

Legislative stalling childish, defeating

Some House Republicans should be sent to bed without dinner.

Like only a child would do, our state leaders voted against something they actually believe in just to prove they have power. These Republican rebels helped vote down a workers' compensation reform bill Monday, although the bill is highly supported by the GOP. Their reasoning for dissenting was so that they could show the House that they could cause chaos if they wanted to. Their actions also proved to be a cheap shot at Speaker of the House Bev Clarno, who is caught in a power struggle with Rep. John Minnis, R-Troutdale.

Any Oregon resident, Republican or Democrat, should be disturbed by the immaturity displayed by our state representatives. American citizens are taught to trust their elected officials, but when government representatives act so foolishly, the entire system of democracy is threatened.

When state representatives disrupt legislation by playing with their votes, they create unnecessary confusion. The six dissenting Republicans, who Democrats have called the "Bad Boys," will probably vote in favor of the bill, which was expected to come up again Wednesday. How can we trust people who say something one day about an important issue and then quickly change their minds the next?

Although workers' compensation isn't as controversial as abortion or gay rights issues, it is a serious issue for our state and deserves the Legislature's undivided attention. The bill being discussed would increase benefits for certain on-the-job injuries and add restrictions to those who can apply for benefits. It would also place more restrictions preventing workers from suing employees. Any worker or employee who has been caught in the tangled web of workers' comp would be disappointed to see that this issue is being treated so lightly.

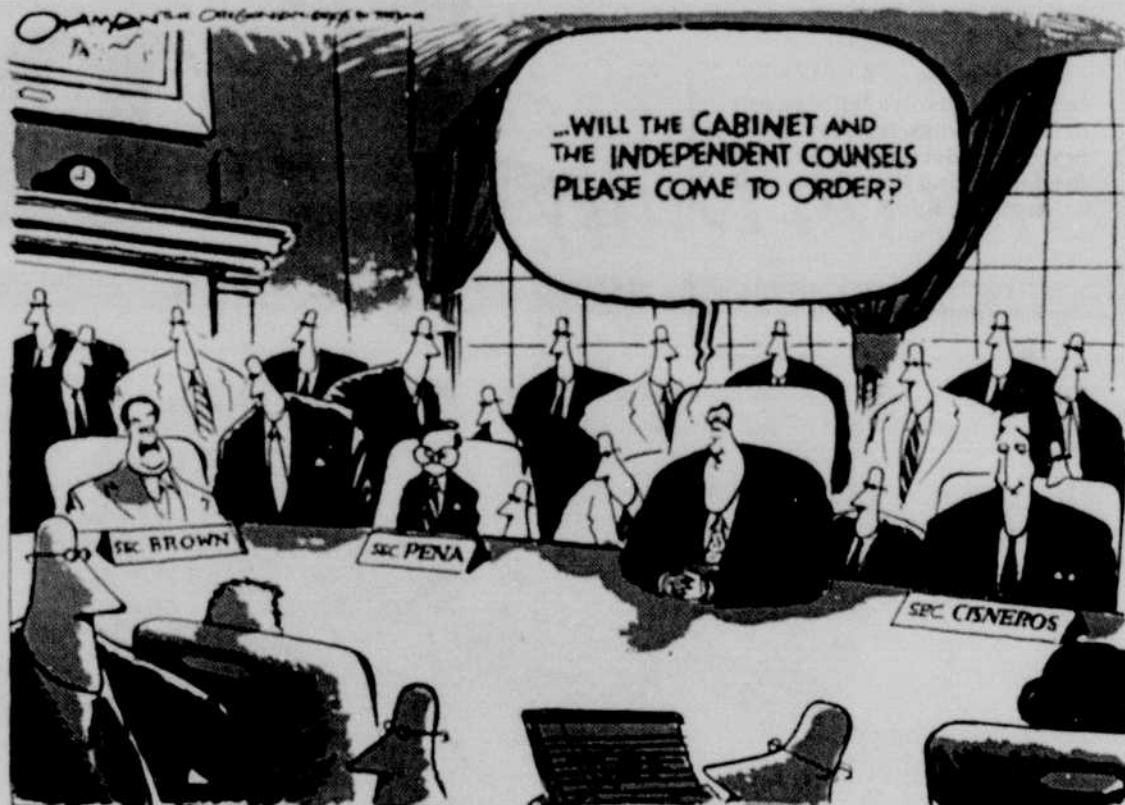
The decision of the six Republicans also is a waste of already scarce government funds. If the group did not rebel, the bill would have been passed Tuesday, saving the Legislature from spending another day on this issue. Long legislative sessions are costly and every effort should be made to limit this year's session. There's no excuse for delaying state government with childish power plays.

Some critics say the Republican rebellion is in response to Clarno's refusal to take a strong stand on state financial matters, including school budget and income taxes. But playing games only creates more bitter feelings on both sides and is an indicator of an unproductive Legislature.

The Republicans were successful in embarrassing the entire Legislature in front of the people they should care about most — Oregon residents.

Should we make them stand in the corner?

There's no excuse for delaying state government with childish power plays.



■ OPINION

Cruelty new aspect of immigration laws



Gayle Forman

During my spring vacation, while so many of my peers were lounging around beaches or swishing down the slopes, I went to New York City. I was there ostensibly to partake in that journalistic tradition of trying to find an internship. While I was there I found a few hours to play tourist and took the ferry along with thousands of camera-toting folks to the Statue of Liberty and to Ellis Island.

The island served as a processing center for some 12-17 million immigrants between 1892 and 1954, mostly people from Eastern and Southern Europe. My father's family members were among the first to come across the island when they immigrated from the Ukraine, while my mother's family traversed the island in the 1930s, fleeing Hitler. So I am among the 100 million or so Americans — 42 percent of the U.S. population — who descended from those original millions.

Most people, even if their ancestors didn't pass through Ellis Island, have some immigrant blood coursing through their veins. The millions of folks who flooded this country during the early part of the century were but one wave of immigrants. Before them, millions of Irish and Western Europeans crossed the Atlantic to try to carve their piece of the American dream as did millions of East Asians via the Pacific. So, unless you're a Native American, the only ones who have the right to complain about foreigners invading their land, one of the Mayflower descendants, who were really nothing more than the first known U.S. immigrants, or a descendant of the African slaves taken here against their

will, you are, or your ancestors were, among the ranks of American immigrants.

Included in those ranks are many of the hundreds of thousands of Californians who passed the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 last November. And dig back a few generations and you might find that your congressman or senator, who is debating whether or not to take away aid from all immigrants, both legal and illegal, is the spawn of an immigrant line.

This country was built by immigrants, be it Europeans farming the Nebraska Plains or Asians building the railroads. Earlier in the century we needed those people to populate our vast country, and, consequently, their presence was welcome. It's not very often that I get a tinge of national pride, but seeing how well we once treated immigrants both shocked me and made me proud of my country's heritage.

I'm a little too cynical to believe that the kindness I saw displayed in pictures and articles in the Ellis Island Museum was the rule. Americans were back-watching racists even back then and anti-immigrant sentiments ebbed and flowed as the national economy rose and fell. But back then, harsh immigrant policy translated into federally imposed quotas and angry, albeit short-sighted "real Americans," discriminating against their new compatriots. Once these innocent foreign souls were let loose, employers exploited them for every ounce of cheap labor that could be wrung from them.

But in light of the anti-immigrant legislations being banded about in both the federal and state governments, such infractions seem slight. Of course we have always had a tradition of treating those who seem different like dirt, but the overt and pure malice that drives today's anti-immigrant sentiments seems like a new step down for us.

And while I know that economics is behind immigrant legislation, there is a degree of cruelty entering our mind

frame. Instead of seeking to control the flood of immigrants, which I begrudgingly admit we need to do to some extent, government is wanting to balance the budget by denying children an education and everyone health care simply because they come from a foreign land. Perhaps even more insulting is Newt Gingrich's proposal to take away aid from legal aliens, many of whom have been tax-paying contributors for as long as he has been alive.

I understand that there are complicated economic forces at play here. This country is desperately trying to tighten the purse strings. But it is indicative of our underlying prejudice that instead of attempting to save money by trimming down or scrapping obsolete government programs, we are denying immigrants — those who are already here and doubtfully going anywhere on their own volition — the basic necessities needed to exist.

By continuing with such racist legislation, we are turning our backs on our own heritage. What if our ancestors, upon arriving poor and hopeful, had been turned away? How could we have ever prospered without an education, without proper care? But now we seek to deny what has been bestowed upon us.

But I must say that the glee with which Americans slam the door in the face of immigrants — after all, who cares if those foreigners are let in as long as we made it in — does not surprise me, for we are a very forgetful people. This too, I learned at Ellis Island. As I was waiting for the ferry to take me back to Manhattan, I overheard two women talking. "Those immigrants back then," said one of the women who was probably the ancestor of an immigrant, "they knew what America was all about. They cared about this country. Not like today's no-good immigrants; they don't give a toss about this country."

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