

# Exxon indictment a welcome surprise

All we can say is "It's about time!" After almost a year, a federal grand jury has passed down a five-count criminal indictment against Exxon and its shipping subsidiary.

The indictment is for the damage caused by 11 million gallons of oil that spilled from the Exxon Valdez tanker when it ran aground in Prince William Sound, Alaska, in March 1989.

Since the disaster, individuals, small companies and large organizations have filed suit against Exxon for various damages caused by the wreck, but until now the federal government had not taken legal action against the Exxon Corporation.

Exxon has tried to avoid prosecution, because that could cost them a great deal of money, but Exxon was unwilling to accept a plea offer, which could have required them to pay up to \$500 million in damages. Perhaps they thought it was too much money.

Unfortunately there is no way to assess the monetary value of the damages to the environment, the wildlife and the waters of the 1,000 mile stretch of Alaskan coastline affected by the spill. With the new indictment the company could be fined up to \$700 million or more depending on the judge's final assessment.

The indictment charges Exxon with the violations of the following: the 1972 Ports and Waterways Safety Act, the Dangerous Cargo Act, the Clean Water Act, the Refuse Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty.

All of these violations call for heavy fines, which could be increased by the judge to amount to the actual costs of the damages and repairs. In addition, any court decisions against Exxon by the federal government will not affect any civil or private suits filed against the company. That's good, because Exxon should have to pay dearly for its mistake.

It is true that mistakes do happen, and human error is inevitable, but in the case of the pristine land that was ruined by the oil spill (for who knows how long) the mistake is hard, if not impossible, to excuse.

The courts should prosecute Exxon to the fullest extent of the law. It is time to remind these huge oil conglomerates that they have a responsibility to the environment and they need to invest money into better ship building and prevention of future oil spills.

Perhaps after all is said and done the government can take whatever money it receives in fines from Exxon and invest it in oil spill and prevention research. We need to be better prepared for accidents of this magnitude, and research would be the best investment of this money.



# Court allows army to hold anti-gay rule

By passing on two opportunities to rule on the constitutionality of anti-gay discrimination in the nation's armed forces, the U.S. Supreme Court gave its tacit approval to one ugly legacy of discrimination that remains in this country.

The discrimination is obvious on its face. In 1982, the Defense Department issued a policy stating that keeping gays, lesbians and bisexuals from the military would help "maintain discipline, good order and morale" and "foster mutual trust and confidence among service members." It further stated that the exclusion would somehow "maintain the public acceptability of military service and ... prevent breaches of security."

Lawyers for Miriam Ben-Shalom, a Wisconsin lesbian, hoped to demonstrate that her excellent service record and proud service in the Army Reserve since 1976 would go far in discounting that Defense Department statement. Ben-Shalom is outspoken about her sexuality, and that fact alone, not a poor service record, prompted the army to discharge her.

The second case the court declined to hear is perhaps more insidious. James Woodward was discharged from the Navy in 1974 after he admitted in a questionnaire that he was sexually attracted to men. Woodward said he had never engaged in homosexual acts; he was discharged for his "propensity" to engage in such acts. He, and Ben-Shalom, were discharged for telling the truth about themselves.

There are some points to be noticed here. We're disappointed the court declined to hear the case, because we'd like to see the Defense Department try and prove what its policy says, that gays and lesbians are somehow undisciplined, unmotivated soldiers. That's simply not the case.

The defense department's policy is a reminder of how far civil rights have yet to go in this country before they apply equally to all. If the current court, Reagan's monument to discrimination, will not further the cause, then the people are going to have to do it themselves, in the legislatures and in the state courts.

# Letters

## Hoopla

With all the hoopla about how the University isn't paying teachers fairly, I find it rather amusing where the money is going instead. Perhaps you haven't noticed it, but inside Deschutes Hall there are a number of new Macintosh computers for those in the office and the professors. In the computing center one can find numerous Mac Plus computers.

I am not pointing this out to knock the University for buying computers, but I do question it for buying relatively expensive Macintosh computers. Outside of the University, students that will be working with computers in business will almost certainly be using MSDOS (IBM) based machines, and not Macs (not to mention the fact that MSDOS computers are relatively cheap compared to Macs).

So I am assuming that the University has purchased the Macs because of their easy-to-use graphic environment. Yet there are other computers out there which also have the graphic environment, run fast-

er, have better graphics, have better sound capabilities, can run Macintosh and MSDOS software, and can cost less than half the price, even when we consider the "discounts" the University gets from Apple.

Students, like myself, can't afford the price of a Macintosh computer, and hate being forced to buy one because the University finds it necessary to purchase these overpriced systems. I believe it would be in the best interest of the University to re-think its computer buying policy, buy better computers, and re-direct the left-over funds to teacher salaries.

Johnmichael Monteith  
Student

## Viewpoint

On Feb. 25, Nicaragua held free, democratic elections for the second time since the 1979 overthrow of the U.S.-backed dictator Somoza. Opposition candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro is the victor.

The choice to hold multi-party elections, to invite international observers, and to organize the government of Nicaragua in a democratic framework is not a result of the United States' insistence on the subject; it is a result of the hard work of the Sandinista party and the citizens of Nicaragua.

Daniel Ortega did not win this election, but it should not be seen as a complete loss for the Sandinista party. They have overcome the seemingly insurmountable obstacle of overthrowing a dictator who was put into power by the most powerful country on earth. They have instituted a democratic constitution, agrarian reforms and environmentally pro-

ductive programs. Most amazingly, they have done these things in the face of the United States' Contra warfare and economic embargo.

In many cases, the media has approached the issues involving Nicaragua and Latin America from a North American viewpoint, taking the propaganda of the U.S. government without examining the historical context and current realities of our involvement in the country. The "freedom" in Nicaragua did not come only from this election; the freedom came when the Sandinistas overthrew Somoza — and the struggle will continue until the U.S. recognizes Nicaragua's right to make its own decisions regard-

less of our own positions.

Amanda Weber  
Journalism

## Correction

A story in Thursday's *Emerald* misidentified ASUO presidential candidate Steve Maples as president of the EMU Board of Directors. He is president of the University Bookstore Board of Directors.

In Thursday's Letters column, Bob Weigel's letter should have stated: "Death, of course, has always been the one thing that proves that none of us has ultimate control over our bodies. I am glad my creator is in control of my body, because he knows me better than I know myself."

The *Emerald* regrets these errors, and apologizes for any inconvenience they may have caused.

## Letters Policy

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.