

Kerans tackles field smoke issue

Ballot measure needs support to survive

By Daralyn Trappe
Emerald Contributor

Oregon State Sen. Grattan Kerans is hoping to collect enough signatures to put a measure on the ballot in November that would ban the current practice of field burning by grass seed farmers.

In a forum at the University Thursday, Kerans said the 40-year-old practice of burning fields after a harvest has taken its toll on the local environment.

"They're using our air as their garbage disposal," he said. "They get the profit, we get the pollution. They get the gain, we get the loss."

Kerans reported that 20,000 tons of PM10 (particulate matter of 10 microns or less) are released into the atmosphere every year. PM10 is a cancer causing substance which gets embedded in the lungs when inhaled.

"Smokers do it to themselves, and the grass farmers do it to us," Kerans said.

The measure outlines a five-year phase down plan on open field burning in the Willamette Valley. Currently, 225,000 acres of grass seed are burned every year in the valley.

If the measure passes in the November general election, a 50 percent reduction in the total number of acres burned would be required in 1991. The reduction would continue until the practice is virtually phased out.

By 1995, all grass seed farmers would be required to either find an alternative to burning their fields or meet the best available environmental standards for it, such as the use of a propane machine which burns much cleaner, Kerans said.

When asked about the feasibility and expense of such alternatives as the use of a propane burner, Kerans said the machine is expensive but

farmers would be given a 50 percent tax credit if they purchased one.

He added that even family farmers could afford the machine.

"There are no poor grass seed farmers," Kerans said. "It's the number one industry in Oregon. And we're already saying we'll pay for half (of the machine)."

He added that another alternative is to sell the leftover grass seed to a country such as Japan. Kerans said Japanese farmers use it to feed their livestock and some states are already selling to them.

"Necessity is the mother of invention," Kerans said. "If this measure passes, the farmers will figure out another way to deal with the leftover grass."

"I'm not anti-farmer, I'm anti-pollution," he said. "I want them to succeed, and they will. I have faith in the ingenuity of the American businessperson."

Kerans said the reason grass seed farmers, the Oregon Seed Council and the Oregon Forest Industries Council want to continue the practice of field burning is that it is the cheapest way to get rid of grass after a harvest.

He stated that industries and corporations are subject to Clean Air legislation and other pollution control laws, and farmers should be equally responsible for the environment.

Kerans said he did not feel the measure would have a negative effect on Oregon's economy.

"As it is now, people don't want to come to a place that has four seasons - rain, rain, rain and smoke."

Kerans and other initiative supporters have collected less than half of the required 6,400 signatures necessary by July 6 to put it on the ballot in November.



Photo by Virginia Pearce

Roberts 'goes too far'

Lane County Commissioner Jack Roberts had a sign in his office window at the Lane County Courthouse Thursday that read "This One Goes Too Far! Vote No on the First Amendment." It was a doctored version of a campaign placard opposing a tougher nuclear free zone law.

Roberts was one of two commissioners who last week removed issues of *Forest Voice* magazine from the courthouse information booth. The decision continues to receive criticism, and Roberts said he put the sign up as a humorous response

to the controversy.

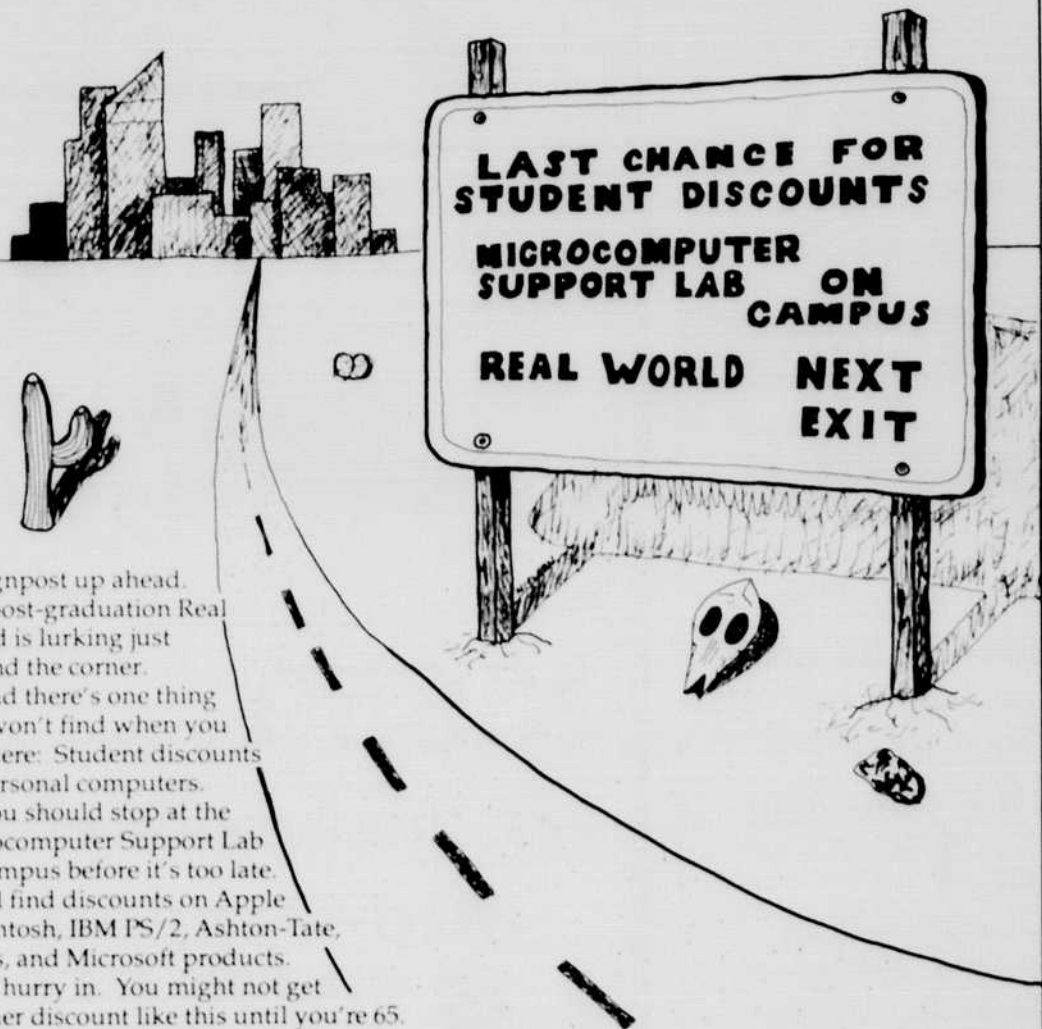
"If the First Amendment brings all of this, does it go too far?" he said. His message was a satirical commentary on the fact that recent decisions at the managerial level are being elevated to encompass constitutional issues, he said.

Forest Voice was removed from the courthouse information booth after a misunderstanding over which publications were allowed at the booth, Roberts said.

The magazine was much more confrontational than

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