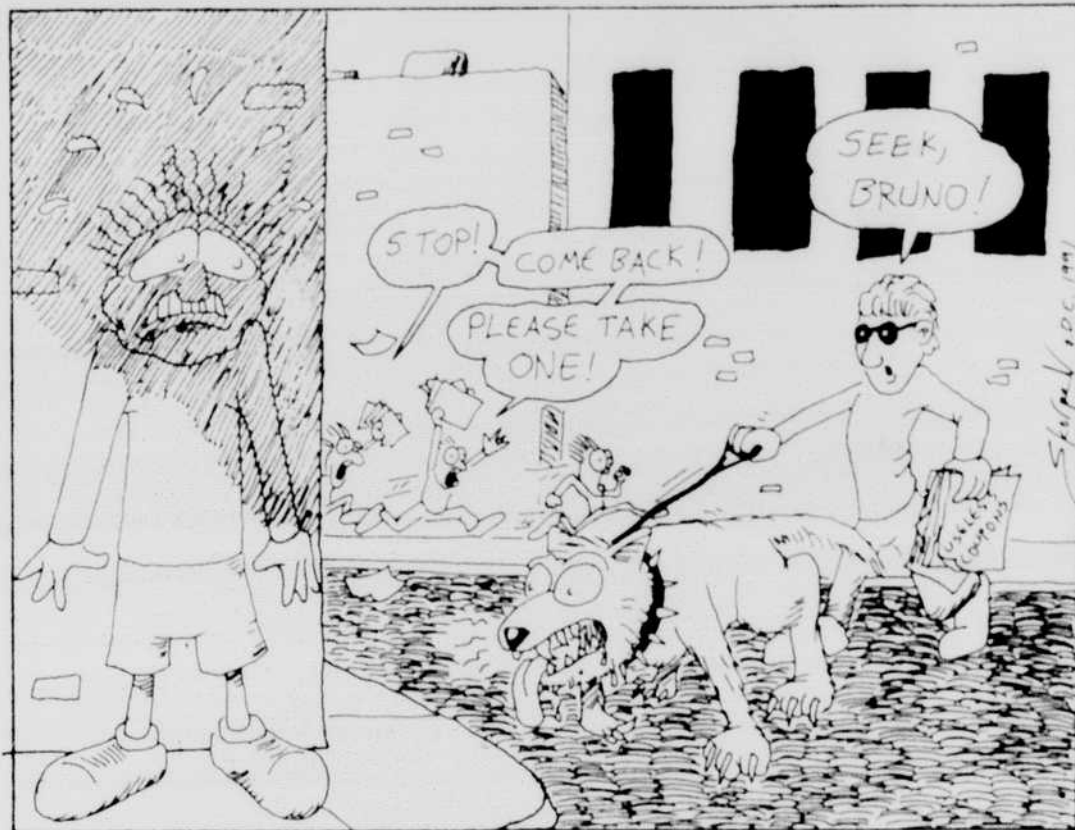


OPINION



Got them petition signin' blues

THE FINE PRINT
BY PAT MALACH

Here it is, two weeks into the term and nary a political rally on campus to speak of. Generally by this time the campus is embroiled in rallies against this, for that or celebrating whatever.

But don't let the lack of overt political activism fool you. The river of right-thinking lobbyists still flows strong through the EMU. They are the brave souls who, on a daily basis, face the cold shoulder and contempt of the politically naive. They are ... the petitioners.

You've seen them in the EMU Courtyard. You've seen them on your way to the Fish-bowl, and if you got to register, you ran through a gauntlet of them coming out of Mac Court.

The petitioners are a wily group. They have to be. It's not enough in this get-the-hell-out-of-my-way world to wait for people to approach them and sign their political statements. Forcing political change means going out and getting in people's faces.

One of the petitioners' most effective tactics is the guilt technic. The guilt technic is successful because of its simplicity. It works on the theory that you would rather sign the damn paper than have to deal with the condescending gaze of someone who obviously feels betrayed by your lack of political empathy.

For those of you who are committed to never signing petitions, there is only one defense against the guilt technic: Never make eye contact. Once you have made eye contact with the person the game is over. Even the most stalwart of petition avoiders will have a difficult time saying no to the desperate-looking activist.

Take the case of Marvin, an innocent freshman heading into the Fishbowl for a veggie bagel. Marvin makes eye contact with a deceptively passive-looking petitioner.

"Are you a registered Oregon voter?"
"Yes."

"Have you signed the petition against skinning puppies alive and then dropping them from PLC?"

"No I haven't."
"Then you favor skinning puppies alive and dropping them from PLC?"

"Well, not exactly."
"Line 25 please. Thank you and have a good day."

Let's review Marvin's road to ruin. He broke the first rule by making eye contact and set himself up for the guilt ploy. Of course, there are other options Marvin could have used. First of all, lie, lie, lie.

For example:
"Are you a registered Oregon voter?"
"No!"

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Generally, this response would get him off the hook. But what if the petitioner throws Marvin a slider.

"Well, you're in luck. You just need to be a student here to sign this one."

Now what should Marvin do? Simple, lie again.

"Well golly, I've already signed that petition."

Again, this would normally end the petitioner's pursuit of your affirmation. Unless, of course, you're facing one of the petitioner pros. These people have heard them all and are not put off so easily. To successfully dodge becoming a victim you must be vigilant and prepared.

"You didn't sign this. I'm the only one collecting signatures and I would have remembered you."

The key here is to being able to think fast on your feet.

"Well a friend of mine who is not a student wanted to sign the petition and couldn't so she signed my name instead."

Once the lying tactic begins

to snowball and the lies are getting bigger and more far-fetched, revert to an old stand-by.

"Look at the time we've wasted talking about this. I'm late for class, sorry."

If you have some kind of sick aversion to lying, there are always the avoid-at-all-cost tactics employed by some of the more experienced upper-classmen.

The first of these tactics is the timing technic. This involves three basic steps. First, you have to spot the petitioner right away. Second, make sure you are in a crowd of people and you're not going to pass the petitioner alone. And third, time it so that at least two other people go past the petitioner before you do.

While the petitioner is occupied by "No, I'm not registered," and "Yes, I have signed that," you slip by unscathed. Naturally, if there are several petitioners you must adjust your timing pattern.

The examples provided here merely skim the surface of possibilities for skirting petition collectors. There are infinite possibilities. Just use your imagination.

I would like to note however, that sometimes signing the rare petition can be fun, and not just for the novelty of the experience either. Now this is unlikely to happen, but suppose the Oregon Citizens Alliance comes to campus with one of its right-wing hate petitions. Definitely don't ignore this one.

If an OCA petitioner asks for your signature you should gladly oblige the person. But don't sign your name. Sign J.T. Ossenpepper, or Ralf Overstreet or anything else you can think of.

Simply not signing the petition would be too easy. Use your imagination and sign a fake name. Let the OCA waste its time and energy trying to verify names like Marvin A. Fallinline.

Pat Malach is managing editor of the Emerald.

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