

VIEWPOINTS

EDITORIALS, OPINIONS, LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Direct Lending Bill sits on the chopping block

■ OUR OPINION:

Congressional budget would cut financial aid substantially for students

Soon after President Clinton moved into the Oval Office, he signed into law something that has since greatly diminished the pain associated with the entire financial aid gauntlet for college students across the country. The University became one of the test colleges for this new piece of legislation, called the Direct Lending Bill, which allowed financially strapped students to get money directly from the federal government. In the old days, students had to apply for financial aid, wait for acceptance from the financial institution (in this case, the federal government), and then take their permission slip to any bank that would give them the loan.

Currently in a joint House and Senate conference committee meeting is a fiendish series of Republican-proposed financial aid cuts that should be scary enough to frighten any college student right out of apathy. The Senate has already passed a bill that cuts \$2.5 billion from the Perkins Loan Program and the Oregon Need Grant. The bill would also cut \$385 million in education and training programs in Oregon, could increase the individual student debt burden to more than \$2,000 for almost 63,000 undergraduate students in the state and would deny Pell Grants to nearly 4,000 Oregon students next year. Other financial programs on the chopping block include the Stafford Loan Interest Subsidy and National Service programs.

Direct benefits to students are not the only programs slated for cuts. Monies allocated for institutional support and research would also be eliminated. As it was summarized in a recent memorandum to student body presidents at Oregon independent colleges and universities: "The overall effect on post-secondary education will be decreased quality offered at higher cost." Basically, education gets mugged.

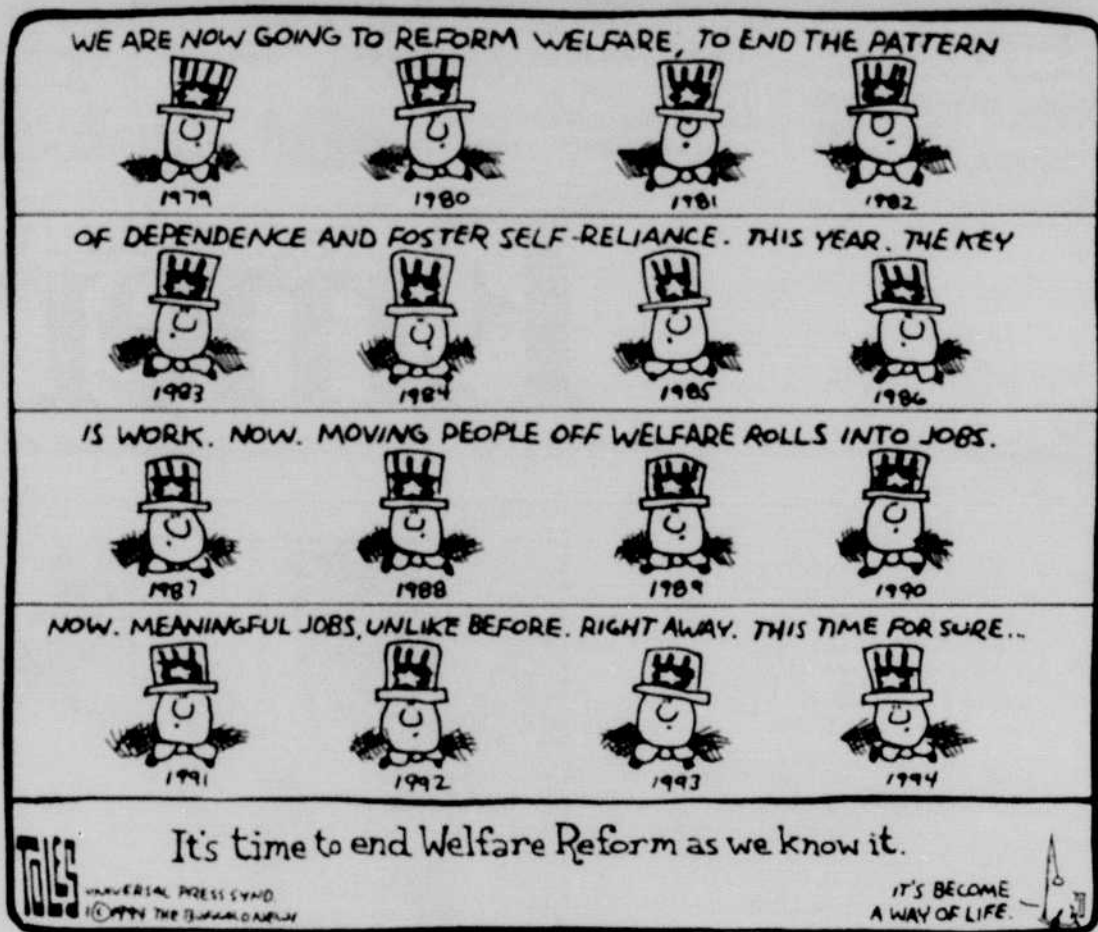
While creating simulated crime scenes complete with chalk outlines of student "victims" might be taking the analogy too far, the legislation does represent a potentially huge reduction in financial aid. We are not powerless, however.

We have until Oct. 1, the deadline for Clinton to either sign or veto the proposed budget, to get on the phones and call our elected representatives and senators to let them know how we feel about this legislative package.

Kevin Easton, ASUO federal affairs director, has arranged a statewide event called "Students are Getting Slashed" to educate students about these proposals. Activities include an 11 a.m. news conference today in the EMU Courtyard and access to cellular phones so students can call their representatives in Washington, D.C. The calls are free.

All it will cost is a little bit of your time, but the clock is ticking right now.

By this time next year, instead of being late for class, some students might find themselves wishing they could just afford to go to school.



OPINION

Amazon families bond during the battle

My best guess is that the fight over Amazon Family Housing has not yet ended. Many of you are already familiar with the argument over the World War II-era complex, but for those who haven't heard, the fight is between the University, which wants to tear down "unsafe housing," and the Save Amazon Coalition, which wants to preserve and refurbish "badly needed low-income housing."

As a resident of Amazon for the past year, I've been caught in the middle of this tug-of-war. While I've heard the arguments on both sides of this debate, what I have not heard is any discussion of the people living in Amazon.

Yes, people are living in Amazon. The University and the Save Amazon Coalition seem to have forgotten about them.

I say the Save Amazon Coalition forgot about Amazon residents because I was never informed about what it was doing. I saw little or no attempt from the coalition to communicate with those of us who were not involved in the effort to save the complex. If any attempts were made, I apologize for not knowing about them.

The University's Family Housing Office, on the other hand, did attempt to communicate with the tenants. Unfortunately, notices and newsletters sent to us were often vague and/or missing important information.

During the months after my partner and I applied for family housing, we called the housing office several times to find out what our chances were of getting an apartment. If we needed to look for other accommodations, we wanted to know about it as soon as possible. No one could tell us

anything. Finally, we got a letter offering us an apartment at Amazon.

The day we got our key we learned of the impending demolition. We were surprised, to say the least. How could the University, in all good conscience, not warn us that we were moving into a building it planned to tear down?

Thus, the tone for University communication was set.

We received another letter from Family Housing on May 16 informing us that everyone in Amazon had to be out by the end of March 1996. We could not be promised other family housing if we had not "made arrangements with University Housing" by Aug. 31. I wasn't sure if I had to agree to move, accept another housing offer or actually be moved by that date. It also said Amazon families with children would be given priority for East Campus houses, which the University rents to student families. East Campus houses are normally distributed through a lottery process because of the high demand for them. Family Housing promised to suspend the lottery to get Amazon families placed. One problem: The lottery for East Campus houses had taken place the day before the letter was written.

I called the housing office to find out whether we were being offered houses that had already been offered to other students. After three phone calls, someone at the East Campus and Amazon office told me that after the unoccupied portion of Amazon had been rebuilt, people still living in Amazon would be able to move into the new apartments. Then, the rest of the demolition would take place. Yet, the letter I held in my hand stated that all Amazon apartments would be vacated by April 1996, and the new apartments

would not be ready until fall term 1996. If the people who sent the letter didn't know what was going on, how was I supposed to figure it out?

The people in Amazon made coping with the bureaucracy bearable. I've been renting apartments for 10 years and have never experienced the strong sense of community I experienced at Amazon.

The day we moved in, three of our neighbors came over to introduce themselves. Our children became best friends. We all understood the pleasures and pains of being students. We shared front yards and back yards, the poor conditions of our apartments and the frustrations of the University's plan to tear down our homes.

We watched each other's kids when someone had a child care problem. We shared speculations and rumors about how demolition plans were going and what the Save Amazon Coalition was doing. We wondered together whether we would be able to get into East Campus houses. At times, we were each other's best and only source of information.

By living at Amazon, I've come to understand what my grandmother means when she talks about the way neighbors used to rely on each other. I've also come to understand what it's like to have a bureaucracy in charge of my living arrangements. Last week we moved out of Amazon and into a house at East Campus. At last we have a real backyard, and we don't trip over each other like we used to at our tiny apartment. Now I just hope I can get to know my neighbors without looking over my shoulder for bulldozers.

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