

## Flag-burning issue just a smokescreen

With all the hoopla surrounding flag-burning, one would think it is the most pressing issue facing the country. We think Congress has much more to concern itself with.

The House and the Senate are preparing to vote on a constitutional amendment to make flag-burning unlawful. The Supreme Court, by a 5-4 margin, recently overturned a Texas law that made flag-burning a crime. Justice William Brennan, speaking for the majority, said the law violated the underlying principle of First Amendment law: "That the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea offensive or disagreeable."

What is offensive and disagreeable is the amount of time and energy lawmakers are spending on the flag-burning issue. With intense problems facing the country, including the budget deficit, the Savings and Loan crisis, AIDS, education funding, and military spending, it is deplorable to see Congress expend energy on restricting free expression.

The cry for a constitutional amendment against flag-burning is absurd. Our flag is supposed to represent our dedication to the principles of a democratic society, including free speech. It is illogical to assume that in prohibiting a certain form of free speech, we are protecting free speech.

No one knows what effect a ban on flag-burning would have on the First Amendment. With the National Endowment for the Arts under attack because it funds allegedly obscene art, and the performance of the rap group 2 Live Crew labeled "obscene" because of the lyrical content of its songs, free speech is under tight scrutiny. But the real scary aspect of the proposed amendment is the number of lawmakers jumping on the bandwagon to support it. It is perceived that a vote against an amendment is a vote against freedom in the United States.

Restricting flag-burning is in direct contrast to what the First Amendment represents. While President Bush says flag-burning "endangers the fabric of our country," he fails to mention the cloak of secrecy surrounding his role in the Iran-contra affair and his ties to Manuel Noriega. It isn't the cloth of the flag that needs protecting, but the principles it represents.

What would be the cost, in time, money, and resources, in enforcing flag-burning? If our flag represents all the good that the United States stands for, what about the poor, the homeless, and the unemployed? Some people may feel justified in burning a flag. Instead of prosecuting, and perhaps putting in jail, citizens who burn the flag, the government should be concerned with the causes of these people's frustrations.



## Homelessness: not a seasonal problem

For the past two years, the beginning of summer has signaled Lane County administrators that it is time to shut down Eugene's Opportunity Shelter. Perhaps county officials believe the homeless disappear in the summer, that homelessness is a seasonal problem.

Those of us with reasonable minds know that this is not the case.

It is true that the county provided families who were still staying at the shelter and were without permanent housing vouchers for local hotel rooms, but the families claim that the hotel rooms are unlivable.

Because of these problems, a few of the families decided to protest the closure by camping out on the shelter's lawn.

The creation of the Opportunity Shelter two years ago was a definitive move to deal with a pressing problem. Now the county wants to put its money elsewhere and plans on expanding current family shelter programs and building more low-income housing. Unfortunately these programs are not ready now for the people who need them now.

The continuing housing problem in this area seems to be at the center of the homeless problem. Income is a key factor in obtaining housing. Signing a lease on a place

is too expensive with first and last month's rent plus a deposit due before tenants can move in.

Some rental agencies even require potential tenants to earn at least four times the cost of their rent before they will even consider their application.

Landlords traditionally do not like families with a lot of children, even though it is illegal to discriminate against such families. Large families put a lot of wear and tear on a house, so landlords often prefer quiet, older people with well-paying jobs.

Community concern has been growing and some landlords are realizing the problems and opening up their doors to a wider variety of people. Over the weekend people brought food, clothing and money to the families camping out on the Opportunity Shelter lawn.

What is truly disheartening is that while public concern about homelessness continues to grow in our community, there is little direct action by our elected officials.

Money has been set aside to enlarge programs in the near future, but right now there is still a gap; there are still people without housing.

The county should have left the shelter open until it could provide needy people with equal or better services elsewhere.

## Abuses

With Admiral John Poindexter's sentencing (six months jail time and no fine), the series of Iran-contra prosecutions wages by Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh threatens to draw to an entirely unsatisfactory close.

Despite all the publicity over Poindexter's guilt on "all counts," like the other defendants, he was tried solely for his role in the cover-up, and not for the original criminal activity he attempted to hide. All charges relating to the actual Iran-contra activities were dropped because Reagan-appointed Attorney General Thornburgh refused to release the classified documents necessary to prosecute Iran-contra figures on these charges.

The real issues look as if they may never be addressed. The crimes which Iran-contra figures tried so desperately tried

to hide continue to be protected by the cloak of "national security" and many high-ranking officials involved in these crimes remain unprosecuted. The off-the-shelf covert "Enterprise" which illegally armed the contras and was uncovered by congressional committees and the Christie Institute, was neither dismantled nor brought to justice. In addition, government collusion with drug traffickers in support of the contra war and illegal propaganda efforts by the Office of Public Diplomacy have all been ignored.

When all is said and done, nothing was done to prevent the Iran-contra abuses, or worse yet, from happening again. Those who planned and committed the crimes have not been adequately punished and the institutional weaknesses that allowed the Iran-contra affair to happen have not been corrected. No institutional reforms have been made. The co-

vert community and their illegal activities were protected at the expense of our political system.

Douglas F. Starfield  
Eugene

## No mincy steps

President Myles Brand's overseas journeys, and especially his trip to South Korea, remind me of a conversation I enjoyed with a young man just back from a vacation in Europe.

I asked him if he had noticed how Europeans can recognize an American woman a block-and-a-half away; by the easy way she walks — no mincy steps. And certainly no walking behind a male companion, as in the Middle East (so as not to interfere with the Great Man's thinking).

This fellow back from Europe had served in the U.S. military

over in South Korea; and there, he told me, women walk a block-and-a-half in front of the men they're with. Why? Because all of the land-mines haven't been found yet. Well, that's what he said.

James Heermance  
Eugene

## Shocking photo

Rarely am I stopped dead in my tracks like I was when I opened the Emerald (ODE, June 1) to a photo on page three of three generations of men engaged in "valuable leadership skills" including teaching a

young boy how to aim and shoot an automatic weapon! I am shocked by what appears to be the "fun" quality of the picture. Is ROTC advocating teaching children how to use automatic weapons? What are these folks smiling about?

We should be horrified how pervasive militarism is in our society that a photo like this can appear in a local newspaper and make learning to use a deadly weapon look like a fun and appropriate activity. Printing this photo was a grave mistake.

Janet Cromwell  
United Methodist  
Campus Ministry

## 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.