

## Breast cancer becomes part of national agenda

■ **OUR OPINION:** The disease is not a women's issue; it affects everyone

Of the women now attending the University, 250 will die from breast cancer; 622 more will be diagnosed with the disease and live. Breast cancer cannot be prevented, but early detection assures a higher rate of survival.

National Breast Cancer Awareness Month was designed to increase the number of early detections that will save the lives of thousands of women each year. What began as a grassroots movement in the mid-1980s has become a part of our national agenda. Breast cancer has come out of the closet. What remains to be changed, however, is the perception that breast cancer is a women's issue.

Human nature often allows us to ignore issues that do not affect us directly. Senior citizens rarely protest student financial-aid cuts, and University students won't be marching toward city hall when Medicare is slashed by the Senate. Youth often adds to that apathy as we delude ourselves into believing we will live forever.

As such, our cry for change rises only when our lives or our way of life are threatened. Men overlook breast cancer because women are 20 times more likely to develop breast cancer than men, and young females disregard it because women older than 40 are at a higher risk for the disease. We simply dismiss it as "somebody else's problem." Until recently, the mission to move breast cancer off the nation's back burner has been staffed primarily by

women, many of whom are surviving the disease.

The Senate recently channeled \$200 million for breast-cancer research through the Department of Defense, one of the largest allotments for the disease to date. The credit for that increase belongs to the advocates for breast cancer research and treatment who have lobbied tirelessly for change.

Breast cancer will undoubtedly affect all of us in our lifetimes.

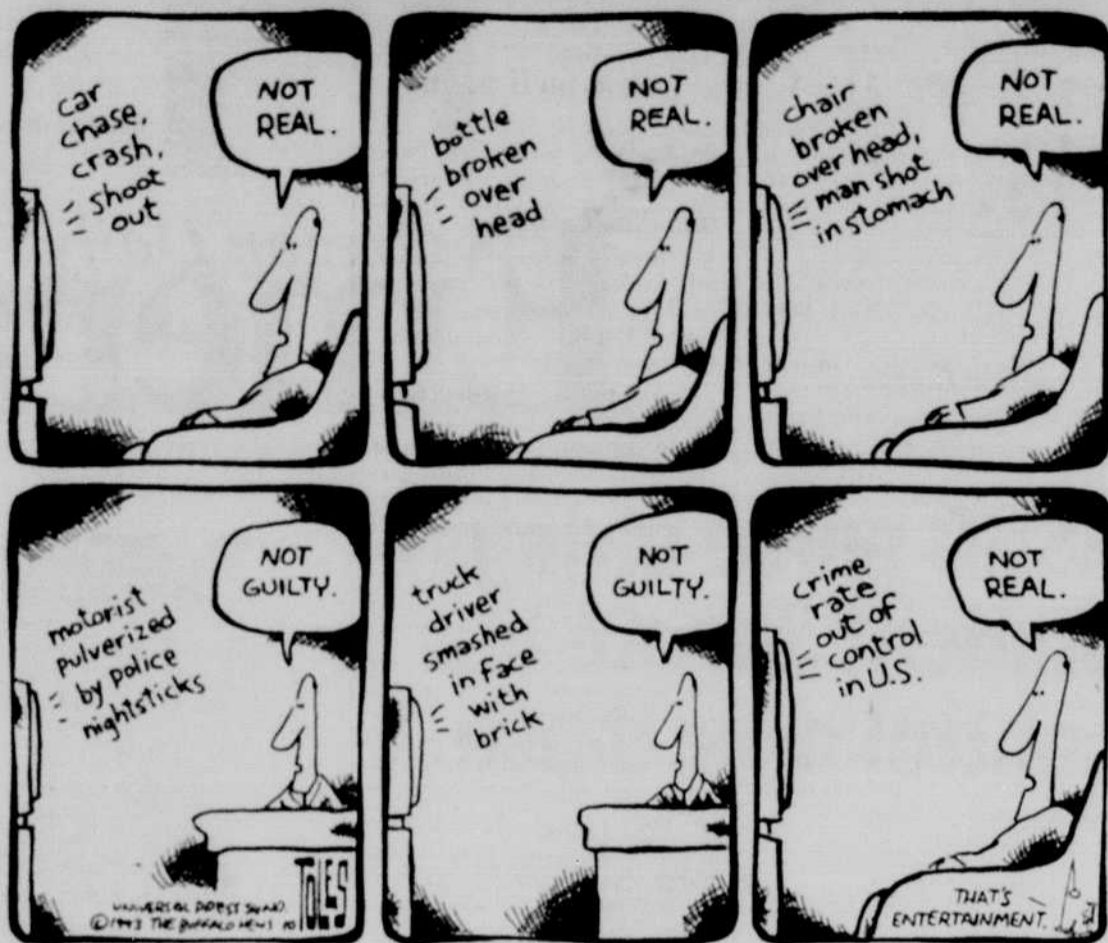
According to the American Cancer Society, one out of every nine women will develop the disease. Each year 186,000 American mothers, sisters, daughters, lovers and best friends hear the words, "You have cancer." Awareness month's purpose is to insure the diagnosis is not followed by, "And it's too late."

It's often the women in our lives who become our primary parents — the ones who keep us safe. We, as a society, rely heavily on women economically and emotionally. They are often the leaders of our consciences and our corporations.

Breast cancer deals a painful blow to hundreds of thousands of American families. Each year, more than 46,000 women leave behind the ones who shared life and love with them.

National Breast Cancer Awareness month is a testament to the thousands of women who looked beyond their personal tragedies to make a difference in the lives of others. Its greatest achievement would be to give all of us a wake-up call.

For more information on breast cancer, call 1-800-4-CANCER.



## State should give school choice a chance

**W**hen it comes to education, most children are captives of a government-run school assigned to them according to geography.

The great tragedy of the government school monopoly is that it denies opportunity for educational excellence to children who need it the most: The children of poor and working-class parents.

Upper-middle class and wealthy parents already have a "school choice" of sorts: They can buy homes in areas served by outstanding public schools, or they can write a check to a private school.

For example, President Clinton and his wife Hillary send their daughter Chelsea to Washington's exclusive Sidwell-Friends School rather than subject her to some of the nation's worst school systems. Good for the Clintons.

But for those who are not so fortunate, private school tuition often is beyond reach. Thus, parents will likely have to send their children to schools they know will fail to provide a quality education.

The mechanics of school choice are less important than achieving a practical result that makes sure all parents, regardless of economic circumstances, have the opportunity to do what they deem best for their children's education. Vouchers, charter schools, direct payments to schools or tax credits all are viable options.

The crucial element is to make existing per-pupil taxpayer subsidies portable among a wide variety of public and private schools, without qualification.

This is the only sure way to make schools fully accountable to parents and to taxpayers at large. Schools that fail to deliver a quality education in a secure environment would stand to lose their subsidies.

Critics claim school choice fundamentally is anti-public school. On the contrary, the strong performance incentive of school choice would result in better schools overall — both public and private. Schools would have to compete to serve a larger pool of potential students.

This likely would spark some degree of specialization among schools, increasing the diversity of education options. Some schools might emphasize sciences, some the arts and still others vocational skills. The possibilities are endless.

Some critics also claim comprehensive school choice would violate the First Amendment by providing students with finances to attend religious schools. This admittedly is an unsettled legal issue.

Yet government already provides significant funds to individuals to attend religious educa-

### OPINION

BILL WITT

tional institutions through student loan guarantees, GI Bill funds, Pell Grants and, some would argue, the tax-exempt status granted all religious institutions. As long as any aid is tied to the individual student and choice programs do not favor any particular religion, there is no real First Amendment problem.

Limited experiments with school choice, using both public and private money, are yielding encouraging results.

The 22 private choice programs affiliated with the Arkansas-based Children's Opportunity Foundation are educating nearly 8,000 students and another 13,000 are on waiting lists — powerful testimony to parents' desires.

The COF Foundation reports many instances of children who have blossomed academically and socially once removed from basket-case schools and given a chance to succeed. A Milwaukee, Wis., choice program is forcing the public school system to improve, despite protests from the American Civil Liberties Union and other obstructionists.

Here in Oregon, State Superintendent Norma Paulus claims to support choice — but only choice among schools approved by existing education authorities, such as the Bend Community School. The Bend school is a worthwhile experiment, but Oregon parents deserve access to a much wider range of choices.

Congress could make it much easier for states and communities to enact their own choice programs simply by allowing federal money, which is sprinkled throughout state and local education budgets, to be used for choice programs.

The state, for its part, should embark on a school choice experiment for students currently assigned to the dozen worst-ranking public schools. Since these schools already are demonstrable failures, a choice program could hardly make matters worse — and more likely would force dramatic improvements.

Considering what's at stake for the students, it's worse than folly to continue to send kids to schools that will leave them entirely unprepared for adulthood. It's destructive.

The burden in the school choice debate ought to be on those who insist on a status quo that so miserably fails children who most need a chance.

Bill Witt, a Republican businessman from Portland, is seeking the GOP nomination for Mark Hatfield's Senate seat.

## Oregon Daily Emerald

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