

Education provides target for legislators

The budget ax has fallen, and it's the heads of students that are going to roll. Lawmakers have targeted every level of education throughout Oregon for drastically disproportionate budget cuts for one simple reason — education is not their priority.

Legislators' priority is getting re-elected, and the way to do that is to appease their constituencies. Unfortunately, the constituency for most legislators does not include students, because students do not vote, nor do they pay taxes.

Even when students do vote, their impact is limited to the immediate campus community, as evident by the reelection of Eugene Representative Larry Campbell, who is quickly becoming the single greatest threat to education in recent state history.

Campbell, who has never been a friend of higher education, is now setting his sights on the state's K-12 system, proposing a 10 percent cut of \$300 million from state school support.

If these cuts are passed, the damage to public schools will be tremendous and, for the most part, irrecoverable. The Eugene 4-J School District could conceivably be forced to cut all extra-curricular activities at all levels.

What Campbell may not have realized is these cuts will have an impact on families throughout the state. Legislators can afford to ignore the concerns of college students. They cannot ignore the concerns of the parents of all the children who will be affected.

The students who lobbied in Salem Wednesday are on the right train but the wrong track. They need to join forces with lobbyists for K-12 education and take their message to the people. Legislators will listen to their constituents, but their constituents need to be informed about the issues and dilemmas surrounding education in this state.

One more time

Excerpt from ODE, May 22, 1917.
"War Has Other Horrors Than Bullets and Blood; Recruits Must Do own Cooking"

It may be that those young men who unknowingly slacked a duty and dodged an opportunity when mother handed them the dish towel, will be regular home boys after the smoke of war clears away.

Several men in the company have suggested that the girls domestic science at the high school be drafted in as temporary instructors and that each soldier be taught by an individual tutor.

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COMMENTARY

Conference ignores Middle East

M. Reza Behnam

The 1993 Public Interest Environmental Law Conference, which emphasizes indigenous peoples and their roots, has excluded the Middle East and its indigenous peoples and their sacred roots. The exclusion of the Middle East two years after the Gulf War is astonishing, if not plain stupid.

The following article unravels public interest and the politics of water in the territories under Israeli occupation in Palestine. Although questions of Palestinian statehood, self-determination, security and the return of lands have been in the forefront of the Middle East peace talks since October 1991, the critical dilemma of who will control water in the area is a paramount concern for all parties.

Among the many burdensome responsibilities facing the Israeli military coordinator of government activities in the West Bank, the Golan Heights and Gaza Strip is controlling water — from drilling new wells to bringing water to dinner tables. For 25 years the Israeli armed forces have set water policies in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Among the myriad of difficult issues facing negotiators at the Middle East peace process, perhaps none is as important as guidelines for the distribution of water. Water is a precious resource in all of the Middle East; future conflicts in the region will be fought over water rather than "old-fashioned" things such as oil.

At issue in the peace process is control of land, but beneath the surface is the critical resource that sustains life. While water is essential to the preservation of the state of Israel, it is basically the only natural resource the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza possess.

The war of June 1967 that yielded the occupied territories to the Israeli state was brought on largely over water-related matters. Before the Six-Day War, Israel extracted 300 million cubic meters of water a year from an aquifer (underground reservoir) in the hills of the West Bank, which was then without

Jordan.

The Arabs of the West Bank used only a fraction of this amount, pumping 20 million cubic meters. This remains roughly the position today. While the aquifer provides about a fifth of Israel's water, Arabs have been prevented by the Israeli authorities from increasing their extractions.

The Israelis have dug more wells to supply West Bank settlements, but most of the aquifer's water continues to be taken from wells outside the West Bank.

Within its pre-1967 borders, Israel was able to tap the waters of the Sea of Galilee, a giant natural holding reservoir on the river Jordan. Israel's National Water Carrier, a giant pipeline three meters in diameter, can transport more than one million cubic meters of water a day from the Sea of Galilee across the country, down the coast and on into the Negev.

Israel was able to recreate the river Jordan as a pipeline within its own territory after the Six-Day War, when most of the Jordan and its catchment, including the Golan Heights, fell into Israeli hands.

Israel now meets a full 30 percent of its entire water needs by direct extraction and diversion from West Bank sources. This translates to 80 percent of West Bank reserves. The influx of Jewish immigrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States could raise annual demand for water by 650 million cubic meters, according to the Israeli Water Authority.

Under the Israeli quota system, Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank receive only a fraction of the water allowed the Israeli: 115-142 cubic meters per person, in contrast to 537 cubic meters in Israel proper and 965 cubic meters per Israeli settler in the West Bank itself.

In addition, the Palestinians have to pay twice as much for their water, and farmers receive none of the subsidies their Israeli counterparts enjoy. Prior permits from the military authorities are necessary for digging new wells and restoring old ones, as well as construction of simple water

catchments. Consequently, Palestinian residents of houses or camps that no longer receive drinking water must form queues at a water-pumping station to receive their ration of water.

In addition, the Israeli agricultural sector is allowed unlimited water, often to produce water-guzzling crops such as tomatoes, cotton and oranges. This over-pumping to produce a green Israel has led, in many cases, to saline intrusion into aquifers and to water toxicity.

Of the two aquifers that supply Israel's water, one is in the occupied territory of the West Bank. That is geography. Enter politics and the Israeli apprehension that if the Middle East peace talks result in giving back the land to either Jordan, which has less water than Israel, or to an autonomous Palestinian state, the inhabitants of the West Bank would immediately increase their use of the aquifer by digging new wells. This could siphon off Israeli supplies of water.

Water rights and "water security" are on the minds of all parties negotiating for peace in the Middle East. Egyptians, Syrians, Lebanese, Jordanians, Palestinians and Israelis all have water woes. And water is known as a zero-sum game — one party's gain will be another's loss.

Will the peace talks produce a Palestinian state on the West Bank? Will the Arab inhabitants control the water rights there? Can the two parties cooperate over water use in the region? These questions are essential where water is crucial. Unless the politics of water distribution are resolved, the region will remain unstable. If the countries in the Middle East do not reach a water agreement by the end of this decade, they will be facing major conflicts instead.

The West Bank's aquifer symbolizes the underlying crisis of the new Middle East. Can governments look beyond old politics to the region's crucial ecology? The long-term survival of everyone requires it.

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