

SOUND OFF
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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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New solutions must solve historic problem

Instead of marking the end of social inequality programs, the decline of affirmative action may signal the beginning

During the last election, Oregonians got the chance to vote on 23 measures and propositions that will have a direct impact on their lives. However, one of the most important propositions in the election is one that Oregonians didn't get to vote on. In fact, it



Brian Diamond

wasn't even proposed in this state; it was proposed in California. California's anti-discrimination measure ended a 20-year trend of affirmative action in the Golden State. And while it has no direct impact on Oregonians, it could represent a nationwide movement away from affirmative action. The big question on everyone's mind: Is this a good or bad thing?

The debate on affirmative action is a sticky one. On one hand, it is hard to argue that affirmative action, as it is now used, is a perfect program. It breeds resentment from minorities and whites alike. On one end of the spectrum, many so-called "angry white males" believe they will not have jobs because minorities and women will be given special treatment. Whether this really happens under affirmative action or not isn't important. What is important is that the social tension in relationships between whites and minorities and women is heightened. This leaves many white males feeling cheated by the system and even more resentful toward the minorities and women whom the program is supposed to help.

White men aren't the only ones upset with the current system. Many qualified minorities and women feel they aren't given the respect they deserve because most people think these groups wouldn't be where they are without affirmative action. Of course this isn't always true, and many are left wondering if they really deserve the position they attained or if they got it because of their race or sex. It was exactly these feelings of frustration that led an African-American man to write California's current anti-discrimination measure.

While the problems of affirmative action are worth noting, it is also important to see why affirmative action programs might be necessary. Hundreds of years of oppression have certainly left



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

women and minorities far behind the rest of the country. The House Committee on Ways and Means reports that a little more than 50 percent of female-headed households live below the poverty line. African-Americans and Hispanics are doing a little better at 32 and 28 percent, respectively. These figures compare to only 11 percent of whites living in poverty.

When you look at these figures, it becomes obvious that something needs to be fixed. If minorities and women aren't given some boost, whether through affirmative action or other programs, there is little reason to suspect this gap will begin to close. By this reasoning, saying we simply won't discriminate anymore — like California's anti-discrimination measure is attempting to do — won't fix the problem. The question is, what will?

The answer many people provide is affirmative

action. However, as we have already seen, affirmative action is filled with flaws. Just because some program is needed to help make up for past inequalities doesn't mean affirmative action is the only solution. In fact, instead of concentrating on saving affirmative action, we should be looking for more effective programs that will accomplish the goals of affirmative action with less negative side effects.

One possible solution, at least for college admittance policies, would be economic action. An economic action policy would give preferential treatment to people from economically poorer backgrounds. Such a policy would be more effective in accomplishing the goals set out for affirmative action on college campuses than the current system.

First of all, a policy of affirmative action would target only minorities who are disadvantaged, allowing those minorities who don't need affirmative action to succeed on their own.

Secondly, because women and minorities are disproportionately poor, economic action would indirectly promote student diversity in college campuses, an original goal of affirmative action. Lastly, because poorer students usually come from poorer schools with less resources, it makes sense to give them preferential treatment because they have not enjoyed the same advantages of wealthier students.

The passing of California's anti-discrimination measure, for better or worse, marks a significant change in social policy in the United States. While there are very good reasons for Americans to reject affirmative action, we should seek better solutions instead of abandoning social inequality programs all together. Economic action is just one of several possible solutions that could achieve the goals of affirmative action more effectively. Instead of fighting to save affirmative action, we should be fighting to replace it with better programs.

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LETTERS

Wrong questions

In your Nov. 14 editorial examining this year's election, you asked the wrong questions regarding Measure 47. "Are voters greedy?" Rather, you should ask: Are thousands of Oregon taxpayers tired of feeling the inflated sting on their pocketbooks? Yes, they are. Nobody will disagree with the fact that education is of utmost importance, but allocating funding through higher taxes is not the solution. Within the state budget exists a large sum of money called the General Fund. This is where some education dollars currently originate. This ample account is where more education funding should originate from, rather than being used on the hundreds of special interest projects that Oregon has become notorious for catering to.

Please refrain from using such conceited arguments like "voters didn't do a good job of educating themselves." Am I to believe that because I chose not to vote as the Emerald mandated that I'm stupid? I think not. I educated myself and came to my own decision based on facts and finance. As a student and a taxpayer, I am able to see both sides of Measure 47 clearly.

Pardon my generalization, but I doubt many students on the Emerald editorial board own property. Hence, Oregon's

steep property tax does not affect you. Wait until we enter the real world, start a career, buy a house and raise a family. Then, as bill after bill mounts up, perhaps you will understand the financial burden of today's tax rates. They are seemingly out of control, and so is your short-sighted judgment.

Levi Buchanan
Business

UWAH misrepresented

This is in response to your Nov. 12 editorial, "Racism is a problem that needs teamwork, not just teams." I object to your use of the United Women of Asian Heritage as an example of "innumerable student unions based on [students'] heritage." I wonder if you know anything about the organization.

When we formed UWAH a year ago, our goal was to draw together women from numerous Asian cultures, as well as American women who are of Asian heritage. It was not to be an organization of Asian women or an organization of Asian-American women. It was to be a combination of the two. We believed Asian women and American women of Asian heritage face similar issues, and we believed ad-

ressing these issues together would be valuable. Moreover, the founding premise of the organization was to educate the University and the Eugene community.

I also find fault in the notion that Asian women and Asian-American women have a similar background and therefore, UWAH was formed to be a "place to feel comfortable with 'your own' and as a means to receive ASUO funds for isolated events — certainly not for outreach." First and foremost, Asian women and American women of Asian heritage come from very diverse cultures.

Moreover, one of our first activities was to conduct a panel discussion on the problems that Asian women confront, an event a range of students, faculty and staff attended. It was an example of what you think student unions should do.

I think you should conduct far more research before you use particular organizations as an example of what you think is wrong with such groups. Otherwise, you are among the "uneducated and intolerant" you criticize in your editorial.

Miyuki Taguchi
Founder
United Women of Asian Heritage