

## 'Oregon Commentator' tests diversity dogma

**■ OUR OPINION:** The journal should be allowed to keep student-fee funding

If the content of the *Oregon Commentator* offends you, you're not alone. In this campus hot bed of bleeding-heart liberalism, the conservative journal of opinion remains an anomaly, an aberration and a class-A button pusher.

The *Commentator* has attacked or offended almost every campus group at one time or another and in the process has made more than its share of enemies.

Yet, despite being on the receiving end of the publication's venom, almost everyone agrees that the *Commentator* has the right to print its opinions. The bone of contention, however, is that the publication is subsidized with mandatory student fees.

Tonight, the Programs Finance Committee will convene in the EMU to examine this question: Should all University students be forced to pay for a publication that does not represent them and attacks their belief systems?

The answer? Absolutely. Journals of opinion have never professed to represent the views of the majority, nor are they designed to present a balanced analysis of the world's occurrences. They are not required to be entertaining, enlightening, educational or intelligent. They can do and be all of these things, of course, but they also have the right to be wrong, sophomoric and spiteful.

The First Amendment gives everyone the right to air their ideas and opinions in a public forum. This freedom has spurred revolu-

tions and civil rights movements and has allowed that elusive entity called truth to enter the public consciousness.

Some opponents of funding the *Commentator* say that its content conflicts with the University's requirement that all student-funded groups maintain the educational objectives of this institution. *Emerald* columnist Keith Cunningham and others have said that the *Commentator's* stance on women and minority issues does not meet the University's pro-diversity and student safety goals.

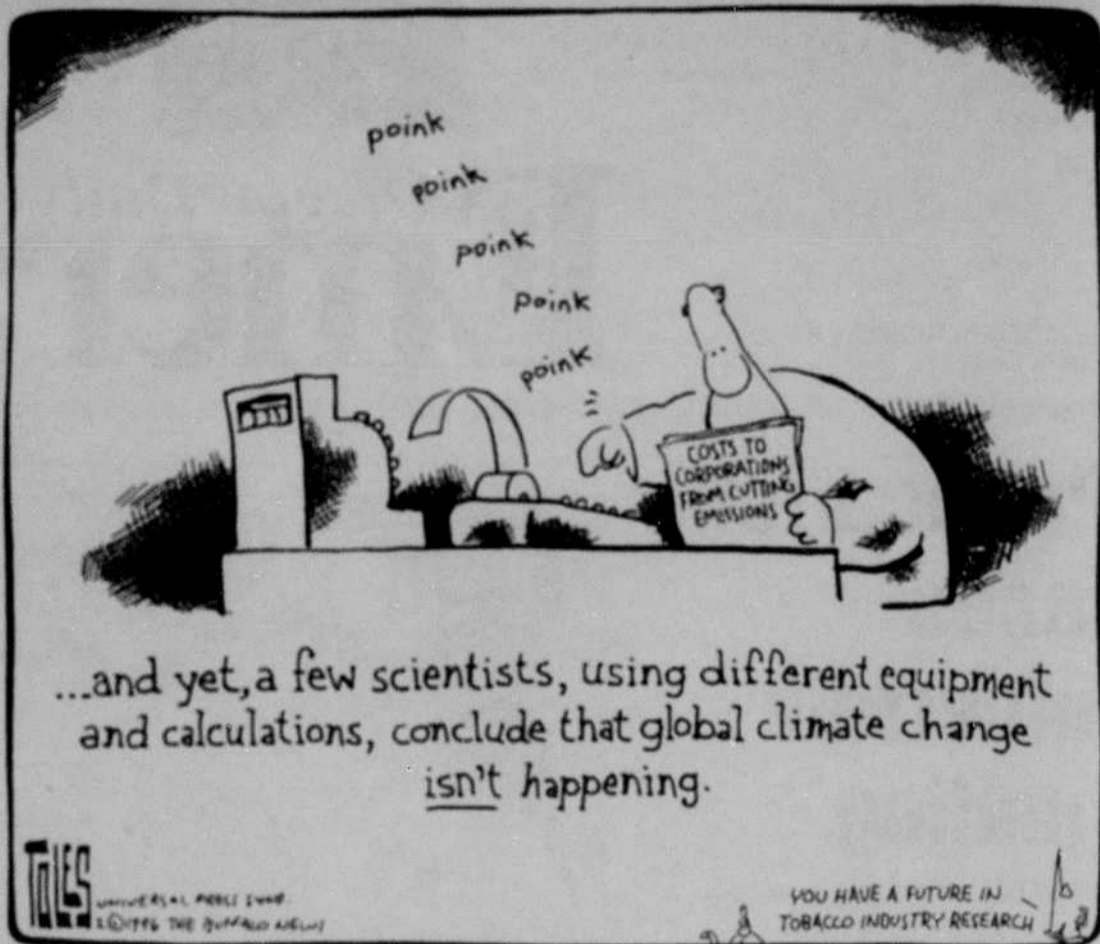
But diversity, like it or not, also means embracing conservatives, chauvinists, and racists. It means supporting the expression of ideas we find abhorrent.

This is the diversity sensitivity that hurts. This is when the mettle of our dogma is tested.

ASUO Vice President Zachary Kelton has suggested that student-fee allocation for the *Commentator* be put to a popular vote. Not only is this a cowardly abdication of executive responsibility, it is antithetical to the ideals of the First Amendment and a liberal arts education.

The opinions of the majority never need protection. It is the minority voices that must rely on the Constitution to make themselves heard.

The ideas expressed on the *Commentator's* pages are clearly in the minority. But if we cannot stand up for the right to express unpopular opinions, if we do not permit offensive ideas to be given a forum, then we, not the *Commentator*, are the enemies of diversity.



## Utility tax could improve Eugene for all

**F**inding solutions to complex social problems is never easy, but once in a while a truly great idea does come along. Imagine helping as many as 220 homeless and low-income families find permanent, affordable housing every year. Not just 220 families this year, but an additional 220 every year for the next 10 years.

Now imagine that all it would take is one cup of coffee from each household per month.

If the proposed Eugene utility tax is passed next month, that is what will happen.

A vote-by-mail election will begin next week to decide if Eugene residents and businesses will be charged a one-percent tax on their use of electricity, water, sewer, natural gas and cable TV. The exact amount customers pay depends upon how much they consume. The average residential customer without cable TV will pay about 95 cents per month. Households with expanded cable services may pay about \$1.18 per month. A latte costs more.

The tax would raise an estimated \$1.1 million per year. Ninety percent of the money will be dedicated to providing affordable housing to homeless and low-income families. The other ten percent will be used to help low-income families pay their utility bills.

Advocates project that the tax will provide enough seed money to build 150 low-income rental units and 20 low-income houses each year in addition to rehabilitating another 50 units.

One of the best features of the proposed tax is that instead of creating another bureaucratic rat hole to pour the money down, the proceeds will go to nonprofit organizations, such as St. Vincent de Paul, who have a proven record in providing subsidized housing.

Opponents of the proposal have four main objections. Eugene shouldn't have to take the lead on solving the affordable housing problem; the tax would help create more low-income housing in areas of the city that are already resisting such housing; the tax is a form of sales tax; and the tax will be a burden to people with fixed or low incomes.

People on low or fixed incomes will have to pay the tax, but ten percent of the revenues raised will be used to help pay the utility bills of those who are in need.

Characterizing the proposed utility tax as a "sales tax" is misleading. The utility tax would be added to monthly utility bills and collected by utility providers as part of their normal collections.

There is no added burden on every shopkeeper in the city to collect a penny from every dollar every day or to fill out complex and audited forms every night. Consumers won't have to come up with an extra penny every time they

spend a dollar, and no governmental bureaucracy will be created to collect those pennies.

As to the first two objections, it's time people in Eugene stopped and thought about what it means to be part of a community.



Larry Haft

Simply put, Eugene must take the lead in solving the affordable housing problem because it is a serious problem in Eugene — our community.

To those who fear their neighborhood will be polluted by people with low incomes, remember that "there, but for the grace of God, go I." Eugene is a small city. It only takes a few minutes to go from one end of Eugene to the other, and all of our neighborhoods are intimately bound to each other.

Treat people with the respect they deserve as fellow humans and they are more likely to respond in kind than to bite your hand off. Treat people like animals or outcasts, and no neighborhood will be safe.

Everyone needs adequate food, clothing and shelter to live with dignity. Most people in our community are fortunate enough to meet those needs. But an estimated 1,200 people in Eugene (about one percent of the population) are homeless. Another 20 percent of all Eugene households are classified as "very low income" (earning less than 50 percent of the median income) and in danger of becoming homeless.

With the help of the community, Food for Lane County and other agencies are able to provide many of those people with enough food to at least survive on.

With the help of the community, St. Vincent de Paul and other agencies are able to provide many of those people with enough clothes to avoid rampant public nudity.

Affordable housing is a much bigger ticket item. Until now, not even the most concerned members of our community were able to make any significant dents in this situation. Now there is a possibility, for about one dollar per household per month.

One last observation. Just before the special senatorial election, the ASUO ran a successful voter-registration drive. And then most of the new voters failed to actually vote. Given the choices, I don't blame them. But this election is different. Students can have a major impact on solving the homeless problem in Eugene. Now is the time for them to get off their collective asses and make a real difference.

It is time for them to vote.

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## Oregon Daily Emerald

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