

## Conflict over exhibit stems from location

"Intrinsically, art reflects the elements of the society from which it springs. Our society is not without controversy, confrontations or offense."

— From the preamble to the Oregon Arts Policy, posted in the EMU Gallery

Without question, the decision to put black curtains in front of the "See No Evil" art exhibit in the EMU Gallery has demonstrated the truth of that statement.

The debate has sprung from a basic conflict of rights. On one hand are the people who have a clear and unquestionable right to view the art. On the other hand are those people who have, despite some loud and obnoxious insistence to the contrary, an equal right not to see the art.

The EMU is a public building, and the gallery is a public part of that building — a corridor that people use every day for purposes that have nothing to do with art.

Therein lies the problem.

It is impossible to reconcile the purpose of the gallery, as an unrestricted and unrestrictable forum for expression, with the purpose of the corridor, as a public path from one side of the EMU to the other.

In an ideal world, the EMU could move the gallery to a room of its own, where there would be no need for curtains. But this is not an ideal world, and there are a half-dozen unfulfilled room requests in the EMU already that deserve higher priority. So that is not a workable option.

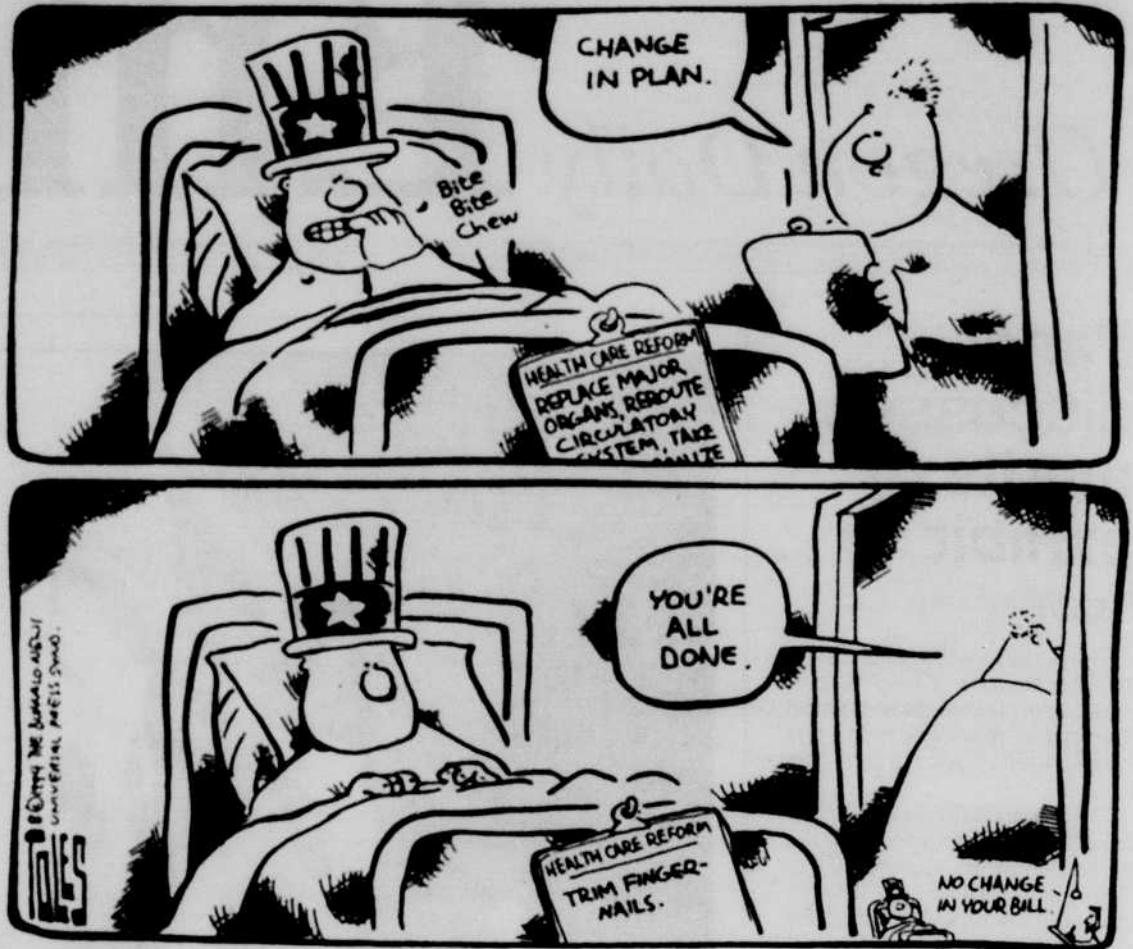
Putting up curtains whenever an exhibit is deemed "potentially objectionable" by someone is a compromise between the rights of viewers and those who don't want to view. But it is an ugly compromise, as anyone who has seen the curtains will attest.

The curtains themselves change the art; they alter its meaning and they send the message that the subjects addressed in the art are somehow taboo or not fit for public consumption.

That is the most tragic irony in a case full of ironies: Much of the art is intended to force people to confront issues, such as sexual abuse, that have been hidden and denied for too long already. The curtains defeat that purpose. If the art dealt with something common and universally accepted, such as the beauty of a flower or a bowl of fruit, the curtains wouldn't do any harm. But then they wouldn't be necessary.

As long as the gallery remains a public corridor, conflicts such as this one will continue to arise. In the future, however, those conflicts should be resolved by the body that is charged with deciding policy for the EMU: its board of directors. A unilateral decision by the EMU director, such as occurred in this case, is not appropriate, no matter what the director's intentions are. It's not a decision that should be made by one person.

If anything positive is to be gained from the whole episode, perhaps it will be a coherent, written policy as to what will be done with such controversial exhibits in the future. Because no one wants to see the curtains go up again.



### OPINION

## Direction for GOP should be right

Have you noticed?

It seems the Republicans are on the verge of trampling the donkeys on a nationwide basis this November. From gubernatorial to congressional race, the Republicans are poised to win and win big.

Jack Germond of the *Baltimore Sun* said Monday that Republicans should pick up five seats in the Senate. Robert Novak of CNN's *Evans and Novak* foresees a Republican sweep, with the Grand Old Party picking up seven seats.

Estimates for the House side range from 20 to 25 to as high as 70 seats going to the GOP.

In Texas, where Gov. Ann Richards is almost as popular as the Cowboys, recent polls find her in a virtual dead heat against (get this) George Bush's son, George Walker Bush.

Many pundits are pointing to the unpopularity of President Clinton as reasons for the forecast gains of the Republicans. Despite an improving economy, Clinton appears as a hapless leader with character problems, someone who wants to force socialized medicine and bigger government on the masses.

What's amazing about all this is how the party of the right is beating up on the supposedly open-minded party of the left. I thought that the Republican party's "takeover" by the religious right was going to sink the party into a political conundrum so out of touch with America, it could simply not relate with the moderate majority.

I thought Patrick J. Buchanan's speech on the culture wars at the 1992 Republican convention sealed a dark fate for the GOP. I thought Dan Quayle's feelings about Candice Bergen's character made sure the Republicans looked like a bunch of out-of-touch Puritans. Geez, I thought politically active Christians would make the party seem so far out in right field, only a few wackos would stay registered under "R" on their voter registration cards.



BRIAN WOMACK

I guess I thought wrong. Could it be the issues of the right are really the issues of a whole lot of red-blooded Americans? Exactly.

Issues like strong families are close to everyone who has ever been in one. Less government intrusion scores big points with a vast amount of the U.S. population. A time of silent prayer in the public schools is something polls find the majority of Americans agree with. A strong free-market economic policy, a willingness to cut spending, opposition to abortion on demand and worry that some of the left's agenda could be harmful to the country are all issues that many Americans agree on; so does the right.

Yet, there are those who want to stereotype the right as some extreme group. They like to claim abortion doctor "killers" represent the constituency of the right (which is the furthest thing from the truth). But folks, they're just regular people who have kids in little league and worry about making the mortgage payment, not some wide-eyed weirdos. Of course, there are radicals in any group (e.g. Marion Barry), but that doesn't mean they represent the whole group.

Saying that people who hold Christianity as their religion are going to somehow wreck the Grand Old Party is nonsense.

It's only when the party has moved to the left that it stumbles. We saw that when George Bush turned liberal and raised taxes. The voters got mad and fired him.

Even after all this, there are still those who say that only if

the party becomes more liberal will it pick up additional voters.

If you take a look at the election poll data, you'll see how even Democrats who were loyal to Bill Clinton (a liberal) are taking it on the chin. A 16-year incumbent from Oklahoma named Mike Synar has been booted out already. An unabashed Clintonite, he was beaten in the Democratic primary by a 71-year-old retired school teacher with zero political experience. It's gotten that bad. Anti-Clinton sentiment is running that deep. And the last thing the Republicans need to do now is attempt to move to the left. They'll only shoot themselves in the foot. Because if the Republicans do indeed become more liberal, they'll look more and more like Democrats and be in the same kind of trouble.

That's why the religious right is important to the Republicans. A shot of good old-fashioned conservatism will make it not only more appealing to the voting population but more victorious on those election days. The country is becoming more conservative on some key issues, including health care and the death penalty. But more than anything, voters don't want to see more politicians sticking their finger up in the air to read where the political winds are blowing for that week and then adjust their platform accordingly. People who will stand up for what they believe in, especially when they are right, will be a refreshing change and a needed one at that.

The Republicans are riding somewhat on the coattails of voter backlash against incumbency and Clinton himself. Republicans will win some seats by default, although certainly not all. But if the Republicans believe they can survive on being more liberal and less conservative, they'll be the ones whining in 1996.

Brian Womack is a columnist for the *Emerald*.

## Oregon Daily Emerald

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