

opinion

Register-Guard fails a test of objectivity

Without wanting to launch a "media war" between Eugene's two daily newspapers, we feel a series that appeared in the Eugene Register-Guard earlier this week warrants a little scrutiny.

The three-part series, written by Guard reporter Mike Stahlberg and published in the Sunday, Monday and Tuesday editions of the paper, purports to take an in-depth look at the two Fourth District Congressional candidates — Jim Weaver and Ross Anthony.

The articles focus on Weaver's effectiveness in Congress, Anthony's background and idealism and the charges and counter-charges that have been flying between the two candidates for weeks.

To us, the articles appear to be more of a hatchet job on the feisty, four-term congressman than an objective look at the two politicians.

One University journalism professor (admittedly a Democrat) said he would have flunked a student who turned in such a series.

Tactics like the unnamed sources in the Weaver article, the emphasis on Anthony's "impressive" health project in Nepal (which was conceived, funded and critiqued by Anthony), and the misleading treatment of Anthony's campaign financing all appear to bend — if not break — common standards of objectivity.

In the Anthony article, folks from his past came forward to sing the praises of "a good guy who has his heart in the right place — who wants to better the world."

In the Weaver article, nearly every quote castigates the representative for superficial personality flaws that supposedly cripple his effectiveness in Congress.

There are other "questionables."

Anthony's staff was invited to submit photos for the series, from which the Guard chose the picture portraying the benevolent Peace Corp worker cuddling sad-eyed children.

Weaver's staff members asked if they could provide a photo, according to Weaver staff assistant Ron Eachus, but were told that using any photos but those taken by the Guard would endanger objectivity.

The reporter got to know Anthony, in part, by traveling around the state with him for a couple of days. He gathered information on Weaver by attending political events and talking to him on the phone.

The Weaver article played on congressional colleagues' criticism of his flamboyant style, his occasionally emotional outbursts, his lack of "congressional" style.

The Anthony article, while stressing his six years of Peace Corps experience in Nepal as an indication of his abilities and character, failed to complete the biography by pointing out he had lived longer in Nepal than Oregon.

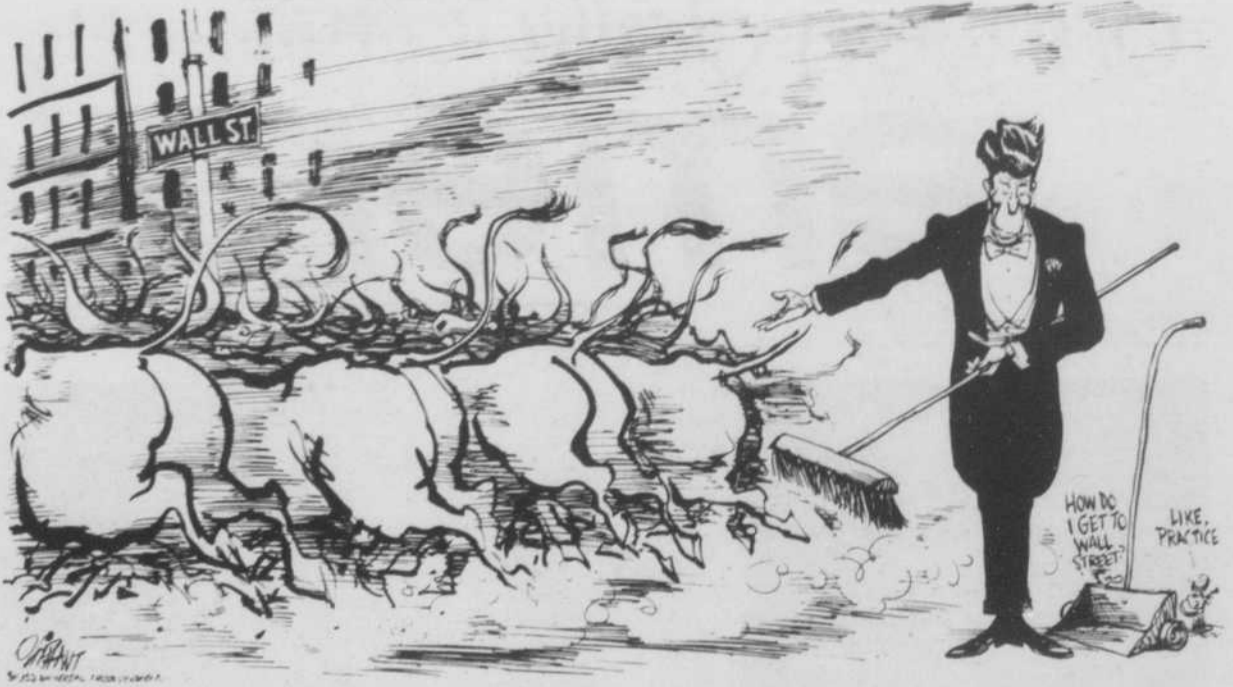
Near the beginning of the Anthony article, the University economics professor was saluted for stretching his \$18,000-a-year faculty salary to cover his costly campaign. Much further into the lengthy article, the reporter pointed out that Anthony is, conservatively, worth half a million because of stock in his family's department store chain.

But in spite of numerous phone calls and letters to the editor, Stahlberg and Steve Weiner, the Guard's city editor, aren't about to recant.

Weiner dismissed critics of the series as Weaver supporters who wouldn't be happy with any type of objective, critical analysis of the congressman's record.

According to Weiner, "We think we did a heck of a good job of reporting and writing."

What do we think? We think we know who the Guard will endorse in the Fourth District race — based on their objective coverage.



your turn

defend University interests

Last Saturday I went to canvass against Ballot Measure 3 — the property tax limitation measure modelled on California's Proposition 13. Proposition 13 has caused enough damage in California — a state with a huge budget surplus when "13" was passed.

It would be devastating in Oregon, and not just for the schools, police and public services funded directly from property taxes. Such state programs as higher education would also be caught in the general budget crisis — a crisis which Ballot Measure 3 would exacerbate through its requirement that any new taxes receive approval by two-thirds of each house of the legislature.

All of the Eugene canvassers against Measure 3 met in the cafeteria of South Eugene High School. When I arrived shortly after 9:00 a.m., that huge space was packed. It was standing room only for canvassers: primary and secondary school teachers and administrators, county employees, policemen, firefighters, L.C.C. teachers and staff and many who were just concerned citizens. But there was one group conspicuously underrepresented: the faculty and staff of the University.

I did not think much of the low University turn-out when I was canvassing. Frankly, I was enjoying myself. I had purposely chosen a North Eugene precinct because I thought it would be relatively conservative. Perhaps it was, but that was not reflected in the responses I got: only two people committed to Measure 3, several times that number already convinced that it must be defeated, and dozens

of pleasant and open-minded citizens willing to accept the literature I was distributing and listen to a few arguments against Measure 3.

With the latest polls showing voters statewide favoring the measure by a five to three margin, that was encouraging. But just as important for me was the opportunity to escape the Ivory Tower for a while, and interact with the good citizens of Eugene.

After I got back, however, and after talking with some other canvassers who had noted the low University turn-out, I gave the matter a little thought and it began to bother me.

We do a lot of complaining around the University about the level of support we get for higher education in Oregon. The gripe is, of course, justified: the slippage in funding for higher education is deplorable. It could cripple any meaningful attempt to promote real economic development in the 1980s.

But, I wonder if we members of the University community should not share a little of the blame. We often complain that in comparison to other states, Oregon ranks far lower in the level of funding for higher education than it does in funding for basic education. Is not one reason for this the fact that the Oregon Education Association mobilizes thousands of teachers to do things like work against Ballot Measure 3?

Those teachers make the political process work for them, while we too often sit around feeling sorry for ourselves. Regrettably, a large proportion of our students fail even to register to vote.

There are still two weeks until the election. It is a little late, but there is still time to make a difference in a number of contests on the Nov. 2 ballot.

There will be another leafletting against Ballot Measure 3 on Saturday, Oct. 30. There are local legislative candidates like Margie Hendriksen who have been strong defenders of the University. You could work on Ted Kulongoski's gubernatorial campaign: the last four years have shown how much Atiyeh cares about higher education. Or you can fight Reaganaut assaults on federal funding for education by working for Jim Weaver for Congress (Anyone who thinks that Ross Anthony as a freshman Republican congressman will stand up against Reagan's budget priorities has not been watching where his well-funded campaign is getting all that money.)

It does not matter so much how you get involved. What matters is that members of the University community — faculty, staff and students — *get involved*.

If we will not go out and use the political process to defend the interests of the University and higher education in Oregon, we can hardly expect someone else to pull our chestnuts out of the fire. If higher education takes another beating in the next round of budget cuts, don't blame the "un-enlightened" people of Oregon — blame our own inaction and apathy!

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oregon daily emerald

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published Monday through Friday, except during exam week and vacations, by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co. at the University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, 97403.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices on the third floor of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

News and Editorial 686-5511
Display Advertising and Business 686-3712
Classified Advertising 686-4343
Production 686-4381
Circulation 686-5511

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Letters to the editor **must** be limited to 250 words, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is turned in to the Emerald office. The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length, style or content.

"Your turn" is an Emerald opinion feature submitted by members of the University community. "Your turns" must be limited to 500 words and typed. This editorial column will not be edited by the staff, but selection will be based on appropriateness.

Letters to the editor and "Your turns" should be turned into the Emerald office, Suite 300 EMU.

Unsigned editorials appearing in the Emerald are based upon the majority opinion of the editorial board.