

Don't discourage rational debate

By Barry Scheel

The *Emerald* editorial of Wednesday, Oct. 19, arguing against City Council involvement in the dispute over Amazon Family Housing, requires rebuttal. The reasoning is flawed, the premises lack merit, and the conclusions are weak. It is hard to believe it was written by an accomplished editorial staff of a daily newspaper. And oh, by the way, why is there a First Amendment?

The first premise assumes (the) University's intention to ... build new low-income housing.... In fact, the latest figures put the cost of the new complex at \$109 a square foot, which is by any definition luxury, not low-income, housing.

Second, the University is said to have the right to make any decision they want, simply because they own the land. Why, then, do we have land-use laws and zoning ordinances? Presumably the writer(s) would also promote the right of industry to pour pollution into air, water and soil, with impunity and without regulation, because they "own the land." This is, by the way, the same argument used by the OCA, as they try to deny the rights of citizens to housing because of their status.

Third, the City Council is to stay out of the fray because, "It's not the city's business." But the city is in the midst of a crisis in affordable housing that will not be solved by the razing of some 270 units. This will only add to the city's problems. And the families who are forced out, given no immediate replacement, will certainly put more pressure on the city's already critical low-cost housing market. It is, indeed, "the city's business."

Moreover, the University has yet to produce an acceptable,

site-specific plan for the replacement of Amazon, as promised in 1991. Shall they also not be held accountable for some \$11 million in taxpayer bond money?

Yet the fourth, and perhaps most amazing assumption made is that President Dave Frohn-mayer knows what is good for Oregon, presumably because he "prides himself on being a good citizen...." Oliver North sees himself in the same light, but it does not follow that he knows what is good for America. Moreover, Mr. Frohn-mayer is a career Republican politician from an elite profession, facts that do little to substantiate claims that he knows "what is good" for low-income students.

Fact is, Mr. Frohn-mayer is the President for the same reason he was brought in as dean of the law school. Yes, his credibility in the state is well-established, and has enhanced the stature and reputation of the law school. But his greatest asset to the law school, and to the University, is as a fund-raiser. He faces a budget crisis. The decision to tear down Amazon was made, not in the interest of Oregonians who need an education, but in the interest of attracting out-of-state students who will pay triple tuition. This is no attack on his character; it is simply a realistic assessment of what his job is, and of how he

will go about doing it.

Finally, the tone of the editorial was surprisingly reminiscent of another voice I seem to hear quite often. The *Emerald* is reputed to be the voice of moderation on a campus deemed by some to lean too far to the left. But the arguments presented: of the sanctity of property; of decisions handed down from above carrying the weight of positive law, unassailable, unquestionable; and of those in positions of authority being the only ones capable of making rational decisions in the interests of their inferiors, are reactionary, right-wing positions that would engender wide grins of the faces of the staff of the *Oregon Commentator*.

I was certain I had learned somewhere that the task, indeed the reason for the existence, of the press was to ensure that decisions made by the State did not go unexamined. Such pandering to policy-by-executive-fiat is hardly becoming of the Fourth Estate. And the issue is not yet dead, irrespective of any recent City Council decisions. So, do your job. Encourage, rather than discourage, debate on an issue affecting Oregonians. Amaze me again by printing this. I won't hold my breath.

Barry Scheel is a political science major at the University.

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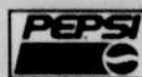
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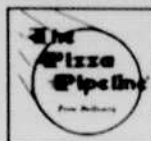
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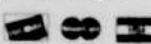
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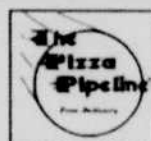
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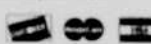
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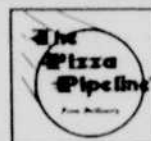


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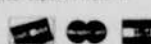
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