opinion

Ghost of military draft materializes again

Two proposals — one poor and one good — involving the military, which could well affect University students, are attracting attention in news columns.

The poor proposal or, more exactly, the collection of poor proposals, revolves around reinstitution of a compulsory, peacetime draft registration and classification. Congressional acceptance of this or similar ideas would create a way-station en route to reactivation of a standing, conscript army.

During either phase — registration or conscription — an exempt status for students probably would be omitted. Women might also be included this time around in a process that entails interminable reporting requirements and the constant threat of social, physical and career dislocations.

The chorus of voices supporting such a development augurs a return to the dark ages of the Vietnam War, when the machinations of the draft provided copious opportunities for suppressing free speech and other civil liberties while causing no small part of the protests that characterized the era.

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Stimulus for the registration proposals appears to lie in the difficulties faced by the military establishment now maintained by the United States. Those difficulties include such problems as widespread use of hard drugs among enlisted servicemen, a high drop-out rate, inability to maintain recruitment quotas and a generally poor state of preparedness and skills among military personnel.

Such conditions, however, do not represent problems of the military's present voluntary recruitment methods, but stem from the organization and policies of the military establishment itself. Conscription would not solve those problems but only, at best, cover them up.

Reinstitution of registration and classification, therefore, should be viewed as a "cop-out," a bogus and simplistic answer sought by military backers unwilling to attempt the structural reforms of America's armed forces needed to improve human factor in our defense formula.

U.S. Rep. Jim Weaver accurately reflected our sentiments when he attacked the hassles incumbent in the draft peacetime concept as representing "a needless governmental intrusion that would not be balanced by any real increase in our security."

On the other hand, Biology Prof. Bayard McConnaughey has reactivated a good idea that he will propose to the University Assembly; termination of the ROTC military-training contract with the University.

McConnaughey portrayed the University-ROTC relationship as an "innappropriate activity" that is "inherently immoral, self-defeating and destructive to humanity."

We wouldn't try to say it a better way.

yours

Icy weather policy

I must fully agree with ASUO President Ramon Herrera on his statement that the decision to keep the University open during the recent frigid weather conditions that besieged the Northwest was "irresponsible and sad."

The roads and sidewalks were outrageously unsafe for anyone or anything to be traveling on and many people were slipping and falling down just walking on flat ground not to mention any kind of sloped terrain. There were literally dozens of traffic accidents throughout the city.

Last Tuesday, while giving three friends a ride to school in my four-wheel-drive vehicle I didn't quite make an icy turn on University Street, hit a curb, rolled my car and damn near totaled the entire vehicle. Miraculously, no one was seriously hurt.

I was especially dismayed at University Vice President Paul Olum's remark that he "did the right thing" by keeping the University open. Why this decision was considered good judgment when the rest of Eugene's schools and the majority of businesses were closed is beyond me.

To keep the University open "only for those students who could make it" was absurd. Try explaining to a professor that a bad midterm exam grade was because you couldn't get to class a couple of times and could he please adjust it accordingly.

Safety and consideration for human life has always been first on my list of common sense priorities. I hope in the future the judgment of the University will be considerably less inept and more sensitive of the students' health and welfare.

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tom thompson

Oil, gas spice up U.S.-Mexico issues

In the past few years Mexico's newly aggressive, state-owned oil industry has gone looking for petroleum. Just six years ago Mexico was importing oil to meet its modest needs. Now it seems Mexico can export oil far into the next century.

In September, Mexico's President Lopez Portillow announced proved hydrocarbon reserves of 20 billion barrels, probable reserves of 37 billion and potential reserves of 200 billion. (The reserves are about 65 percent oil; 35 percent natural gas.)

By comparison, Saudi Arabia's proven reserves are about 150 billion barrels; those of the U.S., 31 billion.

For Mexico, an oil boom could mean an unexpected source of funds with which to combat its many social and economic ills. For the U.S., Mexican oil could be an almost providentially placed alternative to Mideast imports.

Despite its Saudi Arabia-like reserves, Mexico is not likely to end U.S. reliance on OPEC oil in the 1980s. (Although Mexico is not expected to join the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, it does follow the cartel's pricing policies.)

Mexican and U.S. experts agree that the U.S. is the ideal market for Mexico's surplus oil. Economically, it's a natural. But politically, the neighbor ot the south is still smarting from some unneighborly U.S. policies.

One such policy — really a battle — was over oil. In 1938, Mexico kicked out the big U.S. oil companies — which had made Mexico a major producer in the 1920s — and national petroleum. A nasty propaganda war and boycott ensued.

Ever since, oil has been for Mexicans a politically charged symbol of their nationalism and economic independence from the U.S.

A more recent spat involved natural gas.

Last year six U.S. transmission companies agreed to buy Mexican natural gas at $2.60 for 1,000 cubic feet. President Lopez Portillo, despite heavy fire from nationalists, went out on a limb and started laying a gas pipeline to northern Mexico and then the U.S.

The Carter administration balked at Mexico's asking price. It was proposing energy legislation that would have given domestic producers a much lower price for gas.

The government was sure that Mexico would back down. Mexico didn't. So, the U.S. killed the gas deal and sawed Mr. Lopez Portillo's limb off. With it went a chunk of Mexico's pride.

Now with the urgent part of the energy debate over, the U.S. wants to renew the gas talks. But Mexico insists — not totally unconvincingly — that it will reroute the pipeline and consume the gas internally.

"The gas," says Mexico's petroleum chief, "isn't for sale now."

Most U.S. experts think Mexico eventually will sell the gas to the U.S. — at a more propitious moment and for a good price. (Gas is too costly to liquefy and ship for sale elsewhere.) But the gas fiasco undoubtedly has put more pressure on Mr. Lopez Portillo to find alternative markets for Mexico's oil.

Possible markets include Japan, Brazil, and Western Europe. Mr. Lopez Portillo recently visted Japan and China. Oil was discussed.

Any oil and gas deals between Mexico and the U.S. will become linked to the broader aspects of U.S.-Mexico relations.

Mexico, despite the oil bonanza, needs U.S. help with some severe problems:

- Unemployment and underemployment of between 30 and 50 percent.
- A growth rate that will double Mexico's 65 million population in 20 years.
- Poor farm production that makes importing basic foods necessary.
- A foreign debt of about $30 billion.
- Inflation of 15 to 20 percent.

Mexico wants U.S. co-operation in several areas: a soft policy on the perhaps one million undocumented Mexican workers who illegally enter the U.S. every year (and send valuable foreign-exchange dollars back home); access to U.S. markets for agricultural exports (resistance to protectionism); loans to speed oil industry expansion; a continuing flow of tourist dollars (which equal current oil revenues).

The U.S. wants from Mexico: as much oil (and gas) as it can export; an easing of unemployment and slower flow of workers to the U.S. (though the U.S. may depend somewhat on the supply of cheap labor); an expanding market for U.S. goods; help curbing heroin and marijuana traffic; political stability.

In the long run, how Mexico uses its oil bonanza to solve social problems might be just as important to the U.S. as how much oil it exports. A prosperous and stable neighbor is a primary goal of any U.S. policy towards Mexico.

But great expectations can lead to great, politically explosive disappointments. Oil wealth may flood Mexico with revenues that, if not well managed, could fuel inflation without creating jobs and without reaching the bottom of Mexico's very unequal social scale.

Chronic corruption could siphon the oil revenues into the wrong pockets. Venezuela and Iran have shown that oil is not a panacea.

"We'll have no good examples to go by," said Victor Urquidi, a leading Mexican economist. "There is a great danger that . . .a large part of the oil money will be wastefully spent . . .that we will see social differences worsening for quite some time until the end of the century, when the labor supply will be smaller because of declining population growth.

"The basic structural problems Mexico faces," he added, "are not going to be solved in the short term by a boom of petroleum or anything else."