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PERSPECTIVES

Donations build wall between public, University

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

The proposed donor wall in the EMU represents the ongoing corporate buy-out of colleges

Some walls hold up buildings. Some walls keep people in or keep people out. Some walls divide rooms. And some walls divide communities.

The proposed donor wall, which would be built in the EMU to recognize everyone who has donated at least \$50,000 to a University fund-raising campaign, is one such wall.

Our problems are not necessarily with the wall itself. Fund-raising campaigns have long relied upon such ego-gratifying gimmicks to encourage donations. If it's really that important to some rich people that their names be displayed for their greater glory, we are willing to let them gloat about their largesse.

The wall does raise some significant issues, however. Perhaps the most significant is the decision to place it in the EMU.

Not only has none of the money gone to fund programs directly associated with the EMU — most of it has been invested to be used for scholarships and endowments — but it has also led to objections from many students. Placing the wall in the EMU would be a way of deliberately taunting those who have fought to alter the nature of the donor program.

One fundamental student objection to the donor program and the wall was voiced by ASUO Vice President Ben Unger at Wednesday's EMU board meeting: "We should honor the alumni whether they have money or not." As Unger correctly points out, the \$50,000 requirement, far more money than most alumni could ever donate, makes the wall a glorious monument to the particularly rich who have come from the University.

If the wall is intended to honor successful or generous graduates, the ability to give \$50,000 isn't the best test. Alumni who have dedicated their lives to impor-

tant causes and thus can only give a small amount of money are probably more admirable than those who have made millions through the exploitation of labor and therefore are able to give millions to the University.

There is another, more crucial question raised by the donor wall: How much should the University rely upon private donations for its future funding?

An ever-increasing percentage of funding, especially for building construction and scholarships, is coming from private donations. While most of these come from individuals, a disturbing number of them have corporate origins. Whether the money is given directly by a company or comes from people like Phil Knight who raised the money through business ownership, corporate-tied cash brings with it certain risks.

Sometimes big donations come with direct requests concerning how the money is used. Knight's money came with numer-

ous strings attached, including a pay raise for Dave Frohnmayer, the man in charge of distributing the cash.

More often, the University is willing to alter programs in order to aid the soliciting of donations. For example, the school is increasing the high-tech emphasis of certain programs, thus providing a ready labor pool for the high-tech industry and increasing the likelihood of donations from that sector of corporate interests.

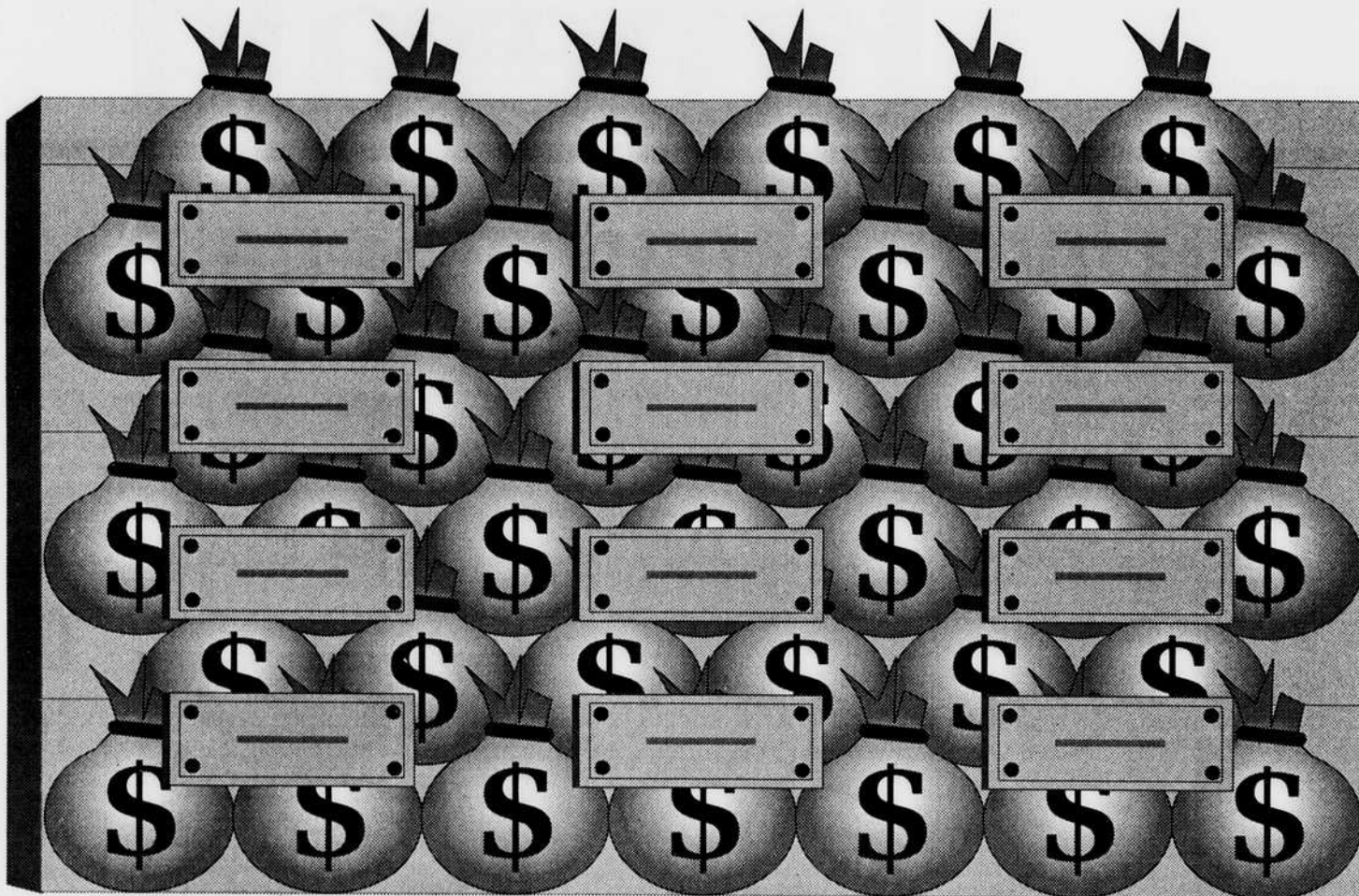
These donations are theoretically intended to offset declining state funding. In reality, a heavily successful donation program risks reducing state funding. As government moves toward privatizing a range of programs, University efforts to sever our financial ties to the state make public funding appear unnecessary.

Combined with Frohnmayer's plan to eliminate the pooling of state tuition, thus keeping University tuition for University purposes, an increased reliance on corpo-

rate-backed donations makes the school increasingly private. This is unfortunate because private schools tend to cost more — preventing needy students from receiving an education — and emphasize the needs of businesses, rather than the community they no longer serve.

Clearly then, the wall represents more than a list of egotists' names. To many students, the wall stands for the corporate buyout of the University system, and the fears of those students are not without justification. The University should think about modifying the program that has brought the wall into being. It should certainly not place the wall, a slight to all those fighting for continued public support and control of the higher education system, in the middle of the EMU.

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



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Research or recreation?

Citizens and members of the University community who oppose the Riverfront Research Park have a different vision for the University's Willamette River parkland from that expressed by Dean Steadman Upham (ODE, May 30). Their vision is not one of the research park's multi-story buildings within 100 feet of the riverbank, of multi-level parking structures, of manicured grass lawns, maintained green and weed-free by fertilizers and herbicides that drain into the river, and of an upscale restaurant perched on a beautiful site, surrounded by a parking lot. These, however, are all part of the plan adopted by the city of Eugene and promoted by Upham.

Opponents of the plan and its incremental implementation have a vision that encompasses more natural uses of the park-

land, as an open space for the University and the citizens of Eugene, enhanced to complement its unique beauty and promoted for the enjoyment of walkers, bikers, picnickers and myriad recreational users.

It is this conflict between development of this beautiful site with concrete for the benefit of a few and development of this beautiful site for recreation for the benefit of the many that is tearing apart our community. We can do industrial developments somewhere other than our irreplaceable riverfront lands. With the passage of the tax capping Measure 50, we cannot afford to divert property tax monies into concrete development, while we cannot sustain our city's recreational programs for at-risk youth, for elderly citizens and for the disabled.

The Riverfront Urban Renewal

District, when it was created, reached all the way south to Franklin Boulevard and east to I-5, thus diverting all incremental increases in property taxes into the renewal fund for the dedicated purpose of constructing a research park. Although the new restaurants, the expanded motels and the fitness clubs had little to do with the park, all property taxes from increases in assessed value and from new construction within this broad area were diverted away from supporting city services and schools to construction within the "renewal" area. In the last tax year, property taxes siphoned into the renewal agency were in excess of \$600,000.

The students of the University are those most adversely impacted by the University's decision to change plans for this area in order to promote a research park.

The prior plan for the property was for recreational use. During public hearings on the Riverfront Research Park proposal, opponents of the plan suggested that the land between the river and the railroad be preserved for recreation and open space, but the University administration and Eugene officials refused such a compromise.

Opponents then urged the city to allow the citizens of Eugene to vote on the research park proposal. The University and city officials again refused. Opponents had to try an indirect route, seeking to amend the city charter by collecting signatures to place an initiative on the ballot. The issue was not appropriately addressed by charter amendment, and it was defeated. The vote was not on the merits of the research park. For Upham to state, "The citizens of Eugene voted two-to-

one to develop the park," is a misrepresentation of the election. In fact, citizens were denied the opportunity for a direct vote on whether to develop the park. No such vote was ever taken.

I have witnessed this project seed dissension in the University community since its conception. Once given away in the name of economic development, our riverfront will not be regained. Why can't we compromise on limiting the buildings and parking structures to those regions of the Riverfront Research Park with limited amenities and save the irreplaceable riverfront land for the use of students, faculty, staff and other citizens of Eugene? Most universities and communities would treasure such an asset were they fortunate enough to have the opportunity.

Howard Bonnett
 Biology professor