

Mother Nature can kill; need laws to save lives

OUR OPINION: Outdoor enthusiasts, taxpayers need mountain climbing regulations

As this goes to print, two University students are still missing somewhere on the North Sister.

Only a month after bad weather kept searchers from combing Mt. Hood to find the relative of a Nike executive, storm conditions atop the Sisters mountains have search organizers clinging to hope but fearing the worst for 19-year-olds Frank Allard and Michael R. Casey.

For the unprepared outdoor sports enthusiast, and even for professionals, the constantly changing moods and weather patterns of Mother Nature make the mountain a most unforgiving foe.

Mt. Hood has a reputation for being as treacherous as it is beautiful. The formidable mountain reaches some 10,400 plus feet into the oxygen-thin air above the valley floor around Portland.

About two years ago a Corvallis man tried to climb a section of Mt. Hood all by himself.

Attempting to ascend the mountain solo was his first mistake.

He knew he was in trouble when just putting one foot in front of the other became an exhausting chore.

His situation deteriorated to the point that he could go no further. It looked as if the deceptively beautiful mountain might claim yet another victim.

That is, until he called his wife and the sheriff's office — on his cellular phone.

He was rescued by ground searchers and a military helicopter.

Although the climber used poor judgment in trying to conquer the mountain by himself, he saved his life by packing his phone.

As mountain climbing and other potentially dangerous outdoor sports continue to grow in popularity, so does the related number of accidents, injuries and deaths.

The sad reality is that many of these situations could be avoided through the mandatory implementation of life-saving technology such as cell phones and personal locator devices.

But the time for talk has passed.

It's time to make cell-phones, tracking devices, and survival training mandatory for climbers of all skill levels. These are solid ideas that will, most importantly, save lives. The added benefit is that taxpayers will not be required to repeatedly foot the search-and-rescue bill every time someone is lost on one of Oregon's many mountains.

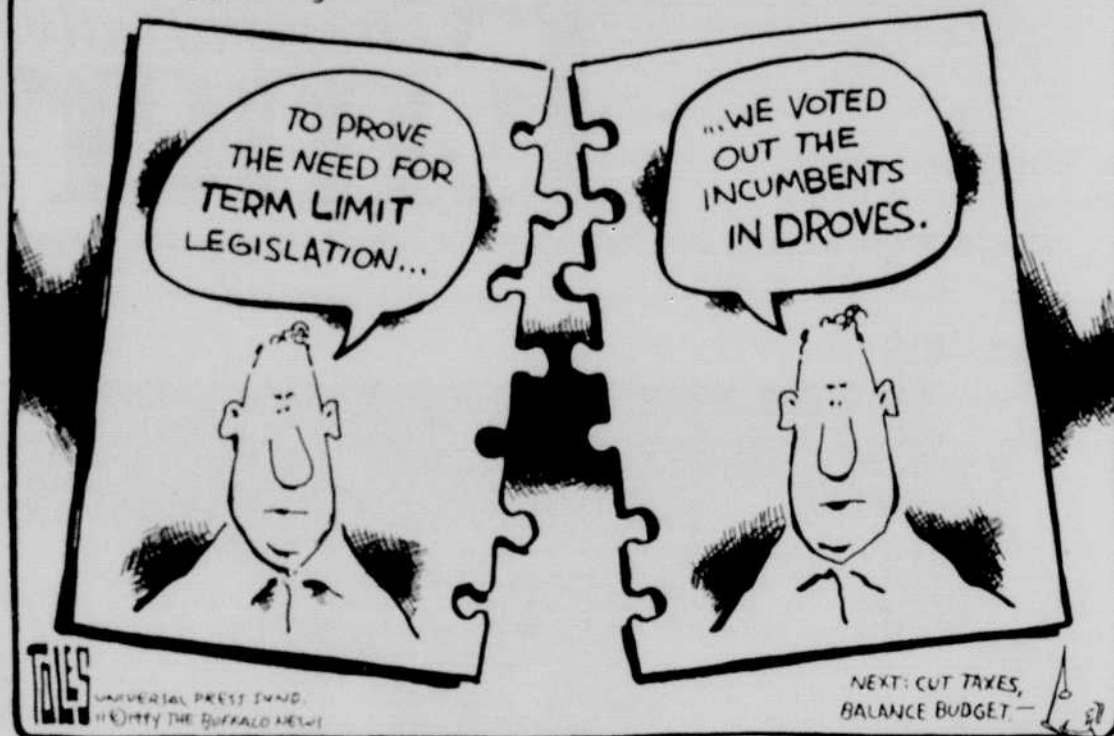
Currently, forest services for several mountains have personal locator devices that climbers and hikers can check out for their outing. But the equipment is issued on a "use it if you want to" basis.

It's time for the forest service to enforce a policy of "use the tracking device if you want to experience the mountain."

With technology such as infrared scanning (used by military and law enforcement agencies) that can detect body heat, locator devices that transmit a signal during emergencies, and cell-phone availability, there is no longer an excuse for the loss of a life.

PUZZLE CORNER

• See if you can reconcile these two statements:



Activism better than voter registration

It's amazing how the trials and tribulations of Bob "Come-on-I-wanna-love-ya" Packwood are being turned into an advantage for so many people. The latest beneficiary appears to be student government. Were it not for the January election to fill Packwood's vacant seat, the ASUO would not have an excuse to mount a "Let's all register to vote and feel good" campaign.

The voter registration campaign is a no-brainer when it comes to making students feel like they actually have a voice in government. It costs nothing but a few minutes to register, it makes the person registering feel good about themselves and the total number registered can be displayed by the ASUO as proof that it is actually doing something besides giving away money from student fees.

Personally, I would rather the ASUO office focus on giving away the money or on looking for programs that actually have some useful benefit attached. Voter registration drives, as practiced on this campus, are worse than a farce, they are deceptions. Please note that I limited my comment to drives on this campus.

Voter registration drives in the South and in the inner cities of the North played an important part in the civil rights struggles of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Such drives went a long way in righting the wrongs done to historically disenfranchised minorities. Along with registration came political education and promotion of minority candidates. Were it not for such drives, many of those candidates would never have been elected to office and America would have been the poorer for it.

In comparison, the ASUO voter registration drive targets University students, the overwhelming majority of whom are not ethnic or racial minorities. Nor are they historically disenfranchised. Worse yet, the ASUO drive offers no political education. None. Not even the most minimal and non-partisan evaluation of the candidates. The emphasis is on getting as many people registered as possible. It's as if the very act of registering is supposed to improve society.

Sorry folks, it just doesn't work that way. To bring about real change requires an on-going dialogue with our elected representatives. Voting once every two years is little more than an ineffectual feel-good exercise. If you doubt this, look at the real differences the 1994 national elections have made.

The Republicans got to be the majority in both Houses of Congress, took over the reins of power and promptly set out to reward all their special-interest contributors with government give-

aways. The Democrats used to give their special-interest contributors a lot of goodies, and now it's the Republicans' turn. And while both parties publicly battle over the crumbs spent on social programs, they both go on giving away enormous grants to their special-interest contributors. Oh-blah-dee oh-blah-da, life goes on.

No matter whom you elect, the net result is going to be very much the same. They are going to spend a lot of their time working on getting re-elected or in raising money to get re-elected. And they are going to be part of a system that will continue to give huge chunks of money to special interest groups. The best you can hope for, if you are not one of those special interests, is that whoever gets elected will at least listen to you if you speak up on any issues. And that is where the on-going dialogue comes in.

"Special interests" are people and organizations that have the money to hire lobbyists to continually deluge elected officials and their staffs with information. Lobbyists essentially do little more than talk to elected officials at every opportunity in an effort to get those officials to vote on bills that favor the lobbyists' employers.

The latest lobbyist tactic is to hire telemarketing firms to call registered voters and sell the voters on calling their representatives to promote the lobbyists' causes. Apparently, it is a very successful tactic, and while there seems to be something inherently wrong about it, the tactic's success offers a possible tool to affect change.

Instead of focusing on voter registration, why not focus on voter organization? Why not help people form telephone circles that engage in on-going communication with elected representatives about issues? Why not help form a student issues calling clique? I know that student government cannot directly engage in partisan politics, but that doesn't mean they can't tell others how to do it.

Let's face it. Turnout in last year's student government election shows just how active students are when it comes to actually voting. Despite a record registration, voter turnout was less than 14%, and that was for an election that had an immediate impact on every student's finances. So stop wasting time on a useless voter registration drive and start spending it on political education. Maybe this year student turnout will get up to a whopping 15%.

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Oregon Daily Emerald

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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. A member of the Associated Press, the Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union.

Unsigned editorials represent the opinion of the Emerald editorial board; signed columns represent the opinion of the columnist.

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