

Homeless evicted: A tale of three cities

When local governments attempt to address a troubling and complex problem, a frequently obeyed rule of thumb is to sweep the problem under the rug.

However, cities all along the West Coast, from Seattle to Springfield to San Francisco, have boldly decided to abandon this useless strategy and adopt a more productive, responsible attitude. They have chosen, instead, to sweep it under someone else's rug.

Measures taken within the past year in all three of these cities have attempted to tackle the growing problems of panhandling and homelessness. These issues, inextricably intertwined, defy easy solutions. Government agencies throughout the nation have been grappling with them for decades. And yet in each of these cities, lawmakers have sought the quick fix, which would get the citizenry off of their backs, but which accomplishes next to nothing.

In Seattle last week, several ordinances were passed by the City Council that would, in effect, make homelessness illegal. The ordinances prohibit sitting or lying on the sidewalk, urinating or defecating in public (despite the lack of public toilets downtown) and public drinking, among other things.

A less drastic measure in Springfield, which gained council approval in the spring, prohibits standing along the street with a sign and asking for handouts or work — one of the preferred methods of panhandling. The City Council used a state law, which was originally designed to prevent traffic tie-ups, to justify its actions.

And San Francisco, with its vaunted progressive political tradition, has taken the most radical steps of all: Police in the "City by the Bay" are required to wake up anyone found sleeping outside and force them to get up and move on. Where they go, of course, is no one's concern.

The effect of all of these measures is obvious. Rather than correcting the problem (which, admittedly, is not a simple task), these three cities have merely managed to move it next door. The real losers, aside from the homeless themselves, are the cities of Tacoma, Eugene and Berkeley ... which are all possible destinations for those homeless people who suddenly find themselves city-less as well.

Residents of this area should be thankful that Springfield's measure is so much less severe than the others. A cynic might argue that this is simply because the homeless problem is less severe here than in Seattle and San Francisco. That might be an accurate assessment, but hopefully, the law is more lenient because the Springfield City Council understands the futility of outlawing homelessness.

If local governments continue trying to push the homeless out of their respective jurisdictions, eventually there will be nowhere left for them to go — except maybe the sea. And the EPA would probably have something to say about that.



LETTERS

Berg off-base

In Carol Berg's "Anything Goes" (ODE, Oct. 8), she implies that the majority of religious people (i.e. Christians) subscribe to the same beliefs as the right-wing religious fanatics responsible for the "escalating violence, the firebombings of abortion clinics and the shooting of physicians."

She further assumes that "anything goes" when it comes to these people's efforts to promote their "zealous agenda," condoning violent acts that contradict their professed high regard for human life.

However, such gross overgeneralizations allow the minority — the right-wing fanatics — to misrepresent, and thus hide from public view, the true beliefs of most Christians.

For instance, the majority of Christians do not condone violence against those who disagree with them. Killing is wrong.

The majority of Christians also believe that all people have the right to live, regardless of their opinions or lifestyles. In addition, they believe that the choices people make must not infringe upon anyone else's fundamental right to live. Contrary to what Berg implies that Christians believe, this right to live also covers unborn babies and homosexuals.

By legalizing abortion, society has already crossed the line that grants everyone the right to live. If this attitude renders some lives less valuable than others, where will it stop?

Most Christians, however, believe that this line should not have been crossed in the first place. If society continues crossing the line, who will be next?

In reality, it is society, not Christians, who seem to feel that "anything goes."

Rob Peterson
Architecture
Kristin Unwin
Journalism

Peace n' drugs?

Recently I've heard people talking around campus about the current proposal to place the course "Drugs and Society" (LSS 463) under the peace studies minor. Begging the question of whether such a course should actually exist on campus, it seems to me ridiculous that it should even be considered for inclusion in peace studies.

Some fairly irrelevant courses already fall into this category ("Feminist Theory" comes to mind). But a class on chemicals would be the icing on the cake. Granted, some drugs do heighten in their addicts a tendency to enter the minor in the first place, but do they inherently have any pacifying tendency or is it simply the atmosphere of Eugene that leads people in this direction?

Actually, drugs in themselves have no relation to peace, other than to envelop their users in somnolence. And is this truly the sort of peaceful society that the program is devoted to studying? It seems doubtful.

Keep drugs out of the peace studies curriculum. It would just give our rivals over at Oregon State another joke to pass around.

Eric McCready
Undeclared

Parking rip-off

I purchased a University park-

ing permit for \$60, but all the parking spaces are taken when I arrive at campus, so I have been forced to park in un-allotted spaces. Today I received a ticket for \$20. So, from now on, I will have to park on the street at an average of \$1.25 per day. That's \$25 in additional parking fees per month.

For argument's sake, let's say that the University has 600 parking spaces. If the University sells 5,000 parking permits, that's 5,000 times \$60, or \$300,000. Six hundred spaces, with 5,000 trying to park. Let's say that's 1,000 parking violations at \$20 each, or \$200,000.

With only 600 permit spaces for 5,000 cars, 4,400 cars will be parked at meters at an average of \$25 monthly, multiplied by nine months, or \$990,000.

Adding this all up, we get \$300,000 in permits, plus \$200,000 in fines, plus \$990,000 in meter revenue, totaling \$1,490,000 for a nine-month period.

My questions are:

Is it legal for the University to sell permits for unavailable space?

If it's legal, then, is it ethical?

If I can't use the parking permit that I paid \$60 for, isn't that considered, in some circles, a rip-off?

I hate it when people are being abused and don't have a solution. So here is mine — allow permit-owners to park at the multihour meters.

Yes, I know. The real "correct" answer is: "Get a bicycle. It's only a 20-mile round trip, and think of the good it would do me."

D.R. Zuber
Eugene

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