

# EDITORIAL

## Open Willamette, vote yes on 20-43

The opening of Willamette Street could mean economic rebirth for the downtown mall area.

Eugene voters will decide whether to open the section of Willamette Street between 8th and 10th Avenues in a mail-in ballot election this month. The measure, 20-43, asks voters to approve a plan to allow vehicular traffic back into the downtown mall.

If the measure passes, the street would have two lanes for the two-way traffic and raised crosswalks outlined with bricks at the intersections of Broadway and the alleys.

This is a positive move for the city of Eugene. In the mall now there are several buildings that have no tenants, including the largest buildings, which housed Newberry's and Woolworth's in the past.

Without reopening the street, it is hard to believe that businesses are going to be interested in moving to these buildings.

The fountain, which hasn't worked in several years and is costly to repair, would be removed to accommodate the street. This eyesore serves no purpose other than providing seating and being a trash receptacle.

The days of thriving downtown malls have been shadowed by strip malls in outlying areas of the city. The Bon Marche and Sears moved to malls taking with them large groups of downtown shoppers. Other areas of the downtown mall have positively responded to the changes, including Olive Street, which was reopened in 1992 and has been thriving.

Voters should pay attention to Olive Street and allow Willamette to thrive the same way.

If the mall opened it would entice private businesses to renovate those large buildings and make the space more user friendly.

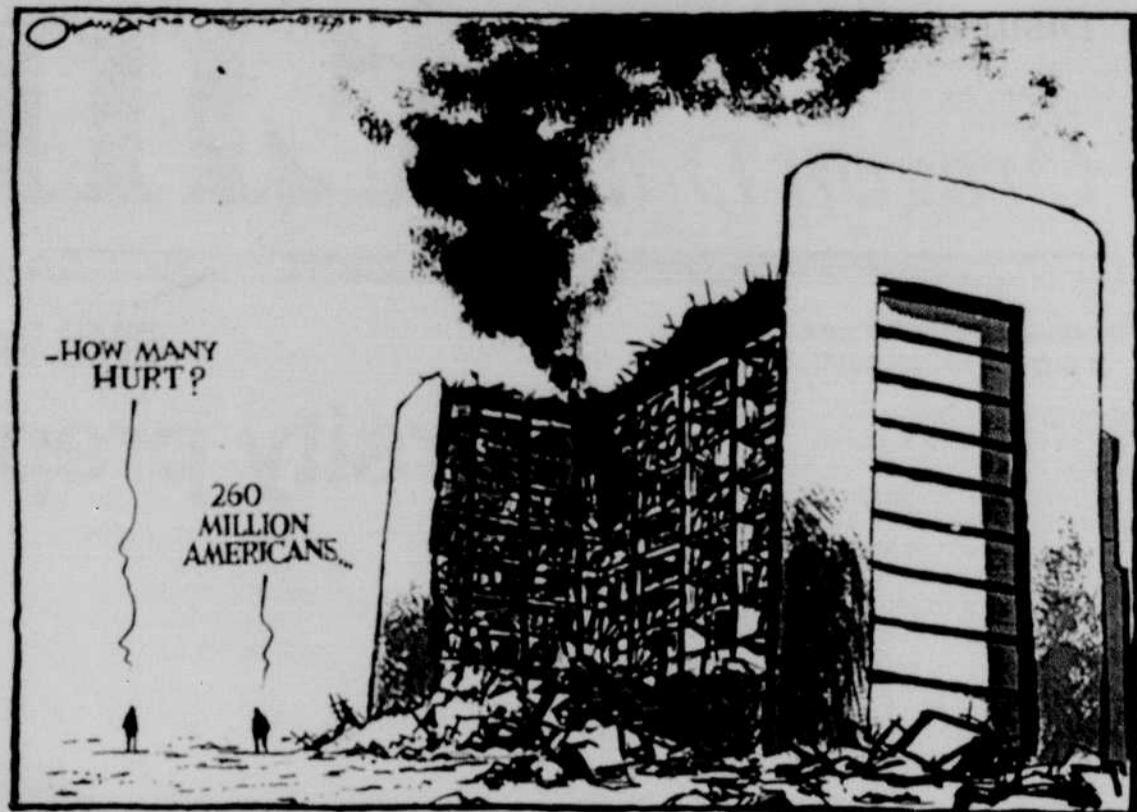
Opponents of the measure say that once the new U.S. Bank building opens and several hundred people move in there will be more activity in the mall. But 750 people are not going to bring life back into the mall. Businesses like U.S. Bank are only open Monday through Friday during the day. Other businesses will not be able to survive on customers during banking hours alone.

After the renovation, businesses will have visibility. Shoppers will be able to see the store from the streets and want to go in them.

Some say the design would take away one of the only places Eugene has to hold community activities, but the design of the street will allow it to be closed for civic activities so the plaza atmosphere would still be available.

The existing situation in the downtown mall is not economically responsible. Many businesses could benefit from the added traffic on the reopened street. As citizens of Eugene we can no longer ignore the problems of that area. This solution can benefit thousands of people and should be approved.

Vote yes on Measure 20-43.



### ■ OPINION

## White men not victims of discrimination



Gayle Forman

After 30 years of affirmative action, foes have suddenly decided that the legislation has made them an unlikely minority. From the ranks of the angry white male has come a new rallying cry for freedom and equality: "Save the white male! We're an endangered species! Affirmative action is reverse discrimination! White men are the new minority!"

Oh, please. The fragile race of supposedly beleaguered white males is not going anywhere. And affirmative action has yet to take our society where it needs to be. For while critics of the program claim that it's not working or not necessary, the truth is that we still have a long way to go.

But if the present political climate prevails and the scores of paranoid and disenfranchised folks have their way, we'll never get there. Affirmative action, which was not even an issue during the 1994 elections, has become the newest symbolic target for conservatives who are desperately trying to hang on to an era gone by.

The U.S. House wants to abolish it. GOP presidential hopeful Sen. Phil Gramm and Sen. Bob Dole are opposing it, making affirmative action a key issue in the upcoming political frenzy. California governor and presidential hopeful Pete Wilson told a group of men that "white men are the new, silent victims of discrimination in this country." California citizens are trying to get a referendum question on the 1996 ballot that would in effect ban affirmative action.

Why is it that white men are suddenly sweating, worrying that their once-sacred grip on the higher echelons of American society may be starting to slip? They needn't worry too much, for despite the general panic, white men are still very much in charge. As Jesse Jackson puts it, this new

"minority" makes up 80 percent of the Congress, 90 percent of the Senate, 92 percent of the Forbes 400 and 80 percent of all tenured university faculty. According to the 1993 Census, blacks hold about 10 percent of all managerial and professional jobs; Hispanics hold less than 8 percent.

Until these percentages reflect — or at least come close to reflecting — our society's make-up, affirmative action will be necessary. These programs help undo some of the inequalities in our society, and have successfully integrated under-represented people into the economic scheme.

But the system isn't perfect, and critics love to point out its imperfections as reason to abolish it. They often cite examples of wealthy people, who are also minorities, taking advantage of their skin colors or their last names to prosper from federal programs that they don't really need. Such occasions are not the rule and to advertise them as commonplace is bogus.

Others cry that affirmative action favors racial minorities and women. Programs, they say, should be based on need, not race. Why should the poor white guy lose out over a comfortable Korean woman? That's a good point. Perhaps we need more programs that provide help based upon need. That is still no reason to abolish a program that brings people into realms that have been exclusively white and male for too long.

That is the point of affirmative action — not just to help poor minorities become wealthier, but to make the American workplace representative of American society. And maybe that is what scares the angry white guys so

much.

Under affirmative action — despite popular misperception — qualified workers are not losing their jobs to less-qualified people. It's just that with these laws as safeguards, a qualified person who is black or Hispanic or female will not be locked out of a job or a promotion on account of his or her race or gender. This may indeed be bad news for some white men. Their free ride is over. It's now time to play by the same rules as the rest of us.

However, I do agree with the affirmative action critics on one point. The program is not supposed to be permanent or inflexible. Just as our society has changed in the last 30 years, so too should affirmative action. Programs need to evolve and change with the times and maybe one day they will realize their goal.

That hasn't happened yet, and from the looks of it, we have a while to go. Still, there are those who will carry on whinnying about the process of affirmative action taking too long and crying for its destruction. But this country is 219 years old. For a good part of our history we have systematically exploited, derided and discriminated against blacks, native Americans, women and any other group that didn't qualify as white male. Perhaps in another 170 years, when affirmative action's tenure rivals that of our history of institutionalized and legislated racism, maybe then we will be ready to dismantle it.

In the mean time, I have some advice for the angry white male: deal with it.

Gayle "Feminazi" Forman is a columnist for the Emerald

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