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PERSPECTIVES

DON'T BUY INTO HOLIDAYS

Corporate America, in its vigilant quest to improve the quality of life in this country, would like you to know two very important things: There are only 36 shopping days left until Christmas, and those Sleep 'n' Snore Ernie dolls are going fast.

It is a scant two weeks before Thanksgiving, and already the annual Christmas hype has bolted out of the gate.

Soon, the streets will be awash in red and green and the joyous tintinnabulation of bells. Department store Santas will "ho ho ho" their little hearts out, and rosy-cheeked children will marvel at the magic of the season.

Merchants and marketers spend almost 12 months rubbing their hands together in anticipation of this time of year. They figure that's just enough time for you to forget those memories of last Christmas.

You know which memories I mean. The one where you trekked to the local shopping center on a wet, icy road only to spend half an hour waiting for a parking space — any parking space. The same one where you spent hours standing in line with a slew of frazzled shoppers who'd just as soon slit your throat than wish you a happy holiday. This was probably the same year that, staggered by how much you spent and how little you

Companies rely on the Christmas rush to boost sales, but they create a crush of capitalism in the process

actually got, you vowed that next year would be different and never again would you be snared in the consumer trap.

Sound familiar? It should. It's the same sentiment echoed by millions of Americans who every year devote copious amounts of time and money to the myth of big-time Christmas, only to find that the reality has left them stressed, broke and decidedly disillusioned.

Christmas, like so much else in society, is getting more bloated and ridiculous with each passing year. And in this, a year of record economic growth and stability, the holiday juggernaut is bearing down faster than ever. Stores are trying to draw shoppers in earlier, warning

that a shortage of holiday workers will lead to longer lines. Invoking last year's Tickle Me Elmo debacle, they warn that hot products will fly off shelves.

The commercialization of Christmas is not a new phenomenon. Somewhere along the line it was decided that the true purpose of this time of year was to show your loved one just how much you cared by showering them with sales-rack sweaters and Hickory Farms gift baskets. The businesses that rake in a third of their annual revenue in the months just prior to Christmas have a clear incentive to promote such a viewpoint. Consequently, those who dare to question the steady denigration of what was once a relatively simple and enjoyable occasion

by championing events like the \$100 Christmas campaign and Buy Nothing Day are routinely denied access to the advertising-supported mainstream media.

Each year Americans spend a mind-boggling amount of money on the holidays, and each year they cite Christmas as their number one source of debt.

As a nation, we are being smothered by the very things that society tells us will make us happy. The idea that we are complex people who need complex things like the motorized back massagers and electronic dictionaries that stores push so hard around the holiday season is little more than a clever ploy to manufacture expensive desires.

On Thanksgiving Day, every imaginable media outlet will be clogged with ads and jingles designed to draw you out of the house and into the stores.

The best way to honor the spirit of Christmas, and perhaps save your sanity, is to simply stay home. Or use this year as a jumping off point and gradually wean yourself away from a consumer culture that is empty and ultimately destructive. Eventually, people are going to get fed up, and this system of mindless accumulation is going to collapse, so why not start today? You still have 36 days to decide.

Kameron Cole is a columnist for the Emerald. Her work appears on alternate Wednesdays. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

OPINION



Kameron Cole

DRAWING BOARD



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sizemore conference

Bill Sizemore, the anti-tax, anti-government, anti-union crusader, held a tax fairness conference in Salem recently amid much media speculation, which he encouraged that it would be the kickoff for his next tax initiative or his campaign for governor.

Oops! The conference didn't turn out the way Sizemore hoped it would. The attendees, who represented a broad spectrum of opinion on government and taxes, rated Sizemore's proposal to replace the property tax with a sales tax unwinnable. They picked a proposal sponsored by a coalition of unions and community groups to raise corporate income taxes to the level paid by individuals and reduce the top personal income tax rate slightly as the only option that was both fair and politically viable. All Sizemore could do at the end was claim that "Oregonians seem content with the existing tax system."

Wrong again! Oregonians may not want to make wholesale changes right now, but that doesn't mean we're content with our tax system. Large numbers of Oregonians are discovering that the tax burden has shifted dramatically in recent years off of corporations and onto households. That's especially unfair at a time when our state economy is strong and we're being forced to accept reduced levels of public services. Many of us, like the delegates to Sizemore's conference, believe it's time to make Oregon's tax system fairer to households.

Bill Sizemore hasn't gotten that message yet. Hopefully, those political leaders and media representatives who show such deference to his pronouncements will.

Kurt Willcox
 Eugene

Sustainable business

Your editorial and accompanying "news" article about the Sustainable Business Symposium

were uninformed, unfair and unproductive (ODE, Nov. 10). Your editorial board is concerned the symposium focuses too much on one side of the debate. You beg for radical environmental groups who believe growth is inherently tied to environmental degradation. While that perspective is valid and reasonable, it simply would not be a productive addition to the event. Barring suicide (which is the only true way to avoid growth), each of us must take steps in our everyday lives to reduce our own impact and demand changes from corporations.

The symposium is based on the premise that businesses will continue to exist and we will continue to consume their products. The questions raised for the symposium then become twofold: First, what can businesses do to reduce their waste and pollution and become more balanced within the ecosystem, while still making a profit. And second, what can each

of us as consumers do to force businesses to change and to reduce our own impact?

These are the questions we seek to answer. The path will not be easy, and the obstacles are immense. If businesses cannot make a profit while becoming sustainable, they simply will not change. They cannot make profits unless each of us is willing to research, locate and support greener businesses. We are in no way saying businesses involved in the symposium are sustainable. Quite the opposite. They are precisely the ones who need to learn about true sustainability.

As organizers of this symposium, we are a few concerned students who have put months into creating an event that will raise awareness and begin to answer these questions. We tried to draw in student groups from across the spectrum. We contacted the Survival Center several times to get them involved. They failed to

respond and now complain about the symposium's efforts. Change will not come from sitting on the sidelines and criticizing those who take action. Change comes only from rolling up our sleeves, speaking out and ultimately changing ourselves.

In short, your editorial and article were premature and completely missed the mark. Ironically, though you state your assertions "need to be looked at closely," as of Monday evening, after the first day of the event, you had not even assigned a reporter to cover the symposium. Perhaps your staff is also guilty of sitting on the sidelines and criticizing the team (in this case, before the game has even started). I hope in the future, your staff will attend and cover events on campus before you make sweeping assaults on the efforts of your fellow students.

Andrew Yorra
 Co-organizer, Sustainable Business Symposium