

Right to die needs strong safeguards

When Washington citizens go to the voting booth Tuesday, they will be deciding on one of the most divisive current issues. Although abortion is on the ballot, that issue is surprisingly being dwarfed by the measure supporting the right for people to decide when their lives are over.

Do people have the right to die when modern medicine runs out of options? Everybody has an opinion on the subject, and the proponents and the opponents are equally vehement.

Backers of Initiative 119, or "Dignity with Death," have lined up terminally ill patients to show support for the measure. Opponents are countering with television spots showing people who were diagnosed as terminally ill but recovered. Both sides' media campaigns are designed to hit voters squarely in their morality. If the acrimonious debate Initiative 119 has sparked is any indication, the advertising agencies have succeeded.

The issue is not new. Living wills have been around for years, and there is even a how-to suicide book, *Final Exit*, on the stands. But Washington is the first state to offer such a bill.

Specifically, Initiative 119 would allow patients who have been diagnosed with having less than six months to live to commit doctor-assisted suicide. There is no residency requirement, which opens up a whole new problem.

Should the measure pass, tragic consequences are possible. Poverty-laden patients might feel pressured to end their lives. Seedy relatives looking for inheritance money could persuade patients into the act.

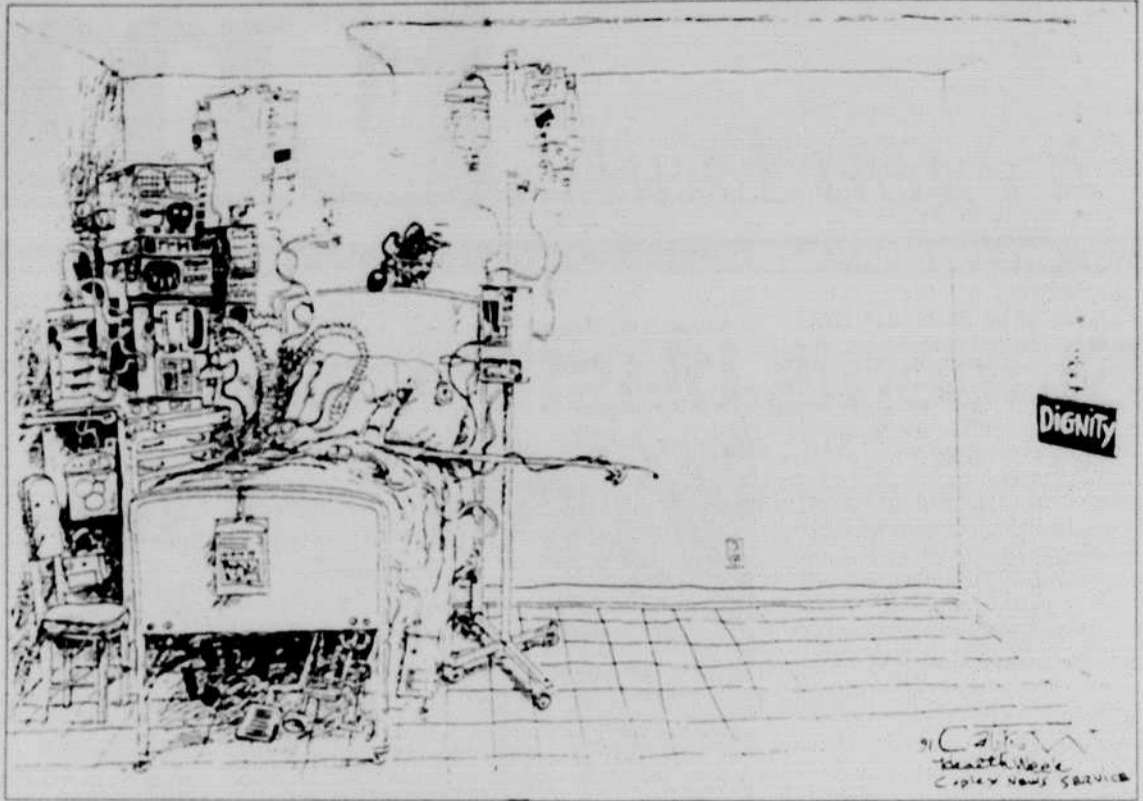
There are several potential problems, but they do not come close to outweighing the importance of this bill. Washington voters need to pass Initiative 119.

Just as in the abortion debate, the issue is the definition of "life." Life is precious, but so is mercy. Is it "life" to spend the last six months of one's existence hooked up to machines, wired with electrodes and stuffed with tubes, in pain, with no hope for recovery? Obviously not. Mercy and dignity are two very important parts of life. To be stripped of both makes life not worth living.

But there need to be steel-hawser safeguards attached to Initiative 119. The decision will have to rest solely with the patient, to circumvent undue pressure. Patients need to be informed of their rights, their options and the consequences before deciding on the suicide option.

Even if Initiative 119 fails (nobody is making any predictions), its importance will not diminish. A dialogue has been established where none has ever existed. As long as people are talking about the subject, the possibility of a solution amenable to both sides exists.

Is it "life" to spend the last six months of one's existence hooked up to machines, wired with electrodes and stuffed with tubes, in pain, with no hope for recovery? Obviously not.



LETTERS

No business

Some time ago the State Board of Higher Education held a fake public hearing at the University on its proposal to bail out the more than \$6 million deficit run up by the University, Oregon State University and Portland State athletic departments.

I attended the meeting to venture my opinion that the University had no business in the business of subsidizing high-cost minor-league experience for National Football League and National Basketball Association players at the expense of its primary educational mission.

I also wanted to ascertain if, as rumored, the board members had heads filled with pressurized air in the shape of footballs and basketballs.

Alberto Salazar, local restaurateur, predictably spoke in favor of public welfare for the three athletic departments in excess of \$3 million annually. He urged the board to dismiss as unrepresentative the opinions of the "political" students and faculty who opposed this special funding at the expense of academic quality.

According to this view, of course, the gaggle of pampered athletes, the head of the Chamber of Commerce, the hospitality industry representatives, the purveyors of Fighting Duck paraphernalia, etc. were not a well-organized, special-interest, political force. Apparently if you're in it for the bucks rather than educational principle, then it's not "political."

By the way, when will athletic director Bill Byrne be officially inaugurated as president of the University? I'd like to attend the ceremony.

Jerome Garger
Eugene

Yep

The Cafe: An oppressive rain beats incessantly upon foggy windows. Inside, an emancipated young woman sits at a corner table reading Burroughs' *Junky* to illustrate her misanthropic disposition.

She holds the book high for all to see, occasionally scanning the room for looks of approval. A black cloak is rapped tightly around her shoulders like the confining foreskin of the great patriarch.

She jots macabre prose in a tattered journal: "I lament an existential existence of social misunderstanding in a bleak and absurd world. As I struggle for diversity and peace in Eugene, U.S. companies harness mother earth with fences of industry across her gentle back.

"A guilty man sits at the next table. He hasn't long, peaceful hair; nor does he don a black cloak. But he is indulging in death! An animal's slain corpse he so euphemistically calls a hamburger lays whimpering and bleeding in his hairy, violating claws. As the man thrusts his teeth into the innocent flesh, testosterone drips from the lips of Columbus. I stare in horror at the manifestation of evils past."

Disconsolate and head hung low, she rubs feces all over her body to affirm her independence. A tear drips from her pale cheek and splashes violently into a pool of house coffee. She sees how quickly something so beautiful and unique as a tear will conform to the bitter, homogeneous caffeine.

Once again the interaction of nature and humanity imitates art, resonating a metaphor of injustice against the alternative citizens within our community.

Ryan Blacketter
English

Miss something?

We have a question for Lucas Gutman: Which *Other People's Money* did you watch? Your review (*ODE*, Oct. 25) could not possibly have been for the movie we saw last weekend. That one was a rental at best; the script was dull and predictable while the plot ended without a measurable climax.

The fairy-tale ending was so contrived and unbelievable one could only stare at the rolling credits and ask, "Did I just miss something really big here?"

As long-time fans of Danny DeVito (*Taxi*, *Ruthless People*, *Jewel of the Nile*, *War of the Roses*), we were disappointed to see him accept such an undemanding role. Penelope Ann Miller's performance was terrible. Her character never develops past the tired "tough" and "sexy" exterior that serves as "a worthy opponent" to the shallow Larry (DeVito).

Neither character is convincing in his or her forced attraction (dare we say love affair?): DeVito's interest is purely physical lust while we never really see just what attracts Miller to DeVito. Something physical? Doubtful.

We agree that the Gregory Peck we saw was the same one you describe. His performance was strong yet it does nothing to save the whole production. You wrote that this is a "challenging film to watch." We can only reply that it was challenging to enjoy.

Three and a half stars? NOT! Maybe two ... (maybe).

Eric J. Antcl
English/History
Tina M. Peterman
Human Services

LETTERS POLICY

The *Oregon Daily Emerald* will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community.

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.

