

VanLeeuwen's ideas gloss over problems

State Rep. Liz VanLeeuwen was funny at first. The Halsey Republican proposed a mandatory gun ownership law for all Oregon citizens, saying it would cut the state's crime rate drastically. Everyone chuckled, including several police chiefs.

Two weeks ago, VanLeeuwen introduced another bill to the Oregon Legislature. This time she wants to reduce the penalty for assaulting a person who is desecrating the flag. Rather than charging the suspect with fourth-degree assault punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$2,500 fine, VanLeeuwen wants the offender be charged only \$25. Jail time would not be necessary.

VanLeeuwen's outrageous ideas are harmless by themselves. The Legislature will never pass the bill, especially given that flag burning is perfectly legal. According to the U.S. Supreme Court, desecrating the flag is a constitutionally legitimate form of protest. People who don't agree can simply turn their backs.

And that's exactly what VanLeeuwen should have done. In an interview with the *Albany Democrat-Herald*, VanLeeuwen said she once saw some demonstrators drape a flag over a Portland hotel entrance during a political protest, forcing people to walk over it. The incident so horrified her that, presumably, she wanted to attack the flag drapers.

But VanLeeuwen must understand assault is a serious crime, regardless of whether the perpetrator's excuse was justified in her own mind. Just because VanLeeuwen is looking for an excuse to beat up flag burners doesn't give her the right to ignore the U.S. Constitution.

The truly frightening aspect of VanLeeuwen's bill-introducing binge is that she doesn't seem to be able to find anything better to do in the Legislature. Perhaps she needs to be reminded that Oregon is still suffering from 1990's Ballot Measure 5. The Legislature must work diligently toward either finding more revenue or cutting excess spending. It's a full-time job that requires dedicated lawmakers. VanLeeuwen's recent actions indicate she is more concerned with quick-fix responses than serious problem solving.

What would happen were VanLeeuwen to get her way? Someone breaks into her home and ends up wiping his brains off the floor. Someone burns a flag and she beats him with the handle of the gun she is required to own. VanLeeuwen probably doesn't like Democrats either. Barbara Roberts had better watch her back.

It's hard not to laugh at VanLeeuwen's ideas. She bases her proposals on knee-jerk reactions rather than rational thought. But the state Legislature is no place for these ideas. She needs to represent her constituency with pride and dignity — to dedicate her skills toward solving the state's budget crisis. The last thing Oregon needs is more crazy legislation.

She is more concerned with quick-fix responses than serious problem solving.



LETTERS

Happy guy

I like this paper a lot because it makes me laugh. I want to thank Jake Berg's "Universitas" for the reminder (*ODE*, Feb. 16).

The hardest I ever laughed while reading the *Emerald* was when two people argued for days about an irrelevant issue, only to discover they had identical viewpoints all along. It was funny to open the paper and watch them make fools of themselves day after day. I laughed a lot.

It makes me sad that more papers don't emphasize letters to the editor like the *Emerald*. It would be a happier world if these were published more often. Everyone needs a good laugh once in a while.

But most people don't give a care. My friends say the *Emerald* is a non-newsworthy waste of time. But I know that in the letter section — where there are all sorts of crazy and kooky people — anything can happen.

I like the *Emerald*. I hope it will continue to publish wacky letters because the letters make me laugh, and laughing makes me happy. And perhaps, if I'm lucky, Berg will continue to write columns to remind me that it's OK to laugh at all the crazy, kooky people.

**Matt Howard
English**

qualities Iglauer mentions, and nobody would think about killing a child then. But thousands of women every day do just that — kill a child.

I am completely for equal rights, and most definitely support women's rights. However, in the case of abortion, the "right" to choose who lives and who dies is not ours to make. Our choice is to have safe sex, abstain or think of adoption, not to kill an innocent child because of our mistakes and wrongdoings.

**Robyn K. Hagg
Pre-Journalism**

Much to learn

Steve Masat, Zoe Pargot and Barbara Rodgers may believe they have mastered the concept of "diversity," but their actions on Feb. 2 show otherwise.

It seems these three self-appointed members of the University thought-police believe diversity to be a characteristic solely dependent on ethnicity, gender or the color of one's skin. I have news for these individuals — it can also be found in the different opinions people possess.

Calling a person "racist and homophobic," simply because of a political philosophy he or she adheres to, is an act of ignorance that should be strongly discouraged.

Unsubstantiated attacks are often successful in the watch-what-you-say, politically correct environment currently infesting our University, but they fail in the broader political environment.

If Masat, Pargot and Rodgers believe unsubstantiated character assassinations are the logical way to confront people who possess different political beliefs, they have much to learn.

I suggest starting with the dictionary. It would behoove them to obtain complete definitions of the words "diversity," "toler-

ance" and "intolerance." They might be shocked to discover their actions on Feb. 2 fit under the definition of "intolerance."

**Bryan Vereschagin
Political Science**

Skinheads

In the past, I have on occasion heard stories related to skinheads in Eugene. I have always ignored those stories, believing they were nothing but grossly exaggerated rumors. I thought, "... Nah, a city with a university that boasts diversity can't possibly be plagued by the skinheads." Well, was I in for a big surprise.

On the evening of Feb. 10, I had the misfortune of leaving a sandwich store just in time to be caught at an intersection with a bunch of, you guessed it, skinheads. They hollered obscenities (which I cannot possibly describe to you) regarding African-Americans for at least three blocks. As a minority myself, I felt both great discomfort and anger at the time. I wondered, "What did African-Americans do to these lost souls to deserve such bitterness and hatred?"

I see the skinheads as a definite threat to minority students at the University. I am not paranoid, but I am very concerned about the safety of minority students who have to be on campus at night.

Constant patrolling by the police is one solution, although it's not adequate in solving the problem.

It seems ironic the University should boast about its diversity while no attempt is made to discourage such hate groups away from the campus community. If the University and the campus community really care about students, a joint effort should be made to turn away hate groups from the campus area.

**Paul Y. Ting
Visual Design**

Go elsewhere

Referring to Jake Berg's column (*ODE*, Feb. 16): If all the "crazy and kooky people" in Eugene are too much for him to handle, I pleausurably encourage him to pursue his interests elsewhere.

**Brittany Henderson
Journalism**

Abortion wrong

In the constant debate over abortion, I would like to address Ben Iglauer's letter (*ODE*, Feb. 12).

He said there are many characteristics that we believe are essential to a human being, "such as self-awareness and the ability to interact with others."

He contends that a growing fetus does not contain those qualities, a pathetic argument he uses in the defense of abortion.

However, a baby who is only one-hour old lacks those same

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