

# EPA's gutless act puts owl in trouble

Many have tried, few have succeeded. And in the end, the Environmental Protection Agency just didn't want the chance to play deity.

The EPA Wednesday backed out of the so-called "God Squad" hearings on the spotted owl, leaving environmentalists fuming and the Bureau of Land Management dancing in the aisles.

With the main government environmental group — albeit a waffling one — out of the picture, the 44 Oregon timber sites the BLM wants to log are one step closer to becoming mountains of two-by-fours. In addition, the fate of the spotted owl is crystalizing — eventual extinction.

Why the EPA bowed out is up for conjecture. In December, the group argued its way into the hearings, claiming it had a right to participate in any decision affecting the nation's environment. The EPA was correct — it did have a vested interest in what the God Squad decided. It was the EPA's duty to oversee the hearings and submit relevant and vital testimony.

Didn't work out that way.

By leaving the hearings — whatever the reason — the EPA managed to sabotage any hopes environmentalists had of influencing the squad. EPA testimony carries much more weight than non-governmental sources. EPA findings on the environmental impact of logging the 44 areas will now probably not be heard.

The quickie self-removal has opened debate on whether Bush is pulling strings to influence the hearings. The EPA isn't talking, and there is no smoking gun, so any such accusations are simply guesswork. But the pullout is odd.

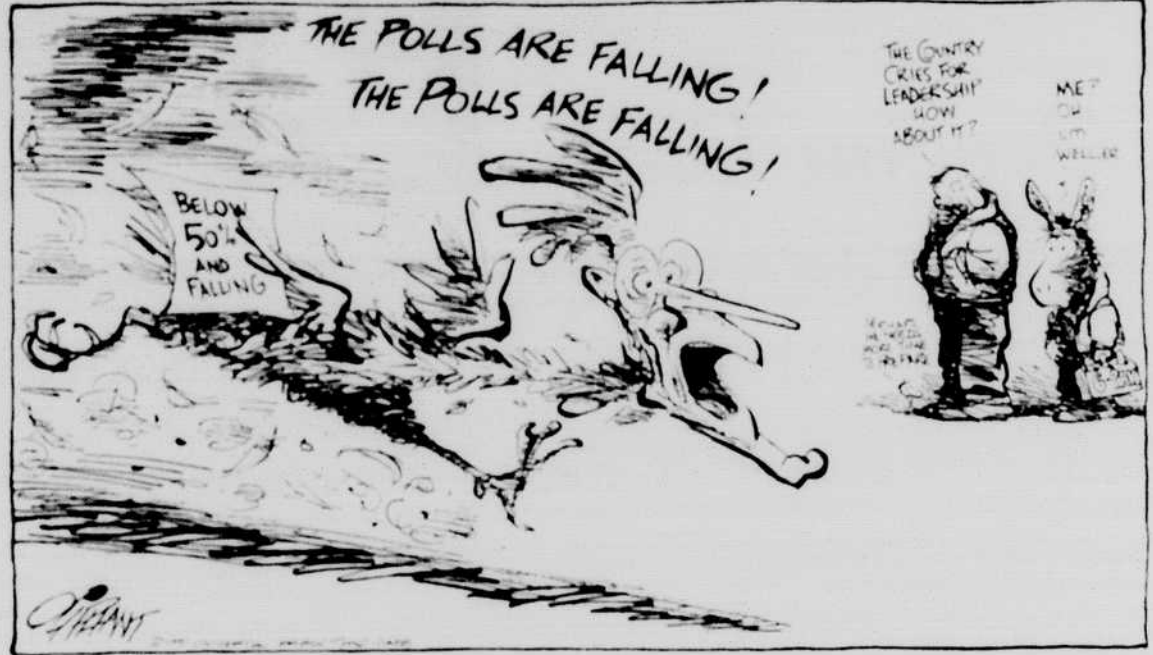
No matter whose side you're on, logger or owl, not hearing all the facts means a biased, one-sided conference.

The 4,600 acres in debate seem a pittance, unless you're an owl or logger.

Should the Endangered Species Act be upheld, some timber workers will lose their jobs. If the God Squad allows logging, the spotted owl will be in danger of extinction. Such dilemmas make for difficult and unpopular decisions.

Regardless, the EPA's wimpy action is an insult. What the God Squad needs most is a reasoned debate on both sides of the issue — not a BLM-dominated session. The EPA has done a disservice to its name.

**No matter whose side you're on, logger or owl, not hearing all the facts means a biased, one-sided conference.**



**COMMENTARY**

# U.S. is lobbying its future away

By Mike Colson

As the United States economy continues to flounder and wallow its way out of mild recession, and as the election year is upon us, many American political commentators and politicians are lining up to take potshots at the Japanese.

The Japanese are one of the prominent reasons why the country is losing markets, which means losing jobs and adding to unemployment at a time the country can ill afford it, so say the protectionist supporters.

The anti-protectionist forces counter that protectionism, meaning retaliating against nations that close their markets to our goods through closing our own markets, is simply the wrong way to achieve the intended goal of total free trade between nation-states as it only forces more, not less, closed markets in the game of tit-for-tat.

Both sides in the debate have valid points. In fact, the protectionists and anti-protectionists are after the same goal — free, and fair-trading practices. However, their means to achieve the intended result are about as satisfying as paying high tuition.

If public policy swings behind the protectionist view, it is likely America will become more isolated from its trading partners, including, but not limited to, Japan.

This will up the ante in a dangerous bidding war. Tariffs and quotas would go through the roof. Americans would be forced to pay double, maybe triple, current prices and the possibility exists that full embargoes might result. In the end, nobody wins.

So where should policy go? What should America do to right the wrongs in the trade imbalance, especially with the Japanese? In order to start finding answers, the country must realize the initial premise which surrounds the discussion, "The Japanese did this to us," is fundamentally wrong.

The real fault lies with ourselves as a nation and what our very own government allows to happen in regards to lobbying, buying of influence, and the revolving door of employment practices. As the *New Republic* simply stated: "The real scan-

dal in Washington is not what is done illegally, but what is done legally."

Japan runs one of the largest continuous political campaigns in this country and the price tag is cheap in comparison to the Japanese political system of campaigning. At least \$400 million each year is spent hiring American lobbyists in Washington, D.C.; super-lawyers, former senators and House members, former high-ranking cabinet officials — and even former U.S. presidents.

Japan does not allow other nations to manipulate its curriculum taught in schools, especially in university programs, where universities are bought up, or bankrolled by Japanese donors. America does.

Japan does not depend upon other nations financing its thinking about Japan's long-term role in the world economy. America does, and the established Japanese think tanks bear this out. American scholars will often not criticize the "hand" that "feeds" them.

Japan does not permit its politicians or parties to accept donations from foreigners. America does.

Japan, also does not tolerate its high government officials becoming other nation's top lobbyists and advisers. America does.

In sum, America tolerates foreign interference in its domestic affairs before trade even is discussed. Japan does not. The declining American civic virtue is the problem. The villainy by the Japanese and other foreign interests is not the real problem in the trade debate. It is an American problem and it is an American weakness. America's competitors simply use the legal opportunities afforded them to maximize their advantage.

All the talk about protectionism and anti-protectionism is missing the mark and won't really solve our problems. In so many political issues, we let ethics slide. Unfortunately the American public has gotten so used to sleaze that when the honest truth is spelled out the public doesn't know how to internalize it and adopt it for the health of the nation.

The debate should refocus on the ethics of influential Americans who have willingly supported the cheapening and core corruption of not only the con-

duct of public service to the nation, but our national interests.

The criticism offered up takes three forms. First, they claim the examination of foreign influence over American politics and institutions reads "McCarthyism." But the issue is not so much about patriotism or ideology as it is about widespread, identifiable corruption — all legal and tolerated in official Washington circles.

Second, the all too familiar chime of "racism" or in this case the familiar "Japan bashing" is utilized to blunt criticisms for Japanese influence peddling. The race card is a familiar gambit used to discredit concerns of Americans over policies that affect their lives. Obviously, some Americans are still racist, but legitimate issues are denied the opportunity to be discussed because of this stigmatizing label.

Finally, these American and foreign operatives object to inspection and criticism of their activities on grounds that they are playing the "game" by American rules. Their point is that Washington permits insiders in the government to peddle influence to the highest bidder.

My point is that the "game" itself is harmful to American interests and requires reform. Throughout history, the U.S. has utilized both protectionist policies and less protectionist policies — both have met with little success. Protectionism, in force before the Great Depression, is credited with having added to the problem of economic recovery. The current negative trade imbalance speaks to the success of anti-protectionist policy. Neither really works.

The corruption of American government by domestic interests is no less destructive than by foreign interests. Depending upon if we allow foreign interests to legally continue lobbying the halls of Congress, and paying Americans to do so, will determine if we make any real difference in achieving the intended goal of free and fair trade among nations. A nation without civic virtue and ethics is a nation that probably won't survive the tests of time anyway. Thus, if we are unable to learn from history we are doomed to repeat it.

Mike Colson is a political science major at the University.

**COMMENTARY POLICY**

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