

Terminally ill patients wounded by 'concern'

■ **OUR OPINION:** Rejection of assisted suicide minimizes choice

If death be not proud, then Oregonians should rejoice about Judge Michael Hogan's ruling last week that the state's doctor-assisted suicide law is unconstitutional. Unfortunately, preventing suffering people from ending their lives in a dignified and peaceful manner is nothing to celebrate.

Judge Hogan rejected the law, saying it violated the 14th Amendment right to equal protection of the laws. Terminally ill patients, he said, would be denied the same protection afforded to all other Oregonians. Dying people would not be protected from being assisted in an act of self-destruction.

This argument is based on an all-too-frequent assumption that any person should or can be protected from him or herself — that the state needs to guide its citizens in issues regarding the individual body. While the state has a legitimate inter-

est in protecting the people from the negligence, malice and stupidity of others, to apply that standard to protecting dying people from themselves is, at best, misguided.

All people should have the right to do with their bodies whatever they choose as long as that action does not harm the body or property of another. Opponents of the measure say that terminally ill patients are not in a stable state of mind to make a reasonable judgment about their lives. Yet, who but the dying has a better perspective on life and its meaning?

If the assisted suicide law is eventually approved, no one will be required to participate in the patient's suicide against his or her wishes. The only people making a life-and-death decision for an adult will be both the actor and receiver of that decision. Under reasonable restrictions, how and when Oregonians choose to die should be none of the state's business.

Legislature gives public transport the green light

■ **OUR OPINION:** Portland's light rail is both positive and progressive

The Oregon Legislature surprised many political cynics last week by passing the light rail funding package in the 11th hour of the session. At its heart, the bill deposits \$375 million into state and local transportation coffers and allots the same amount to the expansion of Portland's light rail system.

The expansion of light rail into the slightly sprawling suburbia surrounding the state's largest city is both savvy and forward-thinking. While Eugeneans spend countless hours debating whether growth is good and what can be done to deter/encourage it, Portland

officials have accepted the inevitable. Growth happens, and our big sister is preparing for her future.

Sandwiched between please-move-here Seattle and please-don't-stay Eugene, Portland has adopted a practical approach to the growth conundrum. By recognizing that they cannot control who and how many people enter (or leave) the city, Portlanders have directed their attention to making sure that their home remains clean, safe and as free of two-hour traffic jams and factory closings as possible. While this rational response may not sell at a Eugene City Council meeting, it just goes to show what we can learn from an older sibling.



OPINION

One family's search comes home, at last

I've been blessed in my life to be surrounded by remarkable people — friends and family members who live with strength and dignity, without fanfare or fame. By some astounding stroke of luck, these same people have invited me into their lives, have shared their pain and their joy, and allowed me to bear witness to their daily sorrows and celebrations. They are all old friends to me. They are friends for life, friends that matter.

One of my dearest friends returned home recently to celebrate his father's 67th birthday. He had come from the East Coast for the event, and his older brother and sister had also traveled great distances to celebrate their father's life. One year ago they had made the same journey to scatter their mother's ashes and to see what remained of a childhood home destroyed by fire. Yesterday, they arrived for a party, a coming home and a coming together.

Through the years each of these children had run away from home in search of something. They had fled their father's life for reasons they could no longer recall. Freedom, maybe. Too many rules. Or maybe they felt they could no longer hear their voices. They had each journeyed around the world, in and out of the military, in and out of poverty, in and out of favor with the man they left behind. Little by little, fences were

mended through time and silence. So much was never said. Bygones were bygones.

After years of Christmases missed for whatever reason, and birthday songs sung by speaker phone, they arrived at one place at one time for one reason.

As they sat on the deck of a new home, holding nothing of their past, the three children, now in their late '20s and early '30s, laughed with each other, telling old stories, rebuilding memories. Their father, a stately, stoic, ex-military



Sean Smith

man, joked and teased, reminding them of who they were and are. He had begun to date again, a lovely woman who had been a friend of the family for nearly two decades, and whose husband had been killed a few years before.

As the mist of an Oregon summer began to drizzle down on the redwood table, the laughter stopped. One by one they turned toward their father and said, for the first time, what was in their hearts.

"It's so wonderful to see you happy, Father."

"You deserve to be happy, Daddy."

"I support you in whatever decision you make, Dad."

The father sat silently and listened to the adult voices of his children. Not one was angry that he had started a relationship so soon after their mother's death. Not one blamed him, challenged him, resented him. As he struggled to speak, his oldest son stopped him.

"Dad, I know I didn't turn out to be the son you always wanted. I haven't done things your way or followed your path. But I just want you to know that you have always been my hero, my only hero."

The rain began to fall, gathering in small puddles on the table, dripping on to the deck. The father wiped his eyes behind his gold-framed bifocals as his children turned their soft smiles toward him.

"I will be," he said, "forever grateful to you kids and the love you have shown me. I may not have always agreed with the way you've lived your lives, but I have never stopped loving you."

As their tears mixed with the rain on their cheeks, a family moved together, toward their father, toward their center.

Somehow, out of the ashes of everything they had lost, they had come to this place and had found, at once, the origin and object of their search. They had, at last, found each other. They had come home.

Sean Smith is an associate editor for the Emerald.

LETTERS

Pro-pooling

Oregon needs expanded mass transit, especially along the Interstate-5 corridor connecting Eugene, Corvallis, Albany, Salem and Portland. Mass transit saves individual costs in gasoline, car maintenance, insurance and parking. It

reduces traffic congestion and helps the Earth's environment (air quality) breathe, while giving commuters ease.

Northbound shuttle buses are beginning but there are currently no van pools, buses or trains I can locate heading south. This, of course, does not include the state's shuttle buses

from Portland to Salem. For example, one can take a van pool from Salem to Portland State University but not to the University of Oregon. Mass transit linking cities along I-5 could really make a difference for businesses in those cities.

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Journalism

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