

Long overdue proposal has many advantages

■ OUR OPINION: Tuition program will benefit future students immensely

For once, the Oregon state government is paying attention to students' needs. Because of Salem Rep. Peter Courtney, proposed legislation is now in existence that is aimed at helping Oregonians save money on tuition — before students reach college.

At first, the idea sounds abstract, and it is already attracting criticism. Critics believe the idea of pre-paid college tuition is too problematic and they are pointing to problems with Florida's program.

But with the rising costs of tuition and the prospect of even fewer Americans having the opportunity to arm themselves with a college education, there is no way this program's guaranteed positive effects will not outweigh its possible problems.

One of the places where the proposed program seems to have the capacity to go wrong is related to parents planning their child's future. What if the child does not want to stay in Oregon? What if the child does not like the particular Oregon college that his or her parents selected? Or better yet, what if the child does not want to go to college?

All these "what ifs" are of no consequence. If the child is not content with the institution that parents have selected, the parents, or supplier of funds, can easily receive their money back without interest.

Another advantage of the

pre-paid tuition program is that the money from contracts purchased today will benefit universities now, instead of ten years later.

This will encourage and allow parents to start planning and investing in their children's education and future right away. The universities will receive money now, and parents who might not have the money for tuition in the future will be motivated to start saving.

But parents are not the only ones who will benefit from this program. Businesses and other family members can purchase the contracts. These businesses could distribute the contracts as scholarships and therefore benefit the community.

Critics' arguments that the pre-paid tuition would result in future losses for colleges are completely illogical.

If people are willing to purchase contracts and support higher education now, there is no reason they would not be willing to purchase further contracts. This will assure that there will be no possibility of Oregon colleges being in debt.

It is about time that Oregon stops persecuting its education system and starts paying attention to the needs of its students.

Rep. Courtney is on the right track. There is no reason we, the students of a university, should not completely support this program, which will provide benefits and opportunities we did not have to future generations of college students.



Recorded jail conversation steals rights

Though it happened 12 years ago this spring, I still remember the day of my first confession vividly, if not fondly. With clenched jaw and twisting hands I entered the confessional box and solemnly began, "Forgive me father, for I have sinned..."

As a 7-year-old, I didn't have much to confess — I had yelled at my mom and been mean to my sister (a frequently revisited confession), but I had the security of knowing I could confess.

The sacrament of reconciliation is both an immensely holy and a completely private time for Roman Catholics. While the other sacraments (such as baptism, holy matrimony, etc...) are generally ones to share and celebrate, reconciliation is the most intensely private of your inner thoughts — said out loud.

Absolutely anything can be said to the priest — really, directly to God — and you will receive forgiveness and a penance (something to atone for your sin — prayers or actions you must take). And it is kept completely between you, the priest and God.

While I have never had anything major to confess, I was always comforted by the knowledge that if I ever needed to talk, even just to think something through, I could turn to a priest and be comforted — be unconditionally forgiven. And it would never be spoken or heard of again, unless I chose to revisit the confessional and that particular subject.

Unfortunately, some Lane County authorities decided that all people don't have that right. During the sacrament of reconciliation, Conan Wayne Hale and Father Tim Mockaitis were recorded. Every word they said, every breath they uttered (though meant only for God) are now on tape for other ears to hear.

There is a difference between Hale and I. He may have had something to confess. Something big. Bigger than stealing his sister's gummi bears or not cleaning his room. He may have confessed to murder.

I would like nothing better than to have the guilty party convicted of these crimes. But to want that to happen to Hale on the basis of a private confession, I would have to go back on something I believe in even more strongly — each person's right to practice his or her religion.

In much the same way I support other peoples' freedom of speech rights, I support evidence being withheld to support the freedom of religion.

What I question is how this entire situation got this far in the first place. There were no signs in the jail that day. While some claim prisoners leave their right to privacy at the door, Father Mockaitis definitely did not. That alone is enough to make the evidence seem inadmissible to me.

"The clergy-penitent privilege belongs to the penitent." Meaning of course, that only Hale has the authority to release what is said in a confessional. Especially in the Roman Catholic Church where the priest is just an earpiece for God, this makes absolute sense — only the thinker can release his private thoughts.

According to Deschutes County District Attorney Mike Dogan, "If the sole purpose of the priest's appearance at the jail was to engage in this religious ceremony of confession, then in all likelihood, the priest-penitent privileges apply."

But by taping the private confession, a whole can of worms has been opened. It may be too late for the tape not to be used in the trial. For if Hale really did confess to something during that confession and the prosecution listened to it, even if they didn't use the tape in court, they could use it to get leads.

In that case, the defendant may have to request that the prosecution used it unfairly.

This is obviously not something that occurs everyday. But it could.

This travesty rates right up there with the Telecommunications Act for unconstitutionality. However, while free speech still survives on the Internet, freedom of religion has been wiped out for inmates in Lane County.

The Bill of Rights clearly states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." While Lane County authorities might not be Congress, they have the same responsibilities to hold this law to the fullest of their capabilities. And they haven't.

One part of Catholic confession is that it CAN NOT be shared outside of the priest-penitent relationship (unless, of course, the penitent decides it should be).

The priest is invested with this responsibility. For now, until privacy is insured, the sacrament of reconciliation cannot be morally given by a priest. This takes away a major, perhaps necessary, sacrament for any prisoner.

Because taped confessions remove inmates' ability to fully practice their religion, they should be declared illegal.

It could take extra procedures (pastoral credentials verified, altering recording equipment, etc.), but it must be done to ensure every citizen's basic rights. Prisoner or no, everyone should be able to have God in their lives.

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