

Don't pin blame on criminal immigrants

Notice to all pundits: Forget last year's political scapegoat, Willy Horton. According to a few of the state's political leaders, the new reason for everything bad in the land is the "crimmigrant" — the illegal immigrant, presumably Hispanic, and his or her amazing propensity for violent crime.

Last week, Oregon's Republican U.S. Rep. Denny Smith said that illegal immigrants are one of the chief causes of a national rise in crime. Also last week, it was revealed that state Sen. Ron Gensky claims Hispanics are responsible for 80 percent of the crime in Jackson County.

Smith has apologized to the state Hispanic Affairs Commission, saying that his comments were misunderstood — he had meant only those illegal immigrants who come here to sell drugs, and not the thousands of migrant workers who enter the country legally to help harvest crops.

In his clarification, of course, Smith is still eager to point the blame at foreigners; he seems to forget that American citizens can sell drugs too, and that in any event it is our indigent populace that buys the stuff. But this half-apology seems to be the best we're likely to get.

In contrast, Gensky is sticking all the way with his remarks. And while the first-term Republican claims that he too is speaking mainly of illegal immigrants, the man is apparently unable to draw a distinction between an illegal immigrant and any Hispanic person.

"Eighty percent of our docket for criminal cases have Spanish surnames on them," Gensky said during a legislative hearing Feb. 24. "The fact of the matter is, violent crime has increased dramatically as a result in my specific county."

Gensky's remarks are not only ignorant, they are apparently inflated as well. The Jackson County District Attorney's Office doesn't keep such demographic figures, and the state senator refuses to reveal where his information comes from.

District Attorney Bill Juba said that Gensky's number is too high; Lorenzo Mejilla of the county's Public Defenders Office claims that, in February, only 10 percent of Jackson County court cases involved Hispanics.

Perhaps figures are sketchy in Jackson County, but at the state level there is easy proof that the crimmigrant is only a straw man invented by Smith and Gensky, men who are eager to build a reputation as crusading crime-fighters. State Corrections Department spokesman Robey Eldridge said last week that Hispanics were an "extremely small percentage" of inmates in state prisons. And also according to Eldridge, as of Nov. 1, only 136 of 4,761 state prisoners were of Mexican descent.

Illegal immigrants make good targets for accusation because they are a powerless and unrepresented segment of our society. But let's hope that we aren't fooled into thinking they are the real cause behind this state's problems.



Clay pigeons make way for live herons

News of humans and wildlife living in harmony is hard to find nowadays, especially when the humans are carrying guns. But out in Coburg, the Lane County Planning Division is trying to find a way to reconcile the two factions, and we hope they succeed.

Coburg-area resident Mike Catlin's recently opened 35-acre target shooting course alongside the Willamette River has been shut down while he obtains the proper use permits that will allow him to continue business. At the same time, county officials are trying to figure out what to do with a natural heron breeding ground close to Catlin's property.

One of Catlin's neighbors, Scott Leatham claims that the great blue herons that nest on Marshall Island adjacent to the course were frightened away by gunshots when the course opened Dec. 10. And since the closure of the sporting clays course, the herons have returned.

Leatham also claims that there used to be another heron rookery on Marshall Island that was lost due to "man's encroachment." We agree with his contention that it would be a shame to lose this last one. The last time the island was surveyed in 1985, 15 heron nests were found.

Catlin's course apparently represents a growing hobby in the nation. Course shooters must abide by the United States Sporting Clays Association, which includes numerous gun-safety restrictions. So what to do?

How to make environmentalists and shooters happy?

The State Department of Fish and Wildlife has recommended that Catlin be allowed to operate his golf course with guns, providing he obtains the proper use permits and follows certain restrictions.

These restrictions would include either or both moving the eight shooting stations to the south end of Catlin's property, farther away from the heron rookery, and closing the shooting course from mid-February to May when the herons are breeding.

Catlin also will have to obtain a Willamette River Greenway development permit. The Lane County Planning Division has scheduled a Thursday hearing for his permit application.

These seem like reasonable restrictions. First of all, course shooters only score points for the clay pigeons they hit and not the live herons, so measures should be taken to prevent accidents. And as for closing the course in the spring, who wants to be out shooting during the rainy season?

To his considerable credit, Catlin seems more than willing to accept this compromise. "Most potential customers are also sportsmen," Catlin said. "If we've got to do this because of the herons, they'll understand that. You do what you have to do to protect wildlife."

We wish all sportsmen were so far-sighted.

Letters

Toxic reduction

There is currently a bill of grave importance in the Oregon State Legislature: the Toxics Use Reduction Act (HB2334). From Nevada, with its nuclear test sites, nuclear waste dumps, and scores of strip-mining projects, I came to Oregon, thinking it was the state of pristine land.

Since then, I have learned that there are 325 potential hazardous waste sites in Oregon that have been confirmed by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in addition to 112 instances of groundwater contamination. The Toxics Use Reduction Act will combat this terrible tainting of the earth by reducing the amount of toxics emitted into the environment.

One factor involved in Ne-

vada's poor lot was irresponsible representation in the past, and apathy toward environmental issues. I truly hope Oregon does not suffer the same spoiling as some parts of Nevada have. One way of insuring that this does not happen is by writing one's legislators expressing support for the Toxics Use Reduction Act. This bill concerns me because if Oregon cannot be saved, what state can?

Tracey C. Grose
International Studies

Endorsement

My experience with student government as both an undergraduate and a graduate student has taught me many

things, the most essential of which is the importance of ASUO elections. The student government has a tremendous amount of power, and all of us must take steps to elect leaders that will actively fight for student rights. This takes commitment and experience.

My vote April 19 and 20 goes to Tim Hughes for President and Maureen Kirk for Vice President, both running with Students for a Progressive Agenda (SPA). Their experience and commitment to activism combine to make them the best ticket for the Executive.

Hughes and Kirk have spent years working on student issues. Hughes has worked for student rights as a program director, IFC member and national USSA Board member. Kirk has worked locally as a program director and EMU Board

Member and nationally with the US PIRGs. Most importantly, they were both active when students needed them. When the incidental fee process was at risk, they were active in preserving student control. When the State Board and the State System made unjust decisions, they were active in organizing students.

They have specific ideas for increasing the diversity of campus — ideas that will work.

Their plans for fighting racism and promoting student power are innovative and will be effective. They have concrete strategies for improving the ability of the ASUO Executive to represent varied, often disenfranchised constituencies.

Please join me in voting Hughes/Kirk and SPA.

Karen Gaffney
Graduate student, PPPM

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