

COMMUNITY

Rights program set to regroup

By June Russell
Emerald Reporter

Proposals to restructure the Eugene Human Rights Program received unanimous approval from the city council at a work session Monday night, pushing the proposals toward a Nov. 5 public hearing.

The proposals call for changing the way in which human rights problems are dealt with. In the past, the Human Rights Program addressed individual groups — such as women, the aging and minorities — separately.

Under the proposed structure, common problems between groups would be identified and solved.

"One of the goals is to get people to work together," said Lynn Kahle, task force member and president of the Commission on the Rights of the Aging. "We need a more systematic way of dealing with problems because a lot of commissions are dealing with the same problems."

Using what is called a functional model, 14 community members and the mayor or a city council member would form the Human Rights Commission. The mayor would nominate members for the first year, and the city council would appoint nominees to staggered terms.

In subsequent years, the council would both nominate and appoint commission members.

This commission would be supported by three standing committees, each with five members

from the commission and five members from the community. These committees would focus on education, outreach, discrimination, harassment and accessibility.

The change in structure reflects a change in how human rights problems are perceived and approached. Instead of building on the concept that different groups have different problems, the functional model operates on the concept that different groups need to work together to solve similar problems, such as discrimination, which is something all groups face.

The functional model better serves groups often excluded by what is called a constituency model, such as religious minority groups, gays and lesbians, and low-income and homeless people.

"The commissions would focus on the issues, so it would unify groups," said Mayor Jeff Miller, task force chairman. "The idea is that no matter who you are, there is a commission to help you."

The task force, created by the city council in April 1989, worked 18 months to create the proposals to restructure the Human Rights Program. Along with the proposals, the task force developed recommendations for improving the program's overall efficiency.

One problem the task force faced was the need for city council members to be more involved in the Human Rights Program.

Only time will tell how effective the new structure will be in dealing with human rights concerns in Eugene, Miller said.

Oregon DAILY EMERALD

P.O. Box 3159, Eugene, Oregon 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published Monday through Friday except during exam week and vacations by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

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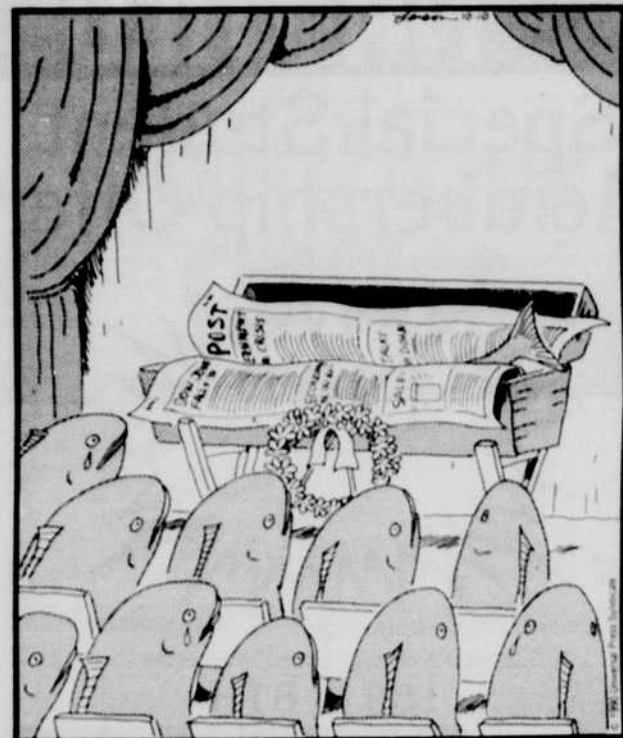
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By GARY LARSON



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