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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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Smoking policy just hot air

OUR OPINION: The FDA's new restrictions on cigarette sales won't ban anything

Our cynicism over government intervention continues. It isn't that federal intervention is inherently bad. It's just that the government's latest attempts at curbing social problems with asinine solutions are especially ripe for criticism.

This time around, the Food and Drug Administration is implementing a new rule in an attempt to curb teenage smoking — with the full support of the Clinton administration. Since Feb. 28, retail clerks across the country are required to card any cigarette buyers who "appear" to be younger than 27.

The new rule is part of a three-step federal "crackdown" on underage smoking. In August, cigarette vending machines and smoking ads will be banned everywhere but bars and other adult-only locales. And next year, the FDA will ban tobacco company sponsorship of sporting events.

But it's this first step that is the most drastic — and the most troublesome.

President Clinton, of course, is excited about the new policy. He said last week that the government has "drawn a line where our children are concerned. From now on, in every store in America, our children will be told: No ID, no sale."

Yeah, right.

Despite the new rules, teenage smokers will still light up just as often. Local high school hangouts will be still be littered with cigarette butts. Young people will still find a way to get what they want, no matter what stands in their way.

This isn't to say we shouldn't try to stop underage smoking or other teenage problems. But such an empty political statement will only hurt any real attempts to solve the problems plaguing today's youth.

First, teenage smokers usually don't obtain cigarettes from the usual channels. While a legal smoker can walk into any convenience or grocery store to support his or her habit, things are bit more difficult for the underaged. The method of sales the government is trying so hard to block isn't even used on a regular basis.

Also, most stores had policies similar to the federal edict already in effect. And many teenagers who did choose to buy their cigarettes straight from stores say they never had any problem, despite the supposed "zero-tolerance" policy. If underage smokers could get cigarettes then, why would it be any difficult now?

Clerks were willing to sell to minors before the federal policy, and will continue to do so. Judging the "appearance" of being 27 or older is highly subjective, and it only takes a lackadaisical or simply unethical employee to render such a policy useless. And such clerks are numerous.

The FDA is proposing a 10-state series of

stings and other operations in order to enforce the new policy. Unfortunately, such moves will do little to stop the problem in the face of such widespread employee misconduct.

The FDA acknowledges that the new policy could be seen as "excessive" by some. But really, it doesn't cut deep enough.

The problem of teenagers smoking is part of a warped national image of the habit and what it represents, especially among young people. Smoking, while not as debonair as it once was, is still seen as "cool" by many. Movie stars like Johnny Depp and Drew Barrymore are infamous chain smokers, and have a large teenage following.

The image of cool smoking is also perpetuated in advertising, movies and television. Despite the huge negative backlash, young people can still see something in smoking that is attractive.

In Oregon, anti-smoking education programs from Measure 44 will help a bit, but the government must make smoking look bad in more than just classrooms to stop teenage use.

At its heart, the new FDA policy is just a symbolic, political gesture with no potentially tangible results. Teenage smoking cannot be solved by empty words and rules. Instead, it will take a long widespread movement to deglamorize the habit that has only just begun.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

WINNERS

Ron Wyden
The freshman senator is already making a name for himself by proposing a Medicare bill that would cut spending for the program.



Mary Slaney
On March 1, the 38-year-old Oregon native ran the fastest 1500 meters by a woman since 1990.

Howard Stern
The shock jock is on the cover of Entertainment Weekly and Rolling Stone, and his autobiography, "Private Parts," comes to the big screen today.



LOSERS

Guido's
The 13th Avenue bar lost its lease and closed indefinitely on Feb. 23.



Harold Nicholson
The OSU alum and former CIA agent pleaded guilty on March 3 to selling national secrets to the Russians.

P.J. Carlesimo
Newspaper reports of his firing as Portland Trailblazers head coach were false, but he's apparently still not on solid ground.



Corrections

In the March 5 article, "Greeks continue fight against rape," ASUO Greek Liaison Melissa Freund was quoted as saying, "There are no other rape prevention education resources on campus."

To clarify, Freund's intent was to say there are no other student-run rape prevention resources on campus.

The EMU Board voted to implement a fraction of the fourth proposal concerning EMU space during its meeting on March 5, not the entire proposal as reported in the March 6 edition.

The Emerald regrets the errors.

LETTERS

Support farmworkers

We must take issue with President Frohnmayer's statement claiming the University must remain "neutral" in the GardenBurger boycott. Growers understand the power of our boycott of GardenBurgers and Flav-R-Pac.

In a recent newsletter, The Oregon Farm Bureau, a grower organization, called on its membership to buy Flav-R-Pac and GardenBurgers in order to oppose farmworkers' efforts to improve living conditions.

The administration of the University, by continuing to sell Flav-R-Pac and GardenBurgers at University dining halls, is supporting the agenda of groups like the Oregon Farm Bureau by continuing to sell GardenBurgers and Flav-R-Pac. This is hardly a "neutral" position.

As long as NORPAC growers, who grow

and process Flav-R-Pac fruits and vegetables, continue to profit from the mistreatment of farmworkers, they have no incentive to negotiate with farmworkers.

Over 50 religious, labor and environmental organizations understand the necessity of our boycott and are supporting us. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, representing 17 Oregon religious denominations, is calling on member congregations not to buy NORPAC brands, including Flav-R-Pac brand frozen vegetables and fruits.

The United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO (the union Cesar Chavez founded) is calling for support of our Flav-R-Pac and GardenBurger boycott, as is the National Farm Worker Ministry and Oregon Farm Worker Ministry.

Oregon farmworkers are the heart of Oregon's booming agricultural industry. They pick the food we eat. Oregon's farmworkers

are now asking for your support. Please work to remove GardenBurgers and Flav-R-Pac for the University dining halls.

Erik Nicholson
PCUN Field Organization Coordinator

University politics

President David Frohnmayer's statement that we "must be careful to be as politically neutral" as possible when speaking as a University (*Emerald*, Feb. 18), is odious and ridiculous.

How does Mr. Frohnmayer propose that we promote this a-politicality? By accepting grants from the Departments of Energy and Defense? By profiting from the wage slavery of Indonesian children (in being paid for the advertisement of Nike's Indonesian made products)?

The University is a fundamentally politi-

cal entity. Through forming the thought processes of the nation's (mis-) leaders, the University is inseparable for the political formation of the state. The kind of talk which denies this capacity is cowardly and double-talking, especially in view of the harm to the farmworkers that is directly engendering.

In his establishment of the administration's two-faced and false a-politicalness, Frohnmayer has long since lost his opportunity to help lead the struggle for human rights and Oregon's abused farmworkers.

Though not unexpected, this is a disappointment. Our leaders lost, we only have ourselves and our solidarity. As they promote the reprehensible treatment of Oregon's farmworkers through their cooperation with Flav-R-Pac.

Aric Bright
Comparative Literature