

## Lobby legislators to prevent cuts

With the budget for higher education being targeted for cuts, now is the time for more students to lobby their legislators to save the budget for publicly-funded universities.

The time couldn't be more right for students to act. The state Senate devoted only two hours of time to public testimony Thursday — two hours when students could be affected for the rest of their lives by cuts to higher education.

The cuts to higher education are illogical. Under the proposal from Gov. John Kitzhaber, K-12 and community colleges in Oregon would receive about 97 percent of their current budgets, with allowances made for inflation and enrollment growth. However, the governor proposes to cut almost 15 percent from higher education — an obviously disproportionate cut.

This might be indicative of the fact that legislators might not believe that higher education is a priority in Oregon. If that is the case, then they are dead wrong. Oregonians have been increasingly seeing fewer blue-collar jobs available as we move into the age of technology coupled with steep declines in the forest supplies industry.

However, students have the opportunity to let their legislators know that higher education contributes to lifelong learning.

It would be easy for students to write to or call legislators from the Eugene area. Unfortunately, it would also be the equivalent of preaching to the choir. Our local legislators, for the most part, are already aware of how valuable the University is to students and the community.

Students could more effectively direct their energies by writing letters to their legislators back home. Portland students should tell their legislators that the University directly impacts people in Portland.

Likewise, students from Bend could tell their lawmaker that Eastern Oregon State College helps give students skills that they will need when they face the job market. Citizens of the state are aided by the education that students receive from all of our state universities.

However, the situation is not hopeless yet. With the collective voice of students speaking to their own legislators back home, more lawmakers than normal will hear the reasons why higher education shouldn't be cut.

Students must contact their home-town legislators immediately, as a vote on the proposed higher education budget should come within the next two weeks. Resident students should call their legislator back home, while non-resident students can lobby their Eugene representatives.

Regardless of one's involvement in political issues, education is an issue which affects everyone at the University. The less the state contributes to higher education, the more students will be expected to pay.

It's clear that legislators have a lot to learn about funding universities in Oregon. Students must take the initiative to teach them that higher education is something that must be valued.



### OPINION

## DMV records must remain accessible



ANNE MOSER-KORNFELD

Public access to driver's licenses and motor vehicle records closes in September 1997 unless each state passes opt-out legislation to keep DMV records open.

What this means for the public-at-large is that valuable, beneficial information that leads to ensuring the general health, safety and welfare of all citizens will become unavailable due to a passage included in last summer's federal crime bill.

In August, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., pushed for the passage of legislation intended to protect stalking victims. Boxer's bill went through the Senate quickly and was approved without public hearings. A repeal of the law seems unlikely.

Currently citizens can pay a small fee at a DMV office to acquire someone's name and address. The law will prevent those who have legitimate needs of obtaining motor vehicle records from gaining access.

States can choose to introduce opt-out legislation, which allows states not to enforce the legislation's imposed restrictions. This is the result of a compromise, authored by Rep. Jim Moran, D-Va., which met with the least opposition by groups in favor of open records.

Indiana and Missouri were the first to enact opt-out legislation earlier in the year.

The law passed in the crime bill restricts the release of personal information, i.e. photographs, Social Security numbers, names, addresses, telephone numbers and any information that identifies an individual.

Information is a neutral commodity.

How people use available information cannot be con-

trolled by lawmakers taking an overprotective stance and supposing they know what is best for their constituents.

Lawmakers were elected to represent the people, not to dictate their doctrines and fashion them into law.

Barriers that regulate the release of information will not deter determined stalkers from finding other ways of locating their potential victims.

Laws to prevent stalking and to prosecute those convicted of stalking are better methods for achieving the end intended by the crime bill provision.

In a free society, the public's ability to scrutinize readily accessible material is the best defense citizens have against the government misuse and abuse of information like DMV records.

The blanket closure of accessibility to DMV records promotes a false sense of security from those whose original intention was for the good of the people.

The sentiment behind the anti-stalking provision was at its worst well-intentioned and at its best a step in the direction toward ending violence against women.

But this law may be one further step toward the global exclusion of information. Concealing public information shows the great need for a new set of rules accompanying the information age, before computer records are closed unnecessarily.

Most individuals have no idea who has access to their records nor what their records tell about them. At first glance, restraining access to public records appears to be a good idea. Perhaps it is that the traditional American notions of personal privacy are at risk.

Few people want to believe that their lives are an open book; nevertheless, each time people fill out credit card applications and subscribe to cable or magazines, they are submitting personal information to countless groups of other people.

By informing the U.S. Post

Office of an address change using form No. 3575, which says that "Filling this form is voluntary, but your mail cannot be forwarded without an order. If filed, your new address will be provided to individuals and companies who request it. This will occur only when the requester is already in possession of your name and old mailing address..." the ante is upped even more.

Direct marketers will still have access to DMV records. The DMV records will be given only to people with a specific business-related reason for obtaining the information.

DMV records helped uncover the identities of Florida Ku Klux Klan members. DMV records help find people with drunk driving charges on their records.

Employers use DMV records to do background checks on potential job applicants.

Credit agencies can cross-check information on an individual's debt in relation to a current address, driving citations and so forth.

The times that DMV records have been used for the public good are innumerable. DMV records are an important fact-checking resource.

By enacting the opt-out legislation, residents can elect to block the release of their DMV records.

Citizens are given an alternative. The decision-making process in favor or against the classification of personal data is left up to them.

To overcome the enormous obstacles which must be faced to guarantee that this freedom of information remains accessible, citizen participation is required. Coalitions, the governor's office and the Oregon DMV can work as allies.

The fight to keep information available to ordinary people has only just begun. Life in an open society has its hazards but life in a closed society is even more dangerous.

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## Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

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