragile state, and this is because of faculty salaries and benefits.

Not everyone sees it this way. In November the PSU chapter of the American Association of University Professors (PSU-AAUP) held a joint budget forum with the PSU Faculty Senate, where members voiced concerns about the administration’s shortfall announcement. A slide-show from this forum, provided to The Spectator by Mary King, President of the PSU-AAUP, tells a different story than that of the administration. With reference to the university’s budgetary problems, it describes the university’s “Major Investment in Real Estate,” citing an expensive university expansion project the president is envisioning over the next twenty years. It also highlights PSU’s “Major Investment in Administration,” showing how “the ratio of tenure-line faculty to [administrative] staff fell from 2.5:1 to 0.8:1 from 1987-2008.”

PSU employs less tenure-line faculty than it does administrators.

Furthermore, the slide-show cites an October study by Florida International University’s Center for Labor Research and Studies, entitled “How PSU Prioritizes Its Money: An Analysis of Personnel and Salary Allocation.” The study focuses on the decade between 2002 and 2012, and shows PSU’s overall trend of valuing administrators over faculty and students. It shows how student tuition increased—86 percent for resident undergraduates and 79 percent for resident graduates—while at the same time salaries for virtually every rank of fixed-term faculty either stayed barely ahead of inflation, or actually fell behind, meaning some professors were effectively making less at the end of the decade than at the start.

Meanwhile, in the same period of time, administrative salaries flourished. Assistant vice presidents’ salaries rose, on average and adjusted for inflation, 23 percent over the ten-year period, and it only gets higher from there. Vice presidents saw a 29 percent rise,
while vice provosts were making 54 percent more in 2012 than in 2002. For reference, fixed-term tenured professors saw an increase of only 6 percent in salary during this time.

These figures, mixed with the administration’s call for cuts to all academic departments, have provoked anger among faculty, staff, and students alike.

During the fall term, the Portland State University Student Union, a student-run organization which describes itself as “a channel through which students can create for ourselves the voice we are being denied by university administration,” grew to over 800 members—an impressive figure, considering only 569 people voted in the 2013 ASPSU elections. The group presented several demands to the administration, including an “immediate, indefinite freeze on salaries for all administrators making over $110,000/year.”

On Nov. 19 the PSU-AAUP, joined by students as well as other university staff, rallied against the potential cuts. Carrying signs deriding the state of faculty pay as well as the proposed departmental budget cuts, they marched to the Market Center.

**PSU is willing to defund academics before even considering a change to administrative salary.**

Building, where members of the union, as well as Senator Michael Dembrow, spoke about the need for PSU to refocus on faculty and academics over administrators.

In an apparent response to this outcry over the “budget shortfall” announcement, President Wiewel sent two emails late in the fall term, announcing several measures the administration would take to work on the budget. Along with requiring the football program “to become self-supporting,” and “retaining online fees” for classes, one point in particular was attention-grabbing: a salary-freeze for administrators making over $100,000 per year, going into effect for the next two academic years. This means administrators in this pay range will not see a raise in salary until 2015 at the earliest.

This decision has several implications. First, it shows the administration is responding to the backlash against its proposed academic cuts. After all, this came only after faculty and students alike expressed their dissatisfaction with the proposed solution. However, it also serves to reinforce the university’s attitude—the very timing of the announcement, coming after the proposed 8 percent cut to all academic programs, shows that PSU is willing to defund academics before even considering a change to administrative salary.

Administrators have already received their raises, and even with their salaries frozen they are still very far ahead of all ranks of professors in terms of inflation-adjusted income.

“It’s not clear why the administration wouldn’t have taken these steps before calling for destructive cuts in academic capacity,” says King. The budgetary concerns come at a tumultuous time for the professors’ union, which, as of press time, is still in mediation with the university over a contract that would make a 2.5 percent “Cost of Living Adjustment” to faculty salary, among other salary changes. In view of this ongoing contract negotiation, the pay-freeze seems less monumental—it certainly doesn’t help the faculty. “I would say that President Wiewel is signaling that he means to hold the line,” says King, “that faculty compensation must not increase enough to keep pace with inflation.”

So while the recent administrative pay freeze is undoubtedly a sign that the administration is aware and listening to student and faculty outrage, it may be best described as the appearance of progress. Essentially, administrators have already received their raises, and even with their salaries frozen they are still very far ahead of all ranks of professors in terms of inflation-adjusted income. Sure, it is a positive step, but don’t let it cloud the issue: real progress occurs when the university starts making up for its years of faculty neglect.

Real progress occurs when PSU values academics over administrators. 😳
The traditional view of Napoleon Bonaparte shows him as a power-hungry megalomaniac who made himself Emperor, warring throughout a large part of the world from Russia to Egypt. The English called him “Boney” and caricatured the man with his hand in his vest, attempting to degrade a powerful warrior. The intelligentsia of Europe praised his spreading of the concepts of the French Revolution, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity throughout Europe, bringing to many areas the downfall of long despised feudalism. Beethoven planned to dedicate a symphony to Napoleon, until Boney crowned himself Emperor. At this stage of his career Napoleon lost the following of the Liberal intelligentsia.

When I began my studies in France, one evening we went to the local cinema to see the film War and Peace. I realized that the majority of the French still greatly admire Napoleon: during intermission, right after a scene in which the French were routed in a battle against the Russians, in the lobby the French were complaining loudly and bitterly that Napoleon or the French never retreated. Never! Of course this invasion of Russia has always been looked upon as the great blunder of the usually outstanding general—choosing to invade Russia in the fall with the terrible Russian winter coming and fighting wars on two fronts. Also in the film when Pierre, the Russian member of the intelligentsia, goes to see his hero Napoleon in action, and views the slaughter of the Russians in another battle, he is shocked into the reality of war and, falling against a tree, shouts, “Damn you Napoleon! Damn you to Hell!” However, in the dubbed version, as there is no way the French would accept Napoleon being damned in any way, the dubbed voice utters in French, “Napoleon is a monster! A monster is Napoleon!” In French, to call someone “monstre” in this manner is not an insult. It simply means “bigger than life.”

One can find many varying aspects to Napoleon’s persona, but here we are to look at his outstanding effect on and contributions to the educational system of France. France was already a country

Napoleon Bonaparte: Father of Modern Education?

By Eugene Messer
with excellent Universities—Sorbonne and Montpellier to name two—but this privilege was basically dedicated to the education of the children of the aristocrats and elites. Napoleon, while creating the Code Napoleon, or Civil Code, which recharged and codified many of the laws and institutions of France, was faced with a series of existing laws that varied in each French province. He set out to replace the tangled mess with a standard code for all French people. He also brought powerful changes to the education of all citizens’ children. He established the pan-French system of lycees (secondary schools) which educated and prepared students for the universities. This had been a long standing desire of the revolutionaries.

Napoleon saw to it that education was available to all. If the student could not afford tuition, he offered scholarships to students—including those who could not afford to pay the fees.

Of course, church officials complained—they felt the church

Many French classes are taught by the lecturer standing in front of the room, then promptly walking out of the room; questions are not often deemed necessary or accepted.

no longer held power over the educational system. However, Napoleon's goal was to produce government officials and citizens who were loyal to the country as well as the principals of its revolution. He also introduced a great deal of new material to the curriculum that brought together the people of France and created a patriotic citizenship working for the good of the nation.

To this day, the educational system has much of the same strength that Napoleon Bonaparte instilled. At the 82 universities of France that give an equal education to the 1.5 million students who attend, there are charged no kinds of tuition fees whatsoever. There are undergraduate enrollment charges which were in effect when I attended the Universite d’Montpellier. At the time, the fee was in French francs, and was equal to 35 dollars, a very small amount. Today it is just 165 Euro, still a relatively small amount. In addition, there is no difference in tuition fees for French citizens or foreign students.

However, before you go running off to French universities, be warned that they are very tough schools. The amount of hours required term-wise and the amount of hours in homework are phenomenal. One of the reasons that they remain cost free is that you are allowed to attend and stay in school so long as you maintain the required grade-point—otherwise, you are asked to vacate the premises. Many French classes are taught by the lecturer standing in front of the room, then promptly walking out of the room; questions are not often deemed necessary or accepted. Exams I remember as a particular nightmare, though nowadays classes are available in English and exams can be taken in English as well.

In discussing the condition of the universities of the United States in comparison to those in France, I am compelled to say that it is time we investigated in-depth the availability of free education for all students, not students loaned funds by the Government and then released with degrees and a massive load of personal debt. The concept of putting this debt off until graduation only postpones the same issue. Recently, marching with fellow students and faculty to demonstrate against the priorities in the funding process of Portland State University, I was astonished by speakers addressing the obviously askew funding priorities of the institution, and the necessity as seen by the administration for thus raising tuition substantially and regularly, all the while not raising salaries of those in positions to educate and form the opinions of the students who will inherit tomorrow.

Looking back at the advances of education under Napoleon Bonaparte, it is time that we decide education is no longer a privilege enjoyed by those in Ivy-covered halls donated by their families. It is a tool that must be given to the entirety of a nation's students, from Kindergarten until they walk out under mortar-board with a degree or a doctorate, thus arming our citizens with the power to move forward in an ever-changing and ever-diversifying world.

I went to the University in France with the traditional American concept of the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte as a tyrannical funny little man. I came away with much revealed to me in praise of his hard work and dedication as he burned the midnight oil developing and establishing, in his rooms at Fontainebleau, lasting principles for France, desiring to improve the lot of the French people.

Viva Napoleon! Viva La France! 🇫🇷
Portland is a landlord’s dream.

We have one of the lowest rental vacancy rates in the country—according to data from the census bureau, Portland has less rental vacancies than Los Angeles, Chicago, and even New York City. Chicago has three times as many vacancies as we do. This has important long-term implications for Portland’s cityscape—in October, The Spectator reported on the numerous east-side developments that will take advantage of the city’s popularity, and increase density at the expense of neighborhood livability. However, the competitive rental market also has very immediate effects, including the potential exploitation of Portland tenants by property managers.

Renters should be informed of laws regarding tenants’ rights, and should be aware of the resources that are available to help them.

One of the common forms of exploitation comes during the initial stage of tenancy: paying the upfront costs. Generally these include an application fee, one or two months’ rent, and a security deposit. However, it is not uncommon to find an additional “cleaning fee” tacked on. A quick Craigslist search shows “cleaning fees” ranging from $150 to $300, in addition to the security deposit. And while the idea behind a deposit is that the tenant has the opportunity to get it back in the future, these “cleaning fees” are all prefaced by the word nonrefundable. This is money the tenant has no chance of ever seeing again.

That’s where the trouble lies.

Oregon Revised Statute 90.302 dictates that “a landlord may not charge a fee at the beginning of the tenancy for an anticipated landlord expense” except for an applicant screening
fee (which is also strictly regulated, and may not exceed the average actual amount the landlord must spend to conduct the application screening, generally $25 to $50). This means there can be no “cleaning fees,” “move-in fees,” “carpet cleaning fees,” or any other upfront nonrefundable payments (this includes “pet fees,” although pet security deposits are fair game). Of course, once the tenant is moved in, there can be any number of fees for contract violations—smoke alarm removal, late rent payment, breaking the lease, and many other actions are all grounds for monetary repercussions. But the tenant cannot be charged in anticipation of landlord expenses.

These potential expenses are meant to be covered by the security deposit, which, while legal, can open more avenues for exploitation. One Portland woman, who spoke with The Spectator on condition of anonymity, had a disagreement with her landlord regarding her security deposit. “I initially paid $1300 for security deposit, pet deposit, and cleaning deposit.” Later, she broke her lease, forfeiting $775 from her security deposit, and irritating the management. “Upon move-out, the apartment manager said that nothing would be refundable, because the apartment was in horrible shape. She said nothing met the standards of the cleaning guide she provided, which was untrue.” After a walk-through of the apartment, the manager estimated the cost to repair the “damage” to the apartment as $2500, “according to her cleaning guide.” However, she would settle for keeping the entire security deposit.

Our source decided to fight this decision, and requested to speak with the actual landlord, instead of the property manager. She was given a phone number, but no other contact information. After calling the number several times and receiving a “generic voicemail message” but never a callback, she decided to give up on that route. “No physical address or email address to contact the landlord was a huge factor in how little power we felt we had.” When she expressed her intent to hire a lawyer, the property manager threatened to make things worse. “She said if we did that we would be charged for the full $2500 worth of ‘damage’ we had done to the apartment,” rather than the manager simply withholding the security deposit.

Ultimately, our source gave up the fight. “I had just started a new job and didn’t want personal stress to affect my work ethic.”

This woman’s process of property manager skirmishing is common, and allows landlords to continue taking advantage of tenants. Our source first tried to settle the dispute by working with the landlord, but her complaint was swallowed up in the company’s bureaucracy. She then considered seeking legal assistance, but was intimidated by the property manager, who made it seem like our source was getting a good deal. Additionally, the cost of hiring a lawyer made that option nearly impossible. Finally, she didn’t have the energy to continue this seemingly fruitless fight, forfeited her deposit, and instead found a better apartment. She is personally done with that property company, but this solution guarantees that their practices will not change, and other tenants will continue to be taken advantage of.

If, however, a tenant does have the time and energy to fight the actions of an abusive property manager, there are several available avenues that do not require the expensive assistance of an attorney. One Oregon-based group, the Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT) describes itself as “Oregon’s only statewide, grassroots, tenant-controlled, tenant-rights organization.” It aims to “address the impact Oregon’s decreasing supply of decent, affordable housing and absence of meaningful tenant protections has on low-income tenants.” It addresses tenant issues by educating and advising tenants, and claims to “have counseled more than 26,500 callers to our Renters’ Rights Hotline” since its inception in 1996. And while it helps individual tenants in their own struggles, CAT also acknowledges that renters are “kept from the funding and policy decisions that impact our lives,” and aims to address that problem as well. Its website details a list of legislative successes, including the 1998 enacting of the Affordable Housing Preservation Ordinance, which dictates that “publicly assisted rental housing... should be preserved as a long-term resource to the maximum extent practicable,” and goes on to provide specific definitions of “affordable housing,” “fair market value,” and other potentially vague terms that could have previously been interpreted in different ways by different parties.

There can be no “cleaning fees,” “move-in fees,” “carpet cleaning fees,” or any other upfront non-refundable payments

These legislative changes pave the way for large-scale progress, helping tenants across the board.

Another organization, the Portland Solidarity Network (PDXSol), focuses specifically on individual cases. It emphasizes the efficacy of “direct action,” which it identifies as “a strategy that empowers individuals and their communities to directly confront those responsible for their exploitation without relying on lawyers or bureaucratic institutions.” Its website has stories of success, including one about a woman who was forced to leave her apartment due to black mold, but was not refunded her security deposit. This woman decided to fight it and, having seen PDXSol posters around Portland, got in touch to see what her options were. The group’s first step was to deliver a demand letter to the offices of the landlord in question. To ensure they were taken seriously, they brought a few supporters with them—34 people in all. After several more direct confrontations with the landlord, the security deposit was refunded.

PDXSol highlights the fact that they “relied on nothing more than the strength of our unified voice and the power that comes from public pressure.”

Tenants often feel alone and powerless against property managers. Putting up a fight against a landlord can mean time, energy, and money—three things working tenants do not have. But they have strength in numbers, and when tenants band together they can make changes. These changes might be huge and systemic, like CAT’s history of working with Oregon government and changing legislation, or it might be as simple as coming together to support a tenant who is being ignored by a property manager. If you are experiencing injustice in your tenancy, you are not alone. There are avenues for help.

And if enough people stand up for themselves, perhaps Portland can become a renter’s dream. 🌟
What’s Happening With The Debt Ceiling? (And What Is The Debt Ceiling?)

By Morgan Knorr

The debt ceiling is the borrowing limit for the U.S. government. Just like a credit card, when the debt ceiling is reached no more spending is allowed. However, unlike a credit card the government is able to raise its own spending limit with congressional approval, and this is a routine procedure.

If a budget deal is not made by Jan. 15, 2014, the country is at risk for another government shutdown. The United States has experienced more than a 40 percent increase in national debt in the past decade, now reaching $17 trillion. The Affordable Care Act alone added $1 trillion to this figure. In addition to this mass spending for ObamaCare, funding two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and dealing with the financial repercussions of the recession has put our government deeply in debt.

While President Obama insists that raising the debt ceiling will not increase spending, and that “all it does is allow the Treasury Department to pay for what Congress has already spent,” the reality is that raising the limit could in fact encourage more federal spending—spending can actually only be increased in the future if the debt ceiling is raised, and new expenditures do require funding. One of these expenses involves the president’s aim to make preschool mandatory for all children, as education is one of his top three priorities in office (aside from healthcare and environmental-energy issues).
This would require an entirely new government program, and thus more spending.

With the increase, many Republican members of Congress are in favor of attaching the condition of cutting funding from ObamaCare, and according to a CBS news poll the majority of Americans (55 percent) agree that spending cuts should be made. Although Obama stated that he “will not negotiate” about this condition, he will still have to make budgetary decisions that could slash domestic or military spending.

While many are in favor of the debt ceiling increase, some question the validity of the issue. Christine Milne of The Guardian referred to the debt ceiling crisis as “just an erroneous fixation with the West Wing.” Milne worries that the government may be hiding debt in “incomprehensible budget papers,” keeping in the shadows whether the money is being spent on infrastructure that we need, or if it is being used to “cover the gap between money raised and money spent.” She recommends that we first ask for more information about what the debt is for before taking a stance or making any sort of decision.

However, if the debt ceiling is not raised, there could be potentially serious ramifications for American citizens.

Economists predict a likely recession if lawmakers don’t come to an agreement on this quickly, disabling the Treasury Department to pay monthly bills. If the Treasury doesn’t have enough money to pay every bill on time, it will be extremely difficult for them to prioritize payments. If Congress does not raise the debt ceiling, some of the biggest monthly payments made by the Treasury, namely Social Security benefits, may not be paid on time. In this event Congress would be forced to make abrupt spending cuts or to hike taxes.

The United States’ reputation as a reliable creditor that always pays its debt on time would obviously be put at risk if it were no longer able to do so. And this reputation is what keeps the dollar strong: if the U.S. were to default on its loans, lenders would likely be unwilling to loan any more money. Although it’s an unlikely scenario, the United States could miss or delay an interest payment on a bond, which may make investors demand higher rates for continued investments in new U.S. debts. With increased Treasury rates, there would also be increases in rates on mortgages, small business loans, and other consumer loans. For the House and Senate, the biggest obstacle is agreeing on how much funding should be cut from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps); the Senate wants to cut around $4 billion of funding from snap within the next 10 years, and the House wants to cut nearly 10 times that amount.

A decision needs to be made promptly as for whether or not to raise the debt ceiling, as there could be serious consequences for the nation’s economy and its citizens. The majority of Americans agree that increasing this limit would be a good thing, but some are not as keen on the idea. The consequences of a default are unforeseeable, as the U.S. has never defaulted on its loans before, but if Congress does raise the limit, spending has the potential to increase. This leaves questions over which decision is the right one and which will best benefit our economy.

Either way, Congress needs to act fast to achieve the best outcome.