

Health insurance not affordable

We're pretty sure most of you don't lose sleep over who in this community does or does not have health insurance. If you have insurance, then why should you care if your neighbor, friend or just that annoying guy in your math class has it? If you don't believe this, then you should have made your way to Salem this week to voice your disgust with Senate Bill 503.

This bill seeks to exclude students who, if they were not attending school, would be eligible for health coverage under the Oregon Health Plan. The conventional (twisted) wisdom goes something like this: because these people are students, they are eligible for health coverage from their schools. These schools have health centers and the health centers can accommodate the students.

Now those of us who are actually in school and not in an office in Salem realize that proximity and access are two different things. It's not possible to work for minimum wage, pay rent, pay tuition and still have the money left over to pay for an insurance policy.

On this campus, an annual insurance policy costs \$572, but that won't really get you anything but the policy. You will have to pay a \$200 deductible, so actually the policy costs \$772. The cost for a student with one dependent is \$1,679 plus a \$400 deductible. For a student with two or more dependents the cost is \$2,264 plus a \$600 deductible.

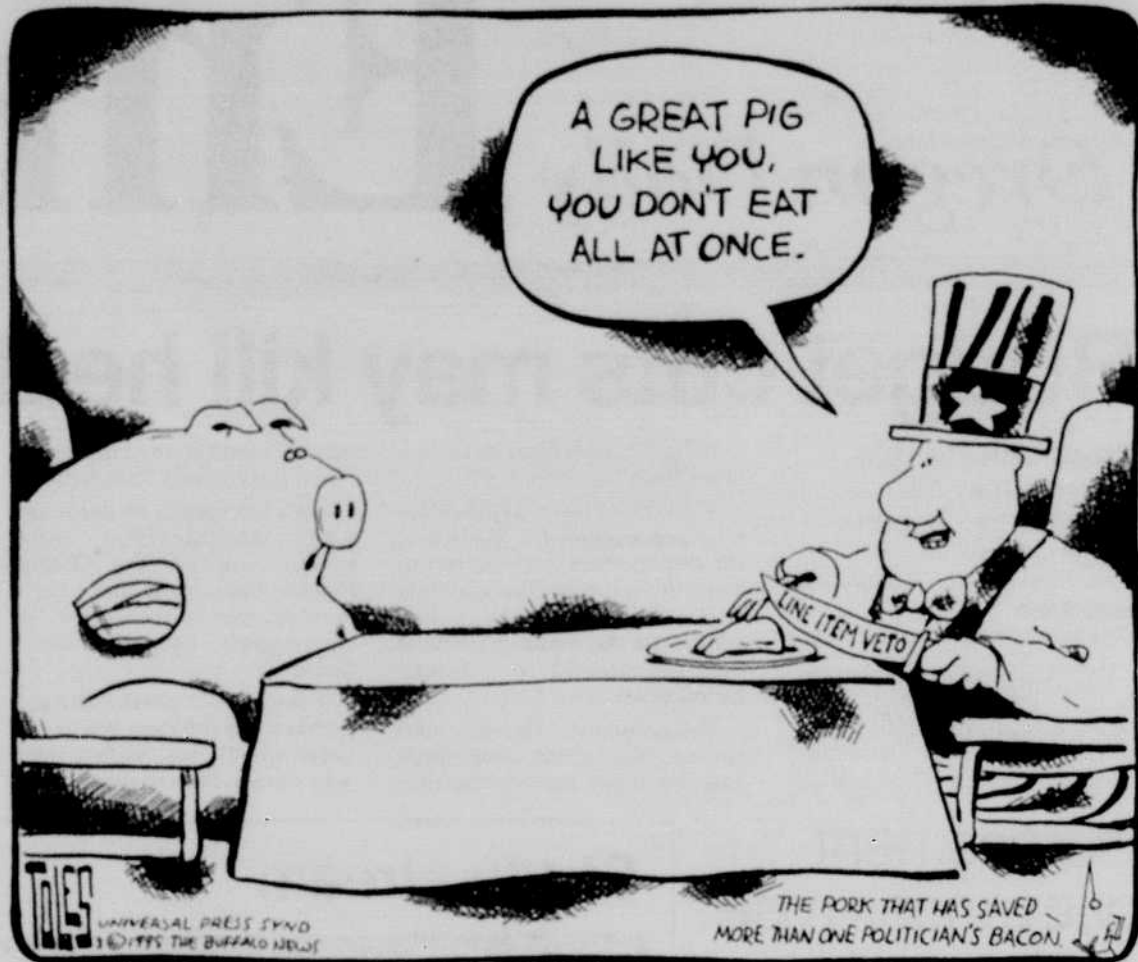
We don't know about you, but no one on our editorial board was fortunate enough to have this much extra money lying around. Most of us have insurance only through our parents, and only as long as we are students. But we are the lucky ones.

Not only is great cost involved, but the facilities at colleges and universities around the state are very different. We are blessed to have a women's clinic, a dental clinic, a pharmacy and a sports medicine and physical therapy department. Only two community colleges have health centers: Central Oregon Community College and Lane Community College. Again, we are the lucky ones.

According to the Oregon Student Lobby, about 60 University students will be affected by this bill. It will affect many more students at other colleges around the state, however, especially at community colleges.

We urge and implore you to stand in solidarity with your fellow students around the state and do what ever you can to show your disgust with the governor's office for proposing this deplorable piece of legislation.

As Robert Nosse of the Oregon Student Lobby said, "The most important thing to remember is that these people are going to school to better their lives and this bill just throws more hurdles in their way. The people who will be affected are not fresh-faced youngsters, they are nontraditional students who have stopped their lives in order to go back to school. They will only be on this plan for a couple of years until they get their degrees and can find good jobs and get their own insurance."



■ OPINION

Faith's views protected by Constitution



PAUL VAN SICKLE

Last Nov. 4, a family was torn apart. Their seven-year old son fell victim to a form of leukemia considered curable by modern medicine.

Last week, that family suffered another blow. Both parents were charged with manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide. They were charged because they were exercising a constitutional right.

According to a Mar. 22 article in the *Oregonian*, Lloyd and Christina Hays, members of the Christian Scientist-esque "Church of the First Born," allowed their child to die from a "curable" form of leukemia because their religious beliefs do not allow for conventional medical treatment. Instead, church elders are called upon to anoint the child and to pray for healing.

Apparently, if the Hays want to believe that, according to their religion, those non-traditional methods will cure their child, it should be self-evident that is their constitutional right.

Unfortunately for the Hays, in Oregon it is considered first-degree manslaughter to withhold medical help because of religious beliefs. I thought this country protected freedom of religion. The First Amendment to the Constitution does say that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Lloyd and Christina Hays belong to a religious faith that prohibits the employment of traditional western medicine. Subscription to religious faith is anyone's constitutional right as

the above amendment demonstrates.

The parents were not negligent, nor did they not care about their child's medical condition. They sought out others to treat their child's illness, as any parent would. The Hays called upon the doctors they believed in: their church elders and a devout faith in a cure. That cure did not work, but it was the best way those parents knew to treat their son. Yet they are criminals, according to the state of Oregon.

This logic may seem infallible, until we look at the age of the patient in question. Little Anthony Hays was only 7 years old. If an adult refused a doctor's attention because of his or her religious ties (Jim Henson died in this way) it is considered legally acceptable. Why? An adult, because of more advanced age, has the judgment to make a decision of that magnitude. Most states' laws say that children don't have the skills to make life and death decisions for themselves.

In every other decision in a child's life, a parent is considered best able to make such choices on the behalf of that child (schooling, clothing, diet, discipline, etc.). The court would uphold that as rational in almost every case except when it comes to religion and medicine. I find it strange that in terms of religion, parents are not considered responsible for their child's decision. It is for this reason that Lloyd and Christina Hays are being charged in a state

court for making a religious decision for their child.

It could be said that the state of Oregon has attempted to impress traditional western Judeo-Christian values on the Hays.

This type of case is not new to this country's courts. Doctors routinely obtain court orders to perform medical treatment on children whose parents' beliefs do not allow for such treatment. A manslaughter case of similar proportions is about to be tried in California in which a 4-year-old boy died of meningitis because his parents tried unsuccessfully to heal him through prayer.

Therefore, it would appear that it is not simply the oversight of the Oregon courts. Many courts of this country are finding that even constitutional rights can be overlooked in the interest of children. I don't agree with the beliefs of the Hays, but if they belong to a religion which unintentionally brought on the death of their child, that is their right.

No parent wants their child to die and most parents would employ the best methods at their disposal to help cure that child. If the options those parents are restricted to are limited to their religious beliefs, which are protected under the First Amendment, then those parents should be allowed to make those choices for their children as they would any other choice.

Paul Van Sickle is a columnist for the *Emerald*.

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