

Amazon doomed by obstructionism

Activism on campus is alive and well, and so, for the time being, is the Amazon Family Housing complex.

Once again, a very determined group of people has succeeded in saving Amazon from the bulldozers and wrecking balls — this time by taking its case to the state's Land Use Board of Appeals. Monday, the board granted a temporary stay against the planned demolition of the 50-year-old complex, until the board can fully consider the merits of the Amazon supporters' case.

If all this seems familiar, it's because it's been seen before. Opponents of the demolition plan have fought the University tooth and nail, using every available government body — from the Eugene City Council to the Oregon Secretary of State to the Eugene Historic Review Board.

Where they have succeeded, they have still failed. The historic designation of complex (the units are considered representative of World War II-era military housing) has delayed, but not derailed, the University's efforts to tear down the aging structures. The Secretary of State's office agreed to audit the University's handling of Amazon, but refused to assume the role of land-use planner in blocking the demolition. Although Amazon's advocates keep throwing up roadblocks, the University keeps pushing them out of the way.

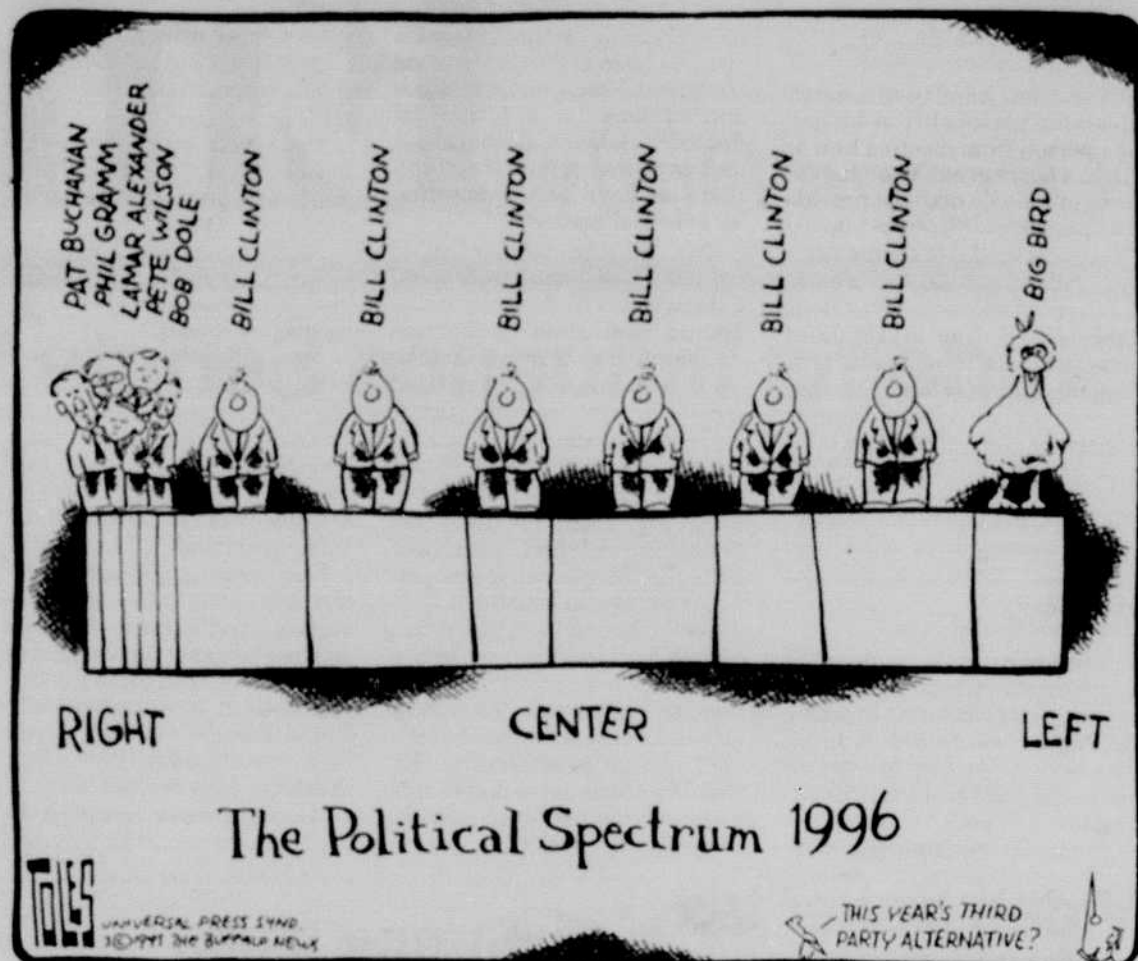
Clearly, the Save Amazon Coalition and those who agree with its aims are the underdogs in this battle against the relatively well-heeled University. But as much as we are tempted to side with the underdog, we need to consider what damage is being done by the coalition's obstructionist strategy.

A plan that is already in the works will move 30 of Amazon's units (two buildings) to a city-owned site at 200 E. 19th Ave. in Eugene. That plan, intended to placate Amazon supporters by preserving some of the housing, is being jeopardized by these delays, as is any possibility of relocating the complex's other 244 remaining units.

And the coalition's efforts, no doubt costly to the group members themselves, threatens to cost the University — and the entire student body — as well. The University says that the cost of delaying the Amazon project another construction season could cost as much as \$1 million.

Why is the relocation option so horrible that Amazon supporters are willing to risk losing everything — the 30 initial units as well as the 244 others — rather than compromise? The "historic" nature of the buildings is preserved by moving them, and the low-income housing market will suffer less if some buildings are saved than if none at all are spared.

If the appeals board decides to allow the demolition of Amazon, then Amazon's supporters should take that as their final "no," and adopt a new strategy, one that tries to preserve the housing the only acceptable way: by moving it elsewhere.



■ OPINION

Take time to vote, further democracy



ROBBIE REEVES

Pop quiz time. How many people knew that Tuesday was Election Day in the state of Oregon?

Next question. How many of you voted?

Last one. Did anyone care?

If you answered 'no' to each question, you're one of a growing number of Oregon's proudly apathetic population. You're also a part of the problem.

Granted, Lane County's contribution to the election was a number of uncontested races and one ballot measure about taxing video poker; the point is that few people bothered to mail in ballots.

Oregon has been on the cutting edge of trying to make voting as simple and effortless as possible. Instead of opening up the polls and having citizens have to go somewhere to vote for their school board, ballots are now mailed to all registered voters. The voters then have two or three weeks to send back the ballots.

But it doesn't seem to help. Turnout is always light.

So much for democracy.

The same trend is evident here on campus in the spring elections. Elections are held each spring to elect the ASUO president and vice-president for the next year. Polls are open for two days for students to express their viewpoints. A whopping five minutes is required to vote.

About 10 percent of students took the chance to vote. That means that about 15,000 otherwise-eligible voters chose not to exercise their franchise.

Some people have told me that they don't vote in any elec-

tions, campus or statewide, because they don't feel that they can make a difference. Their vote would just be one in the vast sea of voters out there, the argument goes.

Well, the sea is a lot smaller these days, mostly because of a drought of voters. Judging solely by the number of ballots cast in elections in America these days, the most bragged-about democracy in the world is made up of a bunch of people who couldn't give a damn who makes decisions for them.

It's important to look at the fundamental reason elections are held in the first place. Our government is based on the principle that citizens have the right (and responsibility, I might add) to elect representatives to represent their viewpoints in governmental bodies. Hence, the term representative democracy.

Using this logic, the purpose of government in the country is defeated when citizens choose not to vote.

Another argument that people have used is that they don't know the issues and don't want to vote uninformed. While this reason for not voting might be more respectable than others, the logic leaves much to be desired. Read the voters' pamphlet. Read a newspaper once in a while. Get involved. Open your mind and learn what's going on. After all, this is your community and your state. Act like it means something to you.

Come to think of it, deciding not to vote is a pretty dumb idea

anyway. The fewer people that vote, the more each vote counts. Round up a couple dozen friends and chances are that someone out there could decide the outcome of a school board election. That was almost certainly the case with ASUO elections last year. Most races and ballot measures won or lost by several hundred vote.

If 1,000 more people voted in the elections last year here on campus, every single race and ballot measure last year could have been decided differently. In several cases, 500 votes cast another way could have changed the outcome of a funding measure. Do you want free bus service?

What it all comes down to is how motivated people are to act to better their communities and further democracy. Take a moment and look at yourself. Are you willing to let the community around you make decisions for you, about who represents you, or might you want to have a say in that decision? If the latter is closer to your opinion, then get your tush to the ballot box more often. Your community needs you.

Elections are coming soon on campus. Special elections are held throughout the year here in Oregon. Take the time to study the issues and to vote.

Your vote really does count. In fact, it might count more than you think.

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Commentaries should be between 600 and 800 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the commentary is submitted.

The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.