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Anti-Tax “Tea Parties” Draw Wrong Lesson From History

The Boston Tea Party was a protest against a corporate tax break, notes OCPP

(Silverton) — Political operatives in Oregon and across the country planning “Tea Parties” to protest taxes and the public structures they support would get a failing grade in history class, according to the Oregon Center for Public Policy. Misunderstood by many, the real Boston Tea Party of 1773 was a protest not against taxation but against a tax cut for a multinational corporation of the day.

“The protesters have a distorted view of history and today’s tax reality,” said OCPP executive director Chuck Sheketoff. “An action more in the spirit of the real Boston Tea Party would be a protest against tax loopholes that allow profitable corporations in Oregon and nationally to avoid paying their fair share of income taxes.”

The Boston Tea Party, in which American colonists dumped British tea into Boston Harbor, was an act of defiance against the Tea Act of 1773, which gave a tax break to the British East India Company. As noted by the [Boston Tea Party Historical Society](#), the tax break was an effort by the British Crown to help the East India Company establish a tea monopoly in the American colonies.

Yet the “Tea Parties” scheduled for later this month in Oregon won’t be protesting tax breaks for corporations but instead will vent against taxation and government spending.

“Sam Adams and the other American patriots must be rolling in their graves,” said Sheketoff. “Political operatives have transformed a story of the people standing up to a government that caters to powerful corporate interests into a message that serves the interest of the well connected and well heeled.”

That message ignores how tax-supported public structures create economic opportunity, according to Sheketoff. “Good schools, roads and libraries, access

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to health care and courthouses — these are the basic building blocks of strong communities and a healthy economy,” he said.

The planned protests are also blind as to who has benefited from the drive to cut taxes over the past few decades, according to Sheketoff.

“As corporations and wealthy individuals have shed their tax responsibilities, working families and small businesses have been forced to pick up the slack,” said Sheketoff.

According to OCPP, while profitable corporations in the mid-1970s paid 18.5 percent of all Oregon income taxes, their share is projected to be just 6 percent during the 2009-11 biennium. Sheketoff said that, contrary to the claims of the Tea Party protest organizers, levels of spending and taxes in Oregon have not been going up.

He also noted that, as a share of income, the wealthiest Oregonians pay the lowest amount of taxes (state and local combined) of any income group.

“Working families have reason to be upset,” said Sheketoff, “but they would be better off protesting against tax breaks and loopholes that favor the powerful and in favor of a more just tax structure.”

The Oregon Center for Public Policy is a non-partisan research institute that does in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax and economic issues. The Center’s goal is to improve decision making and generate more opportunities for all Oregonians.