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# OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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## In foreign affairs, ignorance isn't bliss

■ **OUR OPINION:** Being informed about what is going on around the world is an important responsibility of living in a democracy

While Americans debate the Clintons' role in White-water, a bloody rebellion is devastating the nation of Zaire. While we ponder the effects of clear-cutting on the Oregon landscape, an earthquake kills 2,000 in Iran.

All around the world, uprisings, revolutions and historic events are taking place. And for the majority of us, they're a complete mystery. Most people just don't know a thing about foreign affairs — but they should.

It's not hard to understand why most people don't keep up on foreign affairs. The revolutions of Third World countries don't seem to have a direct impact on a college student's daily life. With half the population not voting in local elections, expecting people to keep informed about what's going on thousands of miles across the ocean is a bit unrealistic.

In addition, foreign affairs are hard to understand. Because we live in one of the most prosperous nations in the world, relating to the causes of starving countries isn't easy. When there hasn't been a war fought on our soil since the Civil War, imagining what it's like to live in a war-torn country is almost impossible.

However, despite the complexities of foreign affairs, it is important for the average citizen to keep up on what's going on in the world. If not just for general knowledge, for the fact that what happens in Africa and Central America can, and inevitably does affect everyone's lives eventually.

Our nation has a long, and somewhat less than admirable, history of meddling in other nation's affairs. Unfortunately, most Americans have no clue what's going on until it escalates into a full-blown conflict (e.g. Vietnam).

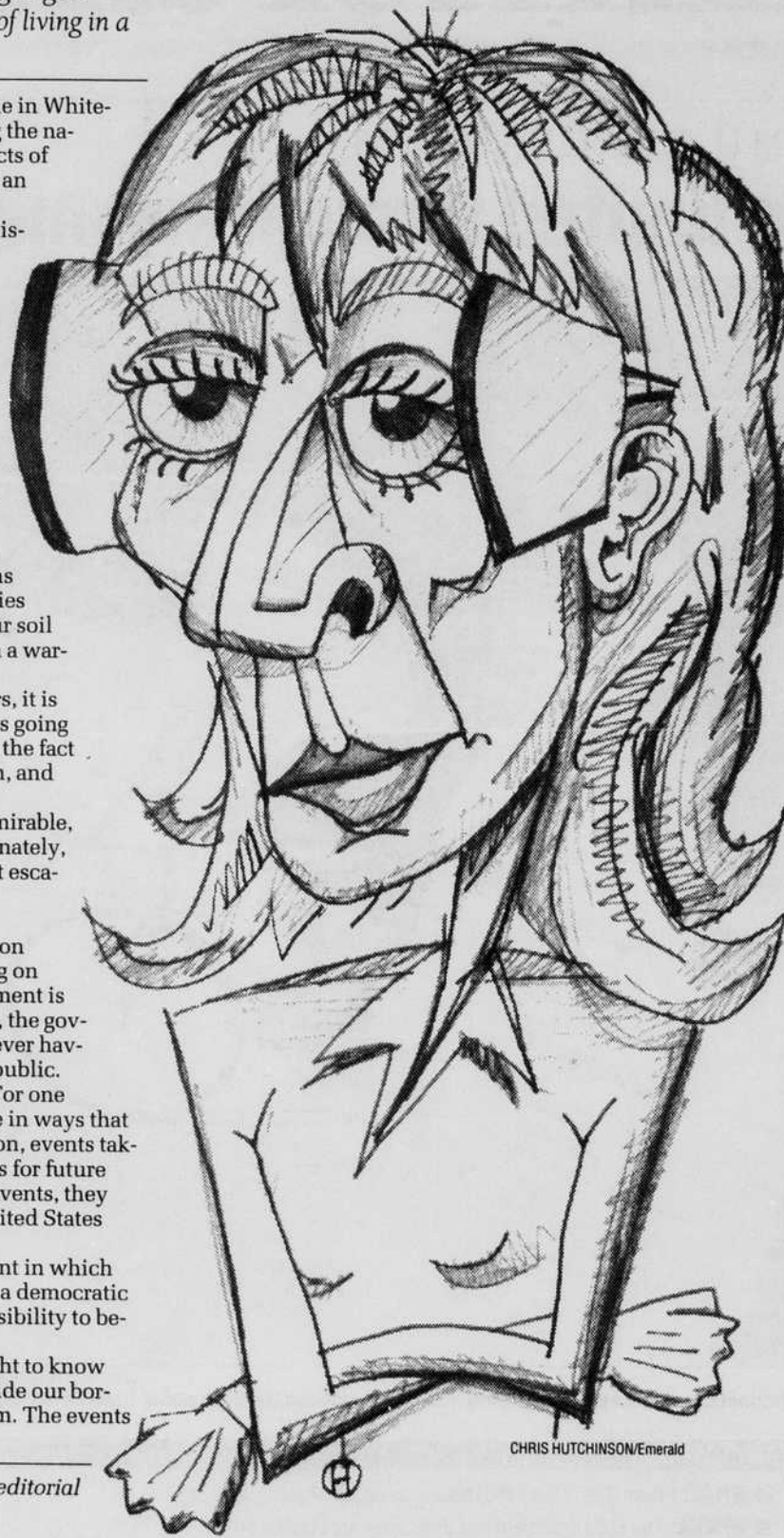
One of the reasons our country has been so active around the world is that most citizens don't keep up on foreign affairs. When people don't know what's going on around the world, they can't protest how the government is dealing with foreign events. And when this happens, the government has virtually free reign to do as it pleases, never having to deal with or justify actions to the uneducated public.

This has obvious and unfortunate consequences. For one thing, the U.S. government is acting around the globe in ways that the general public may or may not support. In addition, events taking place around the world now could be the grounds for future U.S. involvement. If people don't understand these events, they won't be able to evaluate what role they think the United States should play in them.

Foreign affairs is one of the only roles of government in which public opinion plays little role in affecting policy. In a democratic society, this is unacceptable. It is the public's responsibility to become informed on affairs around the world.

After all, as members of this country, we have a right to know what actions the leaders of our nation are doing outside our borders and to decide whether or not we approve of them. The events of the world do affect us. It's time to get informed.

*This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.*



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

### WINNERS

#### "SEINFELD" CAST

Julia Louis-Dreyfuss, Jason Alexander and Michael Richards (a.k.a. Elaine, George and Kramer) settled on a new contract last week with NBC.



#### KEN KESEY

The 1960s Merry Prankster is the subject of new publicity after his "Further" bus arrived at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame last week.

#### DAN QUAYLE

The former vice president is building his forces for a 2000 presidential run, and is generating a lot of buzz in the process.



#### MOBUTU SESE SEKO

The president of Zaire baffled many when he returned to his war-torn country Saturday after a meeting abroad.

### LOSERS

#### FAA

The Federal Aviation Administration is under fire once again in the wake of the one-year anniversary of the ValuJet crash.

### BLAZERS

#### BOB WHITSITT

The Trail Blazers president fired coach P.J. Carlesimo last week, but according to a public opinion poll, it may be Whitsitt who should have been terminated.

#### GARRY KASPAROV

The world champion lost Sunday to Deep Blue in the final game of their six-game series, giving the super-computer the series victory.



#### EUGENE

According to a May 11 *Register-Guard* article, University graduates are leaving the Emerald City in droves for the greener pastures of Portland.

### LETTERS

#### Rice reality

I couldn't help but notice the other day that our president, Dave Frohnmayer, is a racist because he said that people from eastern Asia eat rice. Great googly moogly, call in an ethics probe! Apparently, our president is patronizing our foreign student contingent by providing them with familiar foods to their native diet.

For one, I don't see any racial statement being made here, whether it be intentional or not. You might even find out that the statement made is true; people of "Oriental" nations *do* eat a lot of rice. They eat a lot of fish too, and

they're healthier for it. So why is it so bad to say they do?

In trying to find the flaw in Frohnmayer's statement, I tried to put this story in a different context. Let's say I was studying in Korea. Let's also say that a large majority of the dishes there involved rice. (Please don't put any signs up about me for saying that.) Here's the catch: I hate rice. But then the president of the university comes out and says: "In the interest of bringing a more diverse menu to our international students, we have decided to set up a barbecue pit next to the cafeteria. We think the Americans will like this." If anything, I'd

thank the man.

What I'm seeing here is another example of University students searching desperately for a cause that just isn't there. Look, we're not our parents' generation. The University of 30 years ago had a lot more to protest. What do we have?

I'll be damned. The president said that Asians eat rice. That calls for another takeover of Johnson Hall, don't you think?

Guy Barker  
Sociology

#### Wrong way

I'm a little aggravated by this whole MEChA/Garden-

burger controversy. Regardless of what MEChA thinks, the students in University Housing *do* want Gardenburgers on the menu. Over a two-month period, 702 Gardenburgers were sold as opposed to 386 other vegetarian burgers. A little math here and we get 316 *more* Gardenburgers sold. It seems to me that if students really didn't want Gardenburgers like MEChA claims, they wouldn't outsell other vegetarian burgers.

Maybe MEChA's cause is good, but it's been going about it wrong since day one. I used to be on the President's Council for Hamilton Complex. It was there that I first

became aware of MEChA and the Gardenburger issue. MEChA's original claims were very vague and lacked detail. They asked the President's Council and Residence Hall Governance Committee to support them, even though the groups were confused on what exactly their support would entail.

What it all boils down to is this and only this: whether students choose to eat Gardenburgers or not is a decision that should be made by the individual, not the institution. I hope that MEChA's continuing campaign will focus on this.

Erik Talbert  
Journalism

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