

# Editorial

## Address the root of teen birth problem

If a recent congressional study is accurate, the problem of teen-age pregnancy will continue to grow in epidemic proportions. The billions of federal welfare dollars that support women who gave birth as teen-agers would be better spent in efforts to prevent unintended teen-age pregnancy.

The Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families reported last week that "there is no focused approach to solving the complex problems of teen pregnancy at any level of government." According to the survey, an estimated 1 million unwanted teen-age pregnancies occur each year in the United States, resulting in 400,000 abortions and 500,000 births. 55 percent of the live births are to unwed mothers.

Teens also have more complications during pregnancies and births, and their children are more prone to illness, mortality, and physical and mental disabilities. Teen-agers have more low-birth-weight babies than older women because of poor nutrition and medical care early in their pregnancies.

Only about half of the girls who give birth before they are 18 finish high school, compared to 96 percent of those who have children later. The congressional researchers cited an Urban League study that found that unmarried mothers are more likely to live in poverty. This situation has led many to claim that the "feminization of poverty" is a cycle that begins with teen mothers — 71 percent of women under 30 who receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children had their first child as a teen-ager.

In addition, the economic situation has worsened the ability of young men to earn high wages, leaving them less willing to assume responsibility for a family. Thus, the number of unwed mothers has increased from 15 percent in 1960 to 55 percent in 1983.

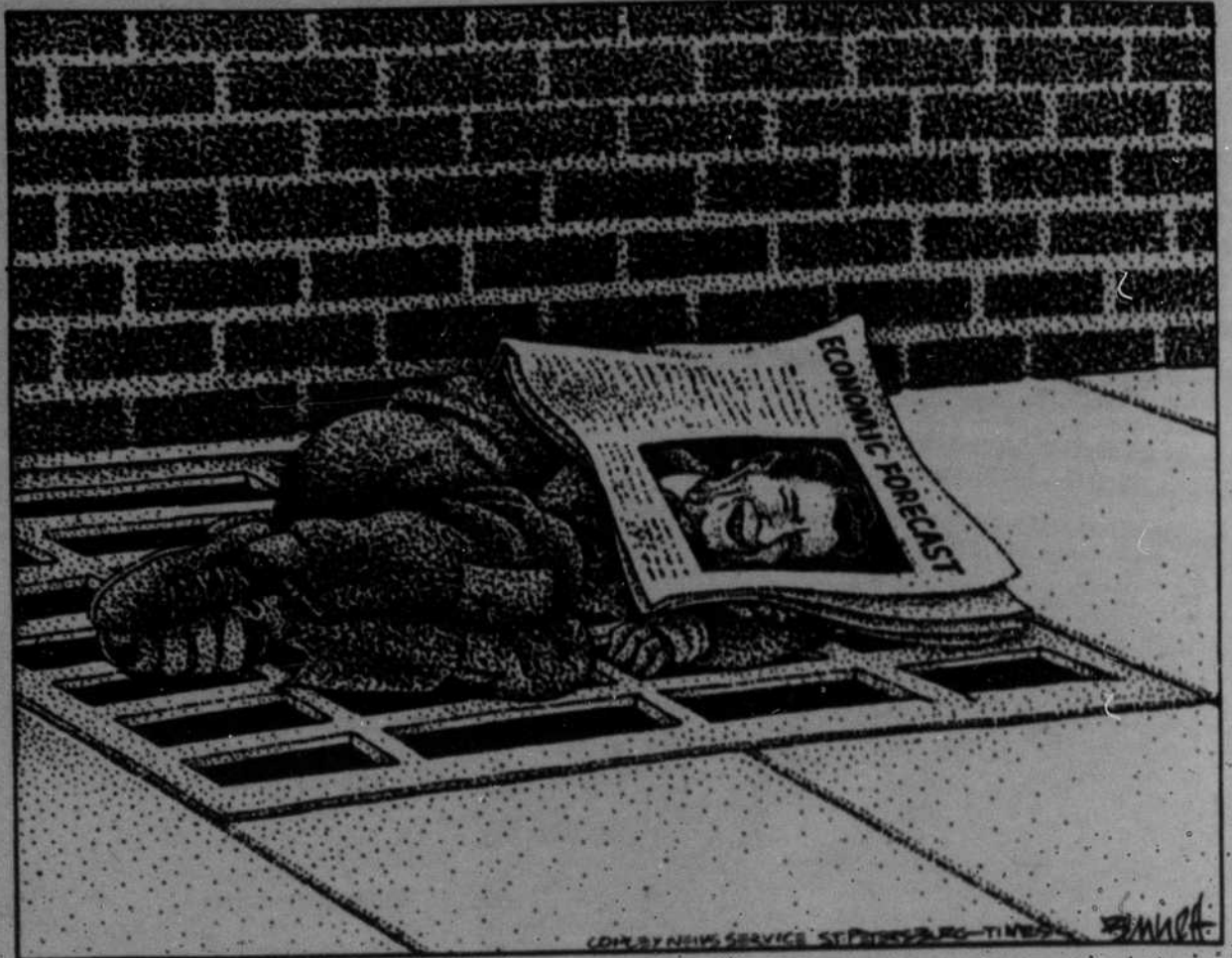
Economic problems are compounded by women's wage-earning inferiority. If an adult female worker makes 60 cents for every dollar earned by her male counterpart, it is important to note that teen-age girls make even less. In 1984, 65 percent of teen-age wage earners could not make enough money to pull a single-income family with one child out of poverty. And jobs themselves are scarce — the teen-age unemployment rate is about 18 percent.

And federal AFDC and welfare rules promote the fragmentation of potential families. Households in which a male is present — regardless of his breadwinning status — receive little or no aid. Young families are encouraged to separate because in many states, AFDC funds are a more stable source of income than low-wage jobs.

The congressional study stressed that pregnancy-prevention programs like health education, and contraception information and services "receive much less emphasis than programs for already pregnant and parenting teens." Indeed, recent studies have shown teen-agers in the United States are misinformed or ignorant about sex itself, as well as its ramifications.

Scholars at Johns Hopkins University found only one in three sexually active teens 15 to 19 years old nationwide uses birth control. The Alan Guttmacher Institute, a research affiliate of Planned Parenthood, reported the United States is ranked near the top of industrialized nations in teen birthrates.

Clearly, the vast sums spent by the government have not eased the problem of teen pregnancies. A national program promoting family planning would, over time, lower the rate of teen-age pregnancies and lessen the demand for welfare assistance. Without a shift of priorities in the form of pregnancy prevention, the rise of poverty among women and children will continue unchecked, as will the trend of single-parent families.



## Commentary

### OSPIRG fits EMU standard; should retain free-rent space

On Feb. 7, the Emerald said that the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group should be charged rent for its EMU office space. We disagree.

The purpose of the Erb Memorial Union is to augment the educational opportunities of students, encourage participation in the community, develop democratic principles and ideals and complement campus life. OSPIRG definitely fits that description. Students here at the University of Oregon created OSPIRG in 1971 as a way to enrich their education while working on issues of concern to them.

Through OSPIRG, students learn how to conduct research on public-policy issues, compile that research into reports and testimony, and present the research to the media, to public officials and to the community at large.

In short, students, through OSPIRG, learn what it means to be a responsible citizen in this society, and in learning this, they are able to have an impact on public policy and the quality

of life in Oregon.

For 15 years, students at this University have supported OSPIRG. For 15 years, the EMU Board has seen OSPIRG as a student group and as a group entitled to rent-free space.

The EMU Board recently changed its rental policy, requiring groups like OSPIRG to go through an appeals process in order to receive rent-free office space. The Board's intention is to provide rent-free space to student groups. During the appeal, therefore, OSPIRG will justify its status as a student group and define its relationship to the purpose of the EMU. OSPIRG in its very nature is a student group. Because OSPIRG is accountable to students through the referendum process and through a student-elected governing board, we believe that the group is entitled to rent-free space.

Each spring, OSPIRG surveys the student body at the U of O to determine the issues students are concerned about. Each spring, students elect a local board to provide leadership. OSPIRG is a student group because students control it.

OSPIRG is a statewide student organization active on many campuses in Oregon. This allows students to pool resources and work together on a larger scale and makes OSPIRG's work effective. This group of students maintains a professional staff to aid students in their research and teach them valuable skills. Four students from the University of Oregon and representatives from other campuses serve as directors of the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group.

In 1983, these students formed another corporation, the Oregon State Public Interest Research Group, to allow the citizens of Oregon the opportunity to support the learning

experience of students, to expand OSPIRG's legislative program and to involve Oregon's voters in citizen politics. Citizens donate money because they believe the work being done by students is important, and they want to see this work continue to grow.

The citizen contributions are obtained through OSPIRG's canvass program. In 1983, OSPIRG received permission from the chair of the EMU Board to run the summer canvass out of Suite 1. Permission was obtained from the Board the following year as well. Several members of the current board have been aware of this practice since then, as have other people associated with the EMU. There has never been a problem with this. Only recently has OSPIRG been informed that this practice is inappropriate. If this is the case, OSPIRG will discontinue running the canvass out of the EMU.

This spring, as is prescribed in the ASUO constitution, OSPIRG will run a referendum to determine student support and ask for an increase in funding. OSPIRG has always felt that the decision to support OSPIRG should be made by the entire student body.

It is the opinion of the Emerald that OSPIRG's funding should be investigated. We agree. All students should be aware of the voice they have in OSPIRG's operation, as well as the control they exercise on how OSPIRG's money is spent.

By Maureen Kirk and Erik Nilsson

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