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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

New bill hardly equals the crime

OUR OPINION:
A state proposal seeking to criminalize the possession of marijuana should go up in smoke

The Oregon House of Representatives wants you to know it's taken a firm stand against that drug of death, that near-narcotic, that wily weed — marijuana.

But actually, what it has really done is make a purely symbolic statement that will place undue restraints on an underserving group of people and ultimately, cause more harm than good.

The House just passed a bill that will "recriminalize" the possession of small amounts of marijuana. If the bill passes through the Senate and becomes law, anyone caught with less than an ounce of the drug will be charged with a Class C misdemeanor.

This means any young person or other casual user out for

a short high could be thrown in jail just for holding a joint. Yikes!

A regression seems to be taking place here. Back in 1973, Oregon was the first state in the union to decriminalize marijuana. Why the change of heart? Well, many representatives say today's marijuana is much stronger than the weed of the trippin' '60s and '70s. Therefore, it should be ranked with more "powerful" drugs, presumably like LSD and crack.

This is where the bill's first problem becomes apparent. Indeed, today's street marijuana is stronger than its predecessor and is obviously not necessarily good for one who uses it. But it can hardly be ranked with more potent drugs. A significant difference in physiological

effects, and therefore addiction, still clearly exists between cocaine, for example, and marijuana.

Furthermore, the bill is unjustly cruel to a primarily young group of users. Should an 18-year-old girl, for example, be subject to a permanent mark on her record just for being caught with a joint? We don't think so. Young people could have trouble finding jobs in the future or even staying in school with such a strong social stigma as a criminal record.

Also, the bill is terribly impractical. Even the people enforcing the law can see this. Some policemen in Portland, for example, say they may not even seek jail time for people they catch breaking the law. And if they do choose to en-

force the law, already overcrowded jails could see an influx of new inmates — inmates that had done nothing more than hold a joint.

A glaringly unbalanced image comes through in all this hoopla. Should marijuana users — not dealers, not producers — be held in the same regard as burglars and other criminals? Of course not, but with this law, they will be.

Instead, if we must fight marijuana use, let's increase the fine already in place for possession. Perhaps a monetary punishment would persuade users to curb their behavior. We sure know putting them in prison won't help anything.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

Quoted

"We're screwed, we're screwed!"

Peruvian rebel leader **Nestor Cerpa's** reported last words as commandos stormed the Japanese embassy in Lima that his group had taken under siege.

"You pat him on the back and say congratulations and enjoy it, and tell him not to serve fried chicken next year...or collard greens, or whatever the hell they serve."

Golfer Fuzzy Zoeller, referring to **Masters** champion **Tiger Woods**. Zoeller apologized to Woods but later claimed he was misquoted.

"I feel very fortunate. My three children are safe. The rest is just stuff."

Grand Forks, North Dak. resident Paula Haney, after her house was overrun by flood waters, as quoted in *Newsweek*.

"I never lose. I have never lost in my life."

Chess champion Garry Kasparov, being interviewed for his upcoming series of matches against **Deep Blue**, an IBM supercomputer. The series is tied 1-1.

LETTERS

Musical sacrifice

I was appalled at the mindlessness of Corey Johnson's letter, "Disappointing endorsement," printed on April 17, regarding former ASUO executive candidates James Boyd and Andrew Oberriter.

Corey, in pointing out that the *Emerald* represents "racial insensitivity" and "conservative voices that are grossly out of touch with student opinion," you certainly did not represent yourself in a way that could set a good example, since you are somehow out of touch with my student opinion, for one, and perhaps many others who happen to know James Boyd and Andrew Oberriter personally.

Like Boyd, I am studying music. We are colleagues, both having been through many of the same

things a music major faces. It takes willpower, dedication and courage to pursue a career in music. Literally, it takes blood, sweat and tears. It is *not* a field for the "frail ego."

I agree with your suggestion for the editorial board to "start getting in touch with the students on this campus." But have you ever even had a friendly conversation with James and Andrew? Did it ever occur to you that perhaps these two people are for real and not interested in political slash and burn tactics? Why else would someone like James come back after his so-called "frail" ego was destroyed to courageously run for a higher position? Dealing with scathing editorials is willful enough.

Lara Daskivich
Music Education

Parking solution

During the recent ASUO elections, we heard a lot of talk about the University's parking shortage, but few viable solutions. I think that the best way to solve the problem is to look at it from a fresh perspective. How about instead of a "parking shortage," we simply acknowledge that what we actually have is a "car surplus."

So how do we go about getting rid of all these surplus cars? Just suggesting alternative forms of transportation hasn't helped. Even funding alternative forms hasn't worked. Eugene is not only walkable and bike-friendly, but our incidental fees already pay for unlimited access to ride the bus.

The University can't keep people from driving to school ... or can

it? What if the people who are driving to school just weren't students? Just expel people who drive to school? That's crazy! These are our future leaders ... or are they? Anyone who has taken classes in finance, accounting or economics and actually thinks it is economical to drive a car to school rather than walk, bike or take the bus for free, is not applying their education.

But why stop with business majors? How about environmental studies majors who drive to school? All of their classes on protecting the environment haven't affected how they treat it. Or exercise & movement majors? Don't they know how much better walking and biking is for you?

Most of all, how can we forgive the history, architecture, planning

& public policy and geography majors who drive to school? Haven't they learned that cars have taken over and destroyed our landscape? Don't they know that only places that were well in place before the invention of cars are memorable or even worth living in?

I'm positive that there are several other well educated students who drive to school despite what their studies, or even simple logic, should make clear. The University should probably expel them too.

So with all of these cars and people off-campus, we would probably have a parking surplus. The problem is solved, and we can reclaim all of that wasted land to find an appropriate use for it.

Robert Nobles
Architecture