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PARTISAN BICKERING *covers up* POLICY FAILURES

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

As Congress breaks for the year, a number of incomplete tasks mar its performance

What happens when you put several hundred politicians in a pair of small rooms? Do they engage in productive discourse, coming up with well-reasoned solutions to the nation's myriad problems? Or do they bicker like spoiled children who need their diapers changed?

If Congress is any indication, the latter is the answer. The congressional session has ended for the year (politicians get long vacations; they don't have to return until January), and now is the time for political pundits to weigh in with their views on the whole fiasco. We would hate to be left out of the gathering.

Every year, analysts lob the same complaints at our nation's leaders: They fought too much over issues like the budget and the environment.

We certainly agree that Congress has behaved poorly over the past year, but our objection isn't to their squabbles over important issues like the budget. In fact, we think Congress got along all too well when it came time to reward the rich with capital gains tax cuts and punish the poor with slashed social services.

Despite the usual partisan posturing, Congress agreed on most of the big issues this year. They agreed that continuing corporate welfare is good and that continuing individual welfare is bad. They agreed that the military, in the midst of an apparently traumatizing peace, needed even more money.

Above all else, they agreed that a balanced budget would be a great thing and proceeded to ensure the economy would take care of that on its own (assuming Alan Greenspan doesn't get his way).

If Congress had fought a little more about continuing to hand our country over to corporate interests, we would

have been happier. Instead, members of Congress squabbled over the issues they ought to agree on.

Lack of decorum is nothing new for a leading legislative body. Some countries see violent fights break out on the floor; here, the best we managed was when one representative shoved another.

The most obvious failure of the session was the leaders' inability to put campaign finance to a vote, much less agree on a plan. Instead, the two parties shouted increasingly loud accusations of unethical money raising.

In particular, Republicans grilled anyone who had ever spoken to Bill Clinton and Al Gore, accusing the executive branch of the biggest scandal since FDR tried to sell us to the Communists. If the hearings proved anything, it's that taxpayers could think of better things to spend their money on.

What the hearings didn't prove is that Clinton ever broke the law; instead, they suggested the law itself was broken. Clinton didn't do anything the rest of Congress hasn't

done; he just has the misfortune of having done it on tape and with less class.

If Congress was sincerely interested in stopping the sort of fund-raising fiascos it's hounding Clinton for, it would have ended the accusations and started passing real reform, such as a federally funded campaign program. Instead, Congress ensured that it can only snipe at itself, banning privately filed ethics violations.

Similarly, Congress failed to provide any coherent plan for reforming the Internal Revenue Service, despite the agency's own admission that the IRS needed to be fixed. And Congress didn't come close to either revising or passing the tobacco settlement even though both state and industry leaders have agreed on it.

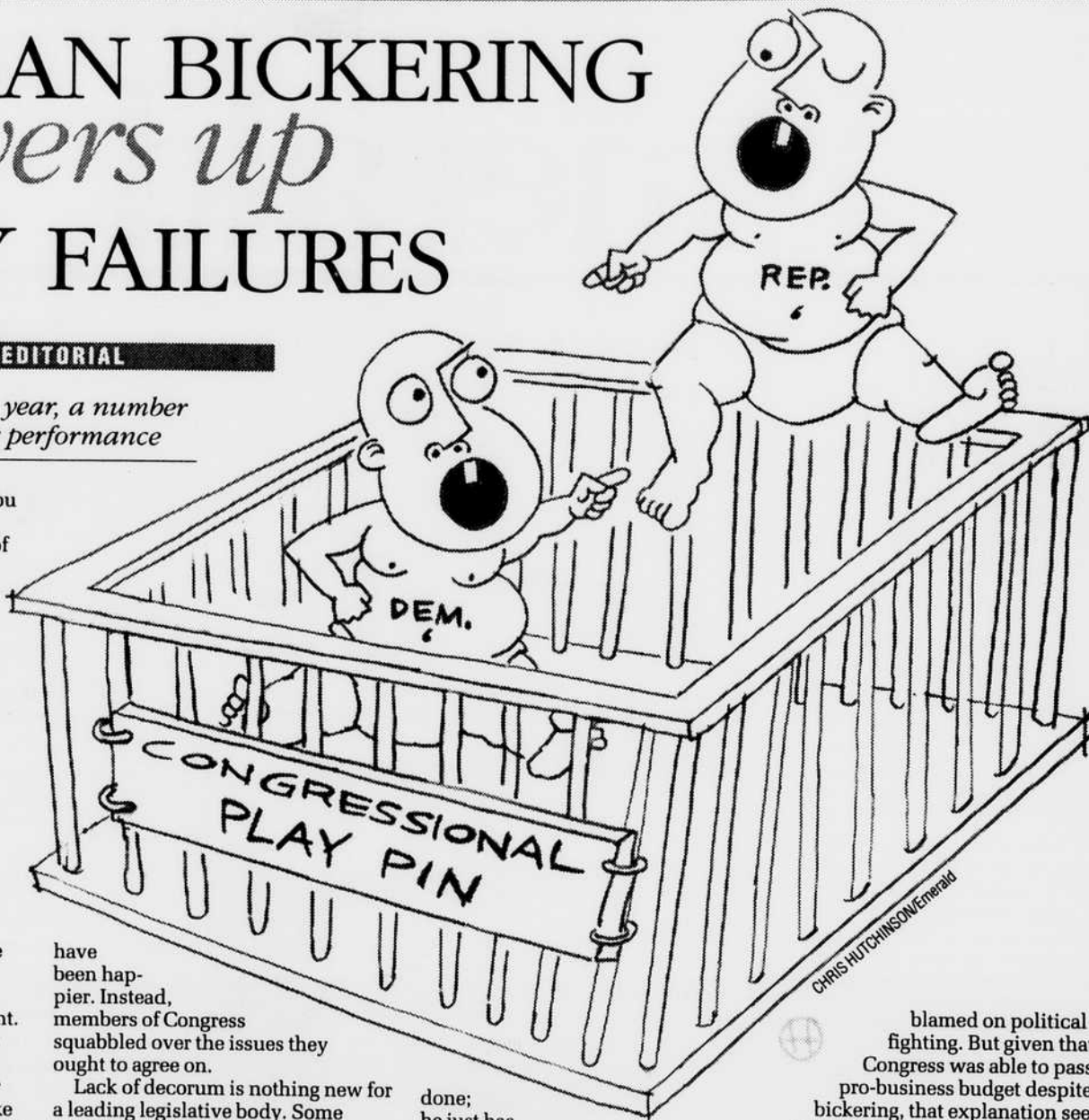
To some extent, this can all be

blamed on political fighting. But given that Congress was able to pass a pro-business budget despite bickering, that explanation seems inadequate.

Realistically, petty fighting within Congress only serves to distract the media, the public and even members of Congress from the political reality under which our Legislature operates. Politicians pretend to disagree about issues like finance reform because it looks better than admitting they agree on one fundamental point: None of them want to sacrifice their jobs or bank accounts.

So, we are upset that Congress fought so much this term when they could have been passing important reforms. However, we also suspect that if Congress had not been fighting, we would be rather frightened by the reforms it managed to create.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/EMERALD

Quoted

"It is a mindless bureaucracy that uses rules instead of brains."
Oregon State University Professor John Gardner, who is blind, in response to a U.S. Department of Education decision to reject his grant application because it wasn't double-spaced, in Tuesday's Oregonian.

"The cooks and custodians in the U.S. Senate cafeteria know Ron Wyden by name, and he seems to know most of theirs as he waits in line to order a sandwich."
Register-Guard reporter Harry Esteve, in a massive centerpiece story on Page One of the Guard Tuesday, the day after terrorists killed 65 people at an Egyptian temple.

"We are challenging old and established businesses like newspapers, travel agencies, automobile dealers, entertainment guides, travel guides, Yellow Page directories, magazines and over time many other areas. ... We must devise ways of working with them or winning away their customers and revenue streams. ... We must be aggressive."

From a Microsoft internal memo, quoted in the November-December Columbia Journalism Review. I guess they left out the "we will bury you" line.

"People who are good at this business are not simply voyeurs. We are people who live the hip life, people who participate as well as observe."

Trend forecaster Haysun Hahn, quoted in the November-December Utne Reader. So basically, they like to make fools of themselves, as well as watching others do the same.

READERS VOICES

How would you evaluate the ASUO's performance this year?



"I think they've done a pretty decent job. I feel like the ASUO makes some decisions that are not necessarily what the majority of the student body wants. On the other hand, I'm not sure the student body makes their voice known to the ASUO, so it's kind of a catch-22."
Josiah Jones
Visual Design



"I haven't really been exposed to the decisions that are being made, and from what I do read in the Emerald, it's usually a lot of opinions about what's right and what's wrong with what the ASUO is doing instead of the facts, and so I'd say from what I do know they're doing a pretty good job."
Emily Meve
Environmental studies



"I don't know what they do because I'm a transfer student and this is my first term."
Paul Kulawiak
Undeclared



"I think they've performed well. I think they've performed the duties that were assigned to them by us."
Nathan Buehler
Business



"I think they're doing a good job, especially with the printing thing."
Soon Qwon
Business/Japanese



"Actually, I haven't noticed that much of their presence besides the printing thing, and I've noticed their voting drive. Not that they're not doing good, I'm just less aware of their actions. They're not as visible for people who are walking by."
Kristen Reindel
Japanese



"I think the ASUO has done just about as good a job as you can expect the student government to do. They haven't done anything to stand out, but they haven't done anything really stupid either."
Brian Diamond
Journalism