

# Burning bill lacking

On Tuesday, the Oregon House of Representatives passed a field burning bill which is neither a long-term solution to the field burning question nor an acceptable compromise on the issue.

The bill, HB 2196, calls for a limit of 195,000 acres on the number of grass seed fields in the Willamette Valley to be burned this summer. The bill contains no provision for reducing open field burning over future years.

Gov. Bob Straub has already vetoed a field burning bill, SB 535, which would have allowed 235,000 acres to be burned annually with no scheduled reductions. He says he will veto HB 2196 if it reaches his desk without a phase-down plan. Neither chamber had enough support to override Straub's first veto and the vote Tuesday indicates the House will sustain a veto of HB 2196.

Straub proposed the bill as a compromise last week. As originally drafted, the bill included a phase-down to 150,000 acres in 1980 and an escalating fee for open field burning permits. The Joint Trade and Economic Development Committee removed both provisions in spite of the assurance of a Straub aide that the action will bring a veto of the bill.

The grass seed industry's unwillingness to compromise on field burning forced Straub to alter a position he had previously adopted — a 165,000-acre limit for this summer. Straub compromised to the 195,000 figure after vetoing SB 535 and included a compromise phase-down plan.

Eliminating that phase-down provision is no compromise at all on the part of the grass seed industry supporters. The 1975 Legislature voted to cut field burning to 95,000 acres this summer and to no more than 50,000 acres after 1977. That phase-down compromised a 1973 ban on all open field burning. The removal of a phase-down from HB 2196 is not consistent with decisions made by two previous legislative sessions.

Without a phase-down plan, grass seed growers have no real incentive to continue the search for alternatives to open field burning. Without that incentive, the growers will do the easiest and cheapest thing — burn. Legislation containing no phase-down increases the likelihood that no permanent solution will ever be sought.

The 1975 Legislature based its decision in part on the development of mobile field burning machines designed to reduce smoke output. Most legislators now recognize that those machines have so far been unsuccessful and some increase in the number of acres allowed to be burned is warranted. Field burning machines may hold some potential for the future, however, but other alternatives such as different crops, burning on alternate years and using straw as an energy source or for cattle feed have still been inadequately explored. Another possibility is draining fields to make them suitable for other crops.

Burning proponents argue that tight smoke management programs will eliminate the need for acreage limitations. But the suggested system of allowing burning on an hourly and daily notice depending on weather predictions is as yet untried and unproven. The 1975 Legislature based a phase-down on faith in unproven machines. This year, the Legislature may approve a burning increase on faith in a system equally untried and unproven.

Another argument made by pro-field burning legislators is that scientific data does not conclusively prove that field burning smoke affects the health of Eugeneans. Slash burning, automobiles and other industries, it is said, contribute more to the total pollution in the area.

It is, however, no coincidence that smoke in the Eugene area thickens during the field burning season. A large hole in the argument against field burning this session is that effects of field burning cannot be demonstrated by statistics. If the Legislature is serious about reducing pollution, funding for a study of what affects field burning has on Eugene would seem to be a common sense proposal. There is no such proposal in HB 2196.

Statistical data gathered during the interim session may provide valuable information when the issue arises again, which will unquestionably be next session. Such data may help the legislators find a permanent solution to the issue that would save the taxpayers money in extended legislative sessions and on long debates over an issue which comes before the Legislature as regularly as the tide comes in at the seashore.

Until the suspected health and environmental effects of field burning on Eugeneans are known, a strong phase-down of field burning is a necessity for any field burning bill penned by the Legislature.

## Letters, opinion column policy

The Emerald will accept and try to print all letters containing fair comment on ideas and topics of concern or interest to the University community. Because of space limitations, letters must be no more than 250 words, typed in a 65-character margin, triple-spaced, dated and signed with the writer's major. No unsigned letters will be published. Longer opinion columns will be published whenever possible after being submitted to the editorial page editor. The limit on opinion columns is 800 words, using the same format as letters.



## Off the Wally \$10 worth the gamble

I just moved into a three-bedroom house on Willamette Street with a couple of buddies. We have wall-to-wall carpeting in the living room and in my bedroom; we have electric baseboard heaters, a garbage disposal and a nice front yard, though it is rather overrun with weeds at the moment.

We also have a \$280 monthly rent bill. Plus about a \$9 phone bill, probably a \$20 EWEB bill and another \$7 for cable TV service. And I'm not sure what we'll do with our garbage.

That's a total of about \$316 per month, or \$105.33 each.

You may understand, then, my curiosity at hearing the Amazon Community Tenants (ACT) complain about the University proposal to raise rent for a two-bedroom apartment to \$80. Surely they must realize how cheap \$80 a month is compared to the local Eugene-Springfield market. You can't even get a one-bedroom apartment for \$80, unless you move into a match box with Fearless Fly.

But it is the written policy of the housing department not to compare rental rates of the Eugene-Springfield market area with University housing, although John Thorpe, then-director of married student housing, did on several occasions make such comparisons to justify the rent hike.

The University wants the \$10 increase to "meet current and future maintenance costs and to pay off debt service." This latter payment has raised the ire of ACT members more than once. They complain they are having to pay the debt incurred when the much more modern Westmoreland complex was built, while their own complex is all paid off. That, however, turns out to be a minor component of the increase.

Kirby Lusk, a member of the University Married Student Council, said last month that rent at Amazon would go up \$8 just for maintenance costs alone. So let's confine ourselves to that issue — University maintenance at Amazon.

Since the shipyard barracks now called Amazon were moved here in 1947 from Vanport, they obviously need repair from

time to time. Anything that old does. The University has done things occasionally, like improving the fencing around a children's play area and installing roadway speed barriers. But much has been left to the tenants, such as last October when they had a two-day cleanup of the complex, which included painting picket fences with paint supplied by the Physical Plant. Much more remains to be done and, though the rent hike itself has grabbed much attention, maintenance is the main thrust of ACT complaints.

Tenants like Bill Groesz still complain about "buckling floors, sagging walls and windows that refuse to close." Not to mention "leaning refrigerators" and "deteriorating fences." And the fact that part of these problems are caused by "improvement" in the foundations done by the married student housing department make the inconveniences all the harder to swallow.

A \$10 rent increase really isn't that much, considering inflation and what the Amazon tenants now pay. The tenants realize this. They don't want a free ride; what they want is a comfortable place in which to live. If the University feels it needs ten extra dollars a month to give them that, so be it. But wanting the money for "current and future maintenance" leaves the University married student housing officials standing on shaky ground, as their immediate past shows a dismal record at doing just that.

But very recent management changes in the married student housing department, as recommended by a recent independent management firm's study (story, page 1), seem to indicate that the office has a new commitment and is ready to get down to the serious questions of effective and responsible maintenance at Amazon. For this reason, the rent hike of \$10 is justified. If the married student housing office really intends to improve the quality of the Amazon units, \$10 would be a small price and easily worth the gamble. But if they get the rate increase and maintenance does not quickly follow, the department deserves to be raked over the coals.

## Letters

### Beautiful prose

It's too bad that the New Yorker has abandoned its "high, beautiful prose" department. Otherwise the Daily Emerald would have an excellent chance of placing with this sentence from its leading news story of June 2: "Sporting the svelte tongue that aided in precociously establishing his lofty position, Boyd chanced to quote

Thomas Jefferson in the course of his arguments for ROTC." Other sentences include worthy phrases such as "The anticipated plethora of faculty" and "several University governors staged a successful upheaval," but failed to maintain the obfuscatory turgidity of the specimen quoted in full.

Kenneth Porter  
Professor Emeritus, History

### Seeking fresh air

I am an American Indian wishing to correspond with a female of any race. I'm from Ontario, Canada, I'm 28 years old, don't know anyone in the area and would appreciate fresh air from out there.

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