

EDITORIAL

'Hey buddy, can ya spare a coupon?'

They're not just a way to get \$2 off a box of Lucky Charms anymore.

Today, several U.S. cities are using coupons to try to eliminate one of the most troubling problems associated with panhandling: that the person asking for a few cents' change will spend the money on something unhealthy, like alcohol or cigarettes.

Here is the way the program works: people who want to give change to panhandlers — but are afraid of what they would do with the money — can buy coupons worth 25 cents each from local retailers, who participate in the program on a voluntary basis.

When asked for a handout, people who have purchased the coupons can give them away instead of money. The panhandler then exchanges the coupons for food, non-alcoholic beverages or personal care items. Essentially, it would be like giving away 25 cent gift certificates, redeemable only for those items people down on their luck would actually need.

Any panhandler who doesn't accept a coupon doesn't really need the help, organizers of the program say.

This innovative idea, introduced recently in Boston and already in place in such cities as Seattle, New York, Chicago, Berkeley, Calif., and Boulder, Colo., shows tremendous promise as a way to solve the potential pitfalls of panhandling.

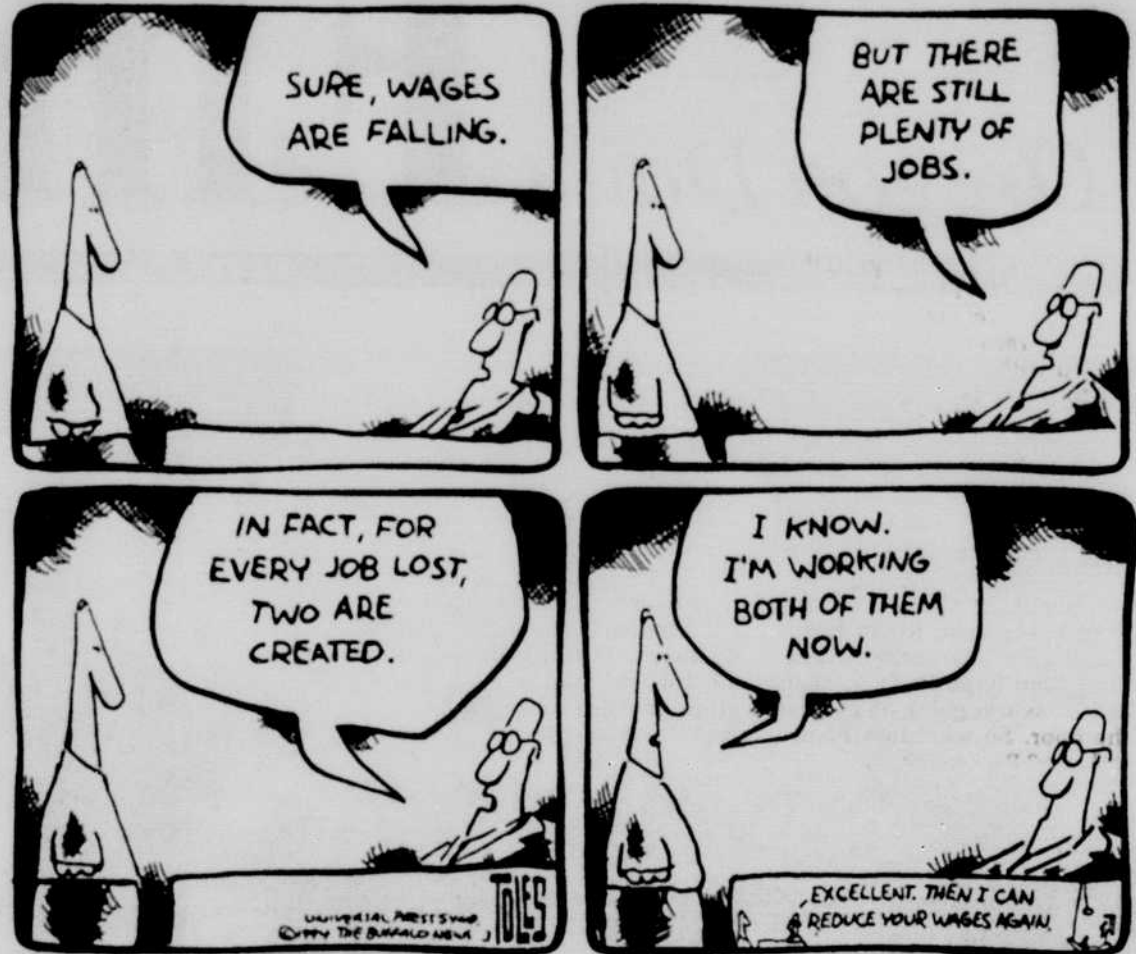
If these programs became widely known and popularly used, they could significantly reduce the access of poor people to alcohol, cigarettes and drugs by denying them the money required to purchase such items. Some beggars make up to \$300 a day — more than enough to keep them fed and perpetually high.

The coupon system would work nicely in concert with the federal food stamps program, which also allows recipients to buy food but not alcohol. Unlike food stamps, however, coupons could be used to buy other essential items that aren't exactly edible: toilet paper and shampoo, for example. In this way, a coupon program could help correct for one of the failures of the food stamp system.

The coupon idea isn't without its problems, however. Some retailers may not be willing to participate, fearing that the coupons will bring in so many panhandlers that other customers will stop coming. But if large numbers of retailers agree to join — which will require the encouragement of both city government and consumers — then the coupon users would be spread out and the problem would be minimized.

Digging deep into one's pockets to help somebody in need can be a satisfying act of charity, but it has always been tainted with the fear that a generous person might be doing more harm than good.

If programs such as these continue to appear in American cities, perhaps people could start to feel good again about giving. And that would go a long way toward easing the plight of people who rely, at least temporarily, on the generosity of strangers.



OPINION

Sorry, folks — no apologies



ROBBIE REEVES

Well, this is it. This being my final column for the *Emerald*, I guess this will be my last time to offend anyone for a while.

No, I'm not going to write some wimpy article apologizing to anyone and everyone I've offended, ridiculed, mocked or whatever. Why? Because I'm not sorry.

Some people claim that I am too liberal. Others say that I am too conservative. And others are dumbfounded that the *Emerald* really even hired me to write anything. Personally, I'm glad that everyone hasn't agreed with me or my viewpoints. The last thing this campus needs is a group of people who totally agree with each other on everything. (As for the third group that didn't understand why I was hired: I was kind of surprised myself.)

A couple of people have asked me how I dealt with letters to the editor, especially those I disagreed with. I loved them. I really did. I believed that I had accomplished something when I motivated someone to take the time to write a letter and send it to the *Emerald*. This happened a number of times, such as with my column about the persistent Portland military recruiter and with the death of Richard Nixon.

Other benefits came with this job, including having a picture of me (apparently having a neck spasm, if you look closely) put in the paper (a benefit?). There was also the neat series of prank phone calls in which somebody out there called military recruiters and, using my name and phone number, asked for more information on "military opportunities." To the person who did that, thanks. I enjoyed

it. Other people I know have dared me to find a way to put certain words in my columns, just to see whether I could fit them into a column. Well, a good friend of mine, who shall be known as "Jon," asked me to put the word "proctologist" in the *Emerald*. Well, I just did. Don't know what it means? Look it up in the dictionary, and spare me your outrage and letters. After Monday, the *Emerald* won't publish again until summer session.

However, the part of my job I have enjoyed the most was the personal contact with readers, who often told me what my column reminded them of, gave me ideas for future columns and gave me a lot of encouragement for my work here.

This column was the first time I had written an opinion piece on a regular basis. I wrote news for a couple of years in high school and starting next year, I will be a reporter here at the *Emerald*. Admittedly, every single column wasn't perfect, but I was learning. Not every argument I made was as good as it could have been, but I was learning. And I'm sure that I made other mistakes along the line, but I kept learning about this job. I learned a bunch about this job since I was hired in November, and I have treasured my experience as a columnist. Where else can you get paid for telling people what you think?

But it's time for me to move on. I don't want to be the next George Will or, for those who read *The Oregonian*, Margie Boule. Besides, they don't look like they'll be quitting by the time I graduate from here. Then

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again, by the time I accumulate enough credits, they may very well be on the way out.

I'm sure there will be more controversy next year as there was with USSA, the *Insurgent* and other groups this year. Take it upon yourself as a paying member of this University community (even if Uncle Sam or your parents are paying for you) to be aware of the issues facing us. Without students, faculty and others looking out for themselves and for others, people can get away with the damndest things. Need I mention the three-digit phone bills of some campus organizations again?

Keep writing letters to the editor here at the *Emerald* and to the other campus publications as well. The free flow of ideas and opinions is vital to the well-being of the University, and students should take it upon themselves to put a little something into the mix of opinions on this campus. It's been fun.

Robbie Reeves is (was) a columnist for the Emerald.

COMMENTARY POLICY

The *Oregon Daily Emerald* welcomes commentaries from the public concerning topics of interest to the University community.

Commentaries should be between 600 and 800 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.

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