

New gun legislation misses its target

Ever since that fateful day in January when a 26-year-old drifter named Patrick Purdy killed five children on a Stockton, Calif., playground, the debate over gun control standards has been heated.

Perhaps this is particularly so in Oregon, where Purdy illegally purchased the AK-47 he used to murder and wound the school children and faculty.

Vera Katz, state speaker of the house, recently announced she had reached a working agreement with police officials and the gun lobby on a compromise bill to create new gun control standards in Oregon.

The bill contains some fine ideas, but it is really only a half-step in terms of gun control — assault rifles like the one used by Purdy have not been included.

The key element of the bill extends the state's five-day waiting period for a handgun purchase to 15 days to allow more complete background checks of buyers.

The background checks also have been expanded to include whether a prospective buyer has a history of mental illness or substance abuse problems.

Another provision of the bill requires handgun buyers to provide fingerprints at the time of sale to verify identity and to facilitate background checks.

But the only part of the bill which speaks to the use of automatic and semi-automatic rifles requires the purchasers of such instruments to fill out registration forms to be used for background checks — and to help conduct a study to see how often illegal purchases are attempted.

Katz claims past gun control efforts have gone nowhere in the state, and in order to reach this present accord — and keep the gun lobby happy — assault rifles couldn't be a part of the bargain.

"I've been around long enough to know what's possible," Katz said. Some would call Katz presumptuous in her claim that she can read the collective mind of the Legislature. Others would call it a cop-out.

Katz thinks that although the bill doesn't ban semi-automatic rifles, it will have a far-reaching effect because of tightened gun legislation.

But we think semiautomatic rifles should have been included — they are not at all appropriate for hunting purposes (unless hunting people has become a "sport"). Katz's legislation is a small step, but it didn't go far enough. The circumstances are even more frightening when one considers where Purdy purchased his weapon of destruction.



Priority list needs re-ranking of system

In December 1987, Portlander Coby Howard died while his relatives tried to raise money for his much-needed bone marrow transplant. He was seven years old.

Thus began the pressure on the Legislature to restore funding to the state's transplant program. Today, the state senate is expected to vote on a health care priority list bill, which, while helping the poor, would place lifesaving organ transplants as a non-essential medical service for low-income state residents.

Senate President John Kitzhaber, a Roseburg physician, conceived of the priority list in an attempt to deal with Oregon's crisis of having too many residents without health insurance and a government without enough money to pay for all of the needed services. He wants to provide state-paid health care for more people but limit the number of services covered to match available money.

We agree with Kitzhaber that this inventive idea of a priority list is a good idea. Making a list might set uncomfortably with some, but there remains a need for a mechanism that will make just and equitable decisions in terms of health care, and this at-

tempt is being watched around the nation.

However, the rankings are a bit off. On a scale of one to 10, with 10 as the highest priority, organ transplants rank a three — behind, even, preventive dentistry for children and routine dental care for the elderly (nine and eight respectively), eating disorder treatment (four), and treatment to quit smoking (six).

Hey, teach a child to brush well at least twice a day, and she'll do it for life. Trust me, I don't have any cavities.

Another complete surprise is the ranking of bunion removal for the elderly over the need to help teen-agers learn about the dangers of drug abuse. It's time we were shown a legitimate concern about the nation's future.

When the Senate takes hold of this proposal, we hope, should they decide to pass it on, that they'll take a hard look at the medical priorities and re-rank them.

It only seems fair that a liver-about-to-fail should receive immediate attention — certainly more attention than a cavity-to-be-filled.

Forum

Higher ed system: Let's live within our means

By Thomas Bartlett

Samuel Gompers, first president of the American Federation of Labor, is perhaps the best known of the nation's ear-

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ly-day labor leaders. Around the turn of the century, someone asked him: "Mr. Gompers, just what does organized labor want?"

Gompers' answer was both quick and to the point. "More!" he said.

We in higher education at times may have appeared to want the same thing. We wanted more money to educate more students, to offer more programs, to perform more research.

But how much we are willing to pay for the services of public four-year colleges and universities must be decided by Oregonians and in each biennium. Our public higher education system then must live within those bounds.

Our higher education institutions are funded at only about

75 percent of the level of comparable schools nationwide, and it is not likely that they will receive a major infusion of new money during the current legislative session.

Our university faculty salaries are in the bottom 30 percent nationally, and I am told Oregon is a terrific recruiting ground for other states seeking top professors and academic scientists. That is our loss.

There is a gap between our dollars and our aspirations. It is time to begin asking ourselves how much we can do, and do well.

Although I was born and reared in Oregon, I am still learning about our state's public higher education system. But it is becoming clear that we can sustain quality and hit important new targets only by following a series of steps: constraints on new programs, careful management of enrollments, and intensive and continuing reviews of our priorities. We must also continue our search for new resources, including attracting a larger flow of private funds.

Each of these should be seen

as part of the whole effort to be better, not bigger. This package includes:

- Program restrictions: In a similar vein, we must subject requests for new academic programs to a severe test of our state's priorities. We must ask ourselves, is the proposed new program important enough to take dollars from existing programs? Or are we prepared to terminate a program to finance a new one? If not, we probably cannot afford the new program.

We must adequately finance our highest priorities first.

- Enrollments: Higher education, like any enterprise, has always had incentive to grow. If we devised attractive programs and attracted more students, we assumed that we would also have larger budgets. Instead, however, state financing has not always matched program costs and increased enrollments. More students produce increased tuition payments, of course, but tuition from Oregon residents finances only about 25 percent of the actual cost of instruction.

As a result, we are now considering enrollment restrictions

on our campuses, including cutbacks in some cases.

That could well mean that some students will not be able to attend the state institution of their choice, but that is not new. Our public colleges and universities already have minimum standards for admission. We can now simply expect those standards to rise somewhat.

- Research universities: Oregon can afford only two major research universities, which we have today in Corvallis and Eugene. Other states our size don't support three.

Yet nearly half the state's population is in metropolitan Portland, and we shall have to expand services there. Portland must have a strong urban university.

Gov. Goldschmidt plans to appoint a blue-ribbon commission to examine higher education in the Portland area, and I expect one of the outcomes will be a call for more cooperation — among public universities and between public and private institutions, inside and outside the Portland area.

To continue taking on more

students, more programs, and more research, without matching them with more dollars could give Oregonians a false sense of educational security without giving them the excellence our state must have to compete nationally and internationally.

None of these ideas for living within our means seems particularly startling. They are no different from living within the limits of our household budgets. If our families purchase goods at a pace exceeding our incomes, the eventual result is bankruptcy. In public higher education, the result is an increasing gap between promise and reality.

I believe that Oregonians, like Samuel Gompers, do want more. I believe they want more of a national reputation that builds and attracts clean industry, more confidence that their sons and daughters are receiving a first-rate education, and more of the public services higher education can provide.

Thomas Bartlett is chancellor of the Oregon State System of Higher Education.

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