

VIEWPOINTS

EDITORIALS OPINIONS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Flood sweeps farms, federal promises away

■ OUR OPINION: After all the "federal aid" hype, some farmers get left holding a goose egg

Many Oregon and Washington residents will remember the Flood of '96 for a long time. Some are still dealing with washed-out homes and ruined dreams.

Immediately following the devastation, Governor Kitzhaber waved a magic wand by declaring parts of the state national disaster areas. President Clinton even flew in with a small team of Federal Emergency Management Agency officials and swept through areas such as downtown Portland's waterfront park and other moderately flooded places in Oregon and Washington, promising immediate emergency aid to the victims.

Playing only part of his hand, Clinton and his handlers strategically avoided the people and land hit hardest by the flood. After all, it's an election year; there's only enough time to get exposure in the big cities because that's where the most votes live.

FEMA officials left promising everything except the check in the mail.

Maybe they knew that many people would never get that check.

Some Willamette Valley farmers are finding those promises for aid to be broken promises and worse — not only are many farmers not getting the aid they so desperately need, but the government is also telling them that they *could have* received federal aid if they had only paid the \$50 for an annual federal catastrophic crop insurance policy.

After filling out forms for FEMA grants and low-interest loans, Jan Goar (whose Scio greenhouse received more than \$200,000 in flood damage) was told by FEMA officials that she wasn't eligible for assistance because she didn't have the federal insurance.

"Who is getting [the federal aid]?" she recently asked the Associated Press. "What does it take to get some help?"

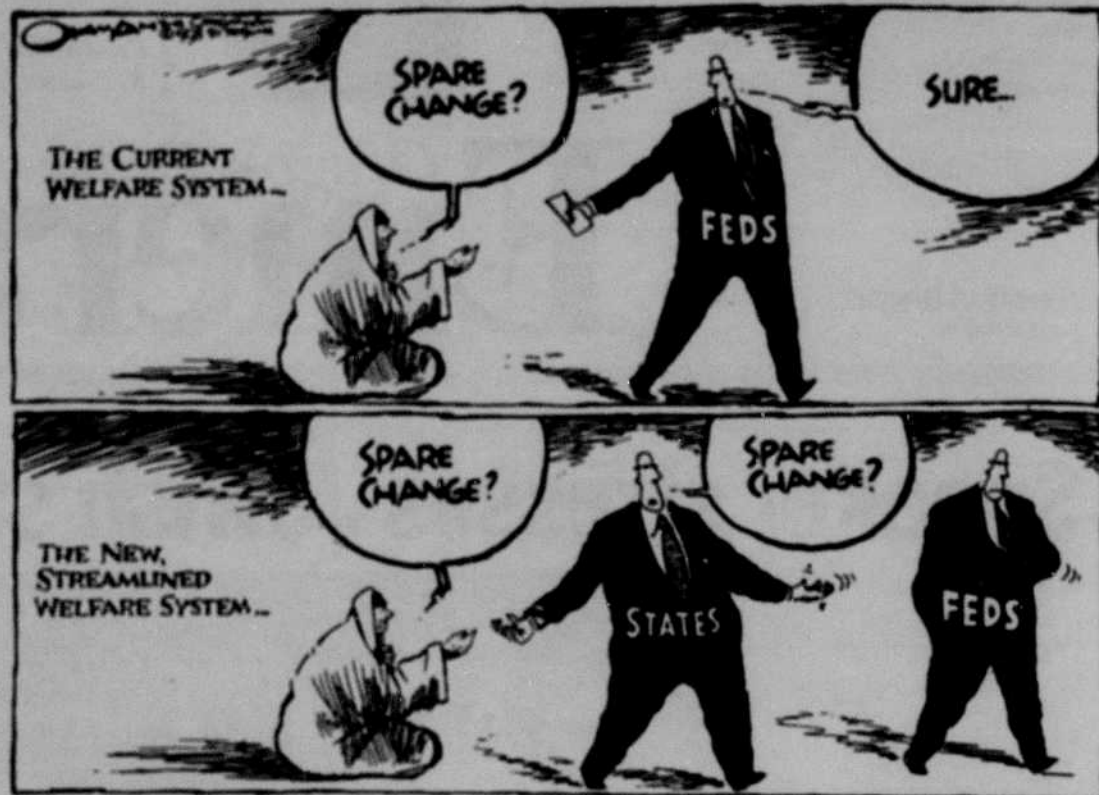
Goar said she didn't buy the federal insurance because she didn't know it even existed.

According to federal officials, farmers should know about the crop insurance because it is required by law. The existence of this law makes Goar either a selective memory candidate or puts the blame on someone else (the bank, or the federal Farm Service Agency) for dropping the ball in a big way.

One farmer, who knew about the insurance but declined to buy it, lost approximately \$250,000 worth of crops, soil and equipment. His gamble with planting on a flood plain and refusing to insure it is now his loss, but that's not what he's upset about.

His anger is directed toward dams that used to protect his crops and that the government has failed to repair in part because of the budget impasse between Congress and President Clinton.

Taxpayers should not be required to shoulder the burden of farmers who refuse to insure their crops, but when a farmer's livelihood is destroyed because of misunderstanding or mistake, the Fed should make good on its promises.



AIDS quilt carries victim's memories

His name was Thomas. "Thomas J. Acquario," my brother informed me as we were speaking on the telephone that day; he in his Boston apartment and me in our mother's kitchen in Michigan. "Or Tommy. But Chico is how he's known to those who love him best," my brother confided.

I tell friends now that it was on that hot, mid-summer evening that I knew I would meet this Thomas. And that I, above all else, wanted to be one of those who loved him well enough to call him Chico.

Friends now ask me when I first realized that Thomas was HIV positive. Looking back, I realize that I wondered whether he was positive the first time I met him, late that same summer. His frame was thin, even for a man of his height, and his purple T-shirt hung loosely, its hem untucked over a pair of too-large, faded jeans. Later, there was his requesting a glass of water, in addition to the juice that the waitress placed in front of him in a Boston cafe, so he could take his medicine. I must admit that it was no surprise when I walked into their bathroom and came across a number of bottles filled with various scripts in Latin; the only letters recognizable to me were "HIV."

Over the past year, Chico's status seemed to move quickly from HIV positive to having full-blown AIDS, a transformation that began the summer I met him in Boston. Already, there were concerns about his health, unvoiced for the most part, but they were there. I could feel them settle in around me at night as I lay in bed in their Boston apartment; I could feel them settle around me as thickly as the city heat that enveloped my body.

I observed the progression of the disease as time passed. Each conversation with my brother turned less from their daily activities and more toward what would be best for my brother, Chico, and their "situation." I felt AIDS growing into the unmanageable monster that it would later become, consuming my brother's lover's strength a bit at a time, slowly at first, and then more and more quickly.

I heard it in my brother's voice, strained, weak and tense as I asked him hesitantly how

COMMENTARY

Joy Sterner

Chico was. In a hurried voice, he answered simply, "It's clear that he's dying." And I heard it again, for the last time, in my brother's message left for me late at night last December:

"Joy, it's your brother Bob. It's finished."

From May 12 through May 14, a group that has become known as the Community AIDS Consortium, consisting of University staff, students, county public health workers and AIDS activists, is going to bring 20 panels of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt to the EMU Ballroom for display.

The first panel of the Quilt was created in 1987 when a man by the name of Cleve Jones took a can of spray paint to a bed sheet to create a memorial for those who had died of AIDS. His goal, and the goal of others who soon became involved in creating subsequent panels, was to help people understand the devastating impact of the AIDS epidemic. Today, the Quilt, which has grown to span a space larger than a football field, provides an opportunity not only for AIDS education, but also for a space in which the healing process can begin for those who are grieving for lovers, friends and family who have died or will die of AIDS.

I urge you to come and view the Quilt panels during the three days they will be on campus. Remember Chico and those who we will never meet, the ones whose stories are told to us now only through their panels. I write to promise that, should you come, the experience will not be soon forgotten.

For more information about the Quilt and volunteer opportunities contact:

Annie Dochnal, Health Educator, Student Health Center, 346-2728

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LETTERS

I agree that when "street people" begin to intimidate others trying to do business on 13th Avenue, there is a problem.

What I object to is Andersson's name-calling and lack of compassion for these people (ODE, May 1).

"Street scuzz" and "hairballs?"

These people are human beings, and for that reason alone they deserve respect. Many of them are abused and neglected children.

Lazy? Maybe, but even laziness is often rooted in some deeper problem. Most of these kids are from broken or uncaring homes. The idea that they are all a bunch of middle-class kids who

have "chosen" to hang out is too simple. Many of them are bitter, angry and anti-social because no one ever taught them to be otherwise.

"My tolerance for diversity and respect does not extend to lazy lawlessness ... and my donations are confined to those who merit compassion," Andersson wrote.

If she truly understood the meaning of compassion and tolerance, she would realize that both are reserved, not just for more obvious cases of hard luck, but also for those whom we least understand.

Jim Bictorff
Eugene

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