

Editorial

Possible tax on toxins seems the right tact

During the 19 months the Oregon State Public Interest Research Group researched the dangers of industrial toxins, a toxic-related accident occurred in this state at the rate of almost one a day.

OSPIRG duly noted this remarkable statistic in its report, formally released Thursday. The high-accident rate becomes even more chilling when coupled with OSPIRG's assertion that only two cities, Portland and Gresham, have firefighting units fully trained and equipped to deal with chemical disasters.

In an effort to protect the public from the 6 million pounds of toxic waste produced in the state each year, the OSPIRG report proposes seven recommendations that will increase safeguards and reduce toxic chemical use.

In the face of some scary numbers and frightening scenarios, it is a pleasant relief to note that the OSPIRG recommendations are thorough.

Included under the OSPIRG proposals are tougher inspections of chemical sites and carriers, use of federal support and public participation as well as the creation of specially trained and equipped hazardous-material response teams.

But OSPIRG is aiming at much more than the prevention of chemical mishaps. Realizing the potential for disaster exists as long as toxins are in use, the public interest group is calling for legislation to enact toxic use reduction.

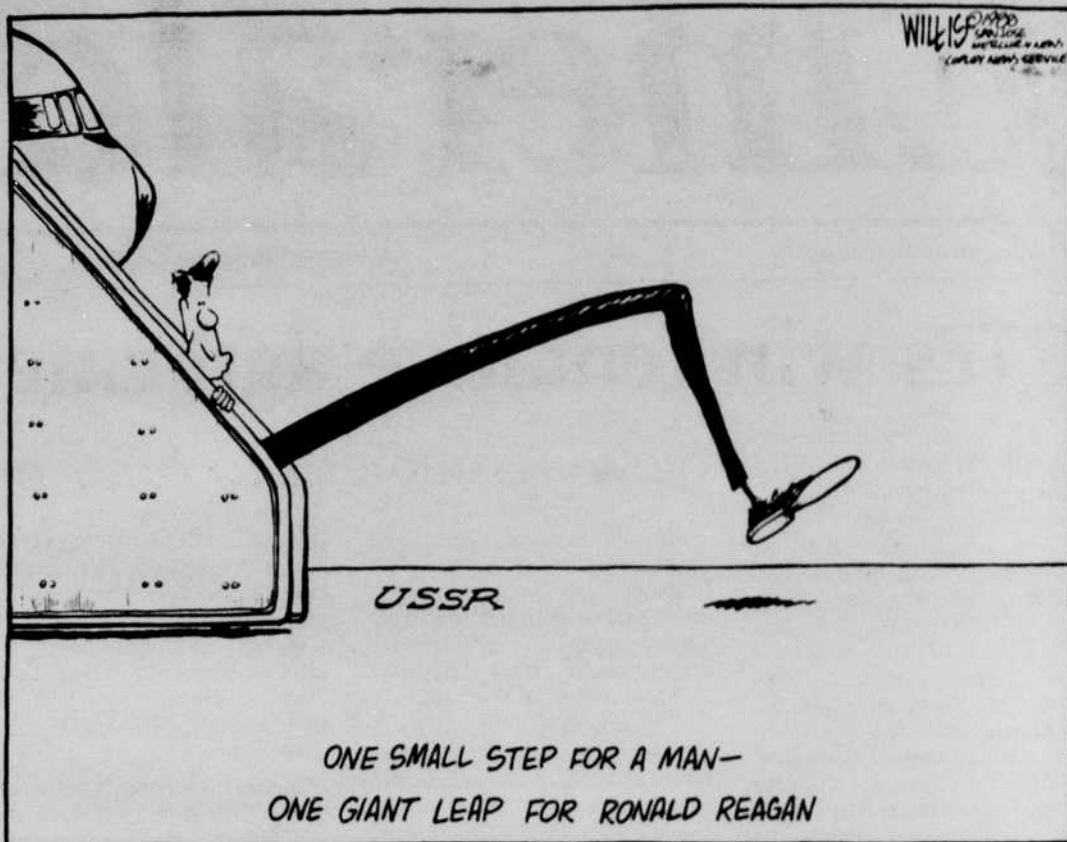
One of the more intriguing parts of such proposed legislation is a tax on the purchase of toxic materials. The tax apparently is modeled on a similar tax on the books up north in Washington.

This tax is a remarkably good idea. Under the OSPIRG plan, the funds would be used to create and support a research institute designed to help companies find ways to reduce the use of toxins. These taxes would lead to higher production costs and make the use of dangerous chemicals less attractive. And because the money would be used in ways profitable to business, the tax would not be overly restrictive.

It must be noted that many corporations already are seeking ways to lower their use of toxins and the associated dangers, as well as liability risks and storage expenses that come with them. OSPIRG reported national companies, such as 3M and Riker Laboratories, have cut down on their toxin purchases through redesigned production means or the substitution of non-toxic chemicals.

And here at home, the state's largest business lobby, Associated Oregon Industries, has supported efforts to reduce the use of toxic chemicals. The creation of a research institute that will work hand-in-hand with industries should create continued good will.

The success of any campaign to eliminate the industrial use of toxic materials will depend upon both the business community's acceptance of such efforts, and on the public's active demand and verification that companies are complying. Luckily, we currently have both OSPIRG prerequisites and an industrial community that appears receptive.



Letters

Confidential

According to Law School Dean Maurice Holland's June 1 letter to the editor, what really underlies students' dissatisfaction with the handling of their recent discrimination grievance against the Law School is their inability to appreciate the University's duty to withhold from students confidential hiring-related information.

Actually, what troubles students about the treatment of their grievance by the University has nothing to do with the privacy rights of faculty job applicants.

The issues of confidentiality and the right of redress through established administrative procedures should not be confused. That certain confidential discoveries made in a fact-finding investigation might, in a particular case, be protected from disclosure does not defeat the right of aggrieved parties to such an investigation, and to appropriate corrective action, as a basic proposition.

It is the University's dilution of this basic right of redress, and not some idle curiosity for secreted information, that underlies students' current

dissatisfaction. This dilution is evident in the notion advanced in Dean Holland's letter that President Olum's investigation has been a laudable "voluntary" undertaking, rather than the obligatory undertaking that many believe, in this case, fell below standards set by Oregon Administrative Rules.

As for an Affirmative Action Office investigation that, according to Dean Holland, has independently arrived at a finding of no discrimination, students shall be better equipped to assess this investigation and its findings when, if ever, they are accorded what has become the privilege of receiving a report confirming these.

Lucille R. Kaplan
Director,
ASUO Office of Student
Advocacy

Brutes

Two weeks ago I asked the questions "Where did equal human rights come from?" and "Dare we draw a line for fear of violating them?"

If our rights are defined by individual caprice then who is to stop others from violating your rights when they are simply exercising their right to violate your rights.

If the government is the giver of human rights, can we point our fingers to Nazi Germany, or Stalinist Russia and accuse them of violating human rights? Could we say anything about U.S. foreign policy?

If our transient society is the source of our rights can we condemn the evils of pornography, child abuse, racism and sexism with authority and not just moral passion?

As the Judeo/Christian view of humans fades from history so do the rights of humans. When evolutionary theory reduced human-kind to the equivalent of a smart animal, human dignity ceased. We became brutes.

If humans have fixed rights there must be a giver of human rights (God) who endowed these rights to them because

they were special. Any other source of human rights are vagrant and lack authority unless brute power is used to enforce them.

The further we depart from the Judeo/Christian view the more difficult it is to claim of human rights. This is also a departure from human reason and common sense, because natural reality tells me that I'm a special creature. We have rights because of God.

Rafe Mumford
McKenzie Study Center

Pass the buck

In an astonishingly passionate letter, Roy Lisi (ODE May 24) painted a tragic picture of a free-spirited motorcyclist who, for failing to protect himself with a helmet, is now a vegetable. Lisi argues that since society must now bear the burden of supporting the motorcyclist and his family, such irresponsible behavior should be illegal.

While one can imagine that there may indeed be several hundred such cases every year in this nation, the argument is utterly absurd. We turn our backs on the fact that some 350,000 people die annually due to tobacco-related disease and that roughly 50,000 others die in automobile accidents. The illness and death of these people places an enormous burden on society, but our government sees fit to subsidize tobacco growers and raise the speed limit.

Making self-destructive behavior illegal will never solve the problems caused by such behavior. Doing so does allow people like Mr. Lisi to feel smug and self-righteous, while placing the entire burden of enforcement on the police.

People love to pass the buck. If the problem doesn't go away, then the cops aren't doing their job. After all, we made it illegal, didn't we?

Jim Remington
Physics
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