

CONTACTING US

NEWSROOM:
(541) 346-5511
E-MAIL:
ode@oregon.uoregon.edu
ONLINE EDITION: www.uoregon.edu/~ode

ADDRESS:
Oregon Daily Emerald
P.O. BOX 3159
Eugene, Oregon 97403

PERSPECTIVES

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Sarah Kickler
EDITORIAL EDITOR
Mike Schmierbach
NIGHT EDITOR
Mike Schmierbach

Truancy won't be solved by police action

Plans for a curfew during school hours threaten to unreasonably expand government power.

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

Eugene seems to have problems with priorities. The city is theoretically suffering from a budget crisis. Money is short, and what little it has is being carefully allotted to agencies that are having to learn to do more with less.

Obviously, there is a need for these agencies to be efficient. In Eugene, the city has decided that of utmost importance are the police. Therefore, there is no agency more in need of efficient operation to ensure that its vital services continue to be available.

Why then, in a time when the police need to focus their attention on serious crime and community policing, does the city keep inventing new ways to waste police time? Closed parks, skateboard bans and heavy turnouts for anti-protest duty have all saddled the police with excess burdens. Now, Mayor Jim Torrey has another way to waste police time while continuing to convert Eugene to a police state.

Torrey wants to implement a daytime curfew for Eugene youth. Under the proposal, presented Wednesday at Torrey's "State of the City" address, any person of school age found on the street during school hours could be taken into police custody and brought to a house where their parents could be contacted.

The proposal is profoundly flawed at both the practical and the philosophical level. The plan fails to take into account the serious drain on police time it represents and the inevitable difficulty it will have combating truancy. In addition, it strengthens governmental and police control over the lives of citizens in a supposedly free society.

Torrey and others argue the proposal will in fact reduce crime. In Salem, a similar plan did slightly lower rates of juvenile crime. It remains to be seen, however, whether that reduction was due to the plan or normal fluctuations in criminal behavior.

In addition, the increased number of police hours needed to enforce the rule is almost certainly not going to be offset by any slight reduction in crime. Those police, kept busy rounding up kids, won't be able to deal with more serious criminal problems.

Therefore, this plan is not going to make the community safer. What it will succeed in doing is making businesses feel happier, something the City Council has proven very adept at this year. Decisions to build parking garages, fund research parks, keep "undesirable" elements off 13th Avenue and now ban kids from the downtown mall during business hours all function to make life more pleasant for business leaders while making it more restricted for the community as a whole.

Of course, reducing crime and the presence of street

kids in downtown Eugene are not the only objectives of the plan. The curfew is also intended to get truant children back in the classroom.

We certainly agree that truancy needs to be dealt with. This simply isn't the correct approach. Truancy is not a criminal problem; it is a problem for schools and parents to deal with. Instead of wasting resources on police roundups, the money could be spent to strengthen school programs that deal with chronically absent youth. At this level, the individuality of each case could be better explored, and those students who truly have a problem with truancy can be separated from those who happened to take a sunny afternoon off.

Although the plan is yet to be finalized or passed by the City Council, Torrey's initial proposal was remarkably lacking in plans to deal with the unique nature of each case. Despite the fact that many, if not most, parents are not home during the day, Torrey's plan hinges upon contacting those parents and having them come to personally deal with their children.

The plan also hinges upon the notion that these kids have parents in the first place. For many of the troubled youth of particular concern to businesses and community leaders, family is a foreign concept. Instead of spending resources to provide shelter and education for these kids, Torrey wants to round them up and hide them away.

Of course, this could be done in conjunction with the creation of an alternative education framework to deal with dropouts and expelled students (another group who are not clearly accounted for in the plan), something Torrey wants to see take place. Unfortunately, while his plans for the curfew are concrete and immediate, his plans for an education facility are vague and distant.

At a more fundamental level, this proposal fails to counter the reasons many of these students are not in school. Students have to want to participate in the educational process; they have to look upon school as a privilege to be enjoyed. Instead of this, the proposal would make schools into prisons.

The most fundamental problem of all is the simple violation of personal liberties. Now, walking down the street in the middle of the day has become a reason for police attention. This is troublesome not only for those students who have a legitimate excuse, such as those who are home schooled, have an early release or an appointment, but also for those who have no legitimate reason to be out of class.

There comes a time when the state needs to intervene in certain problems, including truancy. This proposal intervenes in individual behavior far before that time, however. Instead of dealing with the problem at the family or school level, this plan compels police to examine and intervene in the affairs of every youth in Eugene.

It is difficult to ever justify such intervention. In this case, when the benefits are non-existent, justification is impossible.

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



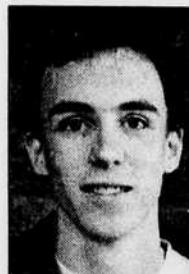
CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

READERS' VOICES

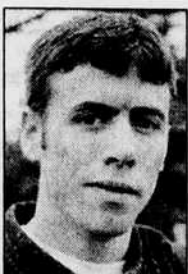
How should the University change in the years to come?



"More multimedia use of computers and off-campus options such as having options to take classes over the computer. Taking education out of the classroom and more into the community."
Jason Maas-Bespain
Linguistics



"It should continue to be innovative and grow in whatever way it sees fit."
Andrew Carley
Philosophy



"I think the University should make more well-rounded students. Instead of just classroom education, it should work on educating outside of the classroom — education on diversity and other sorts of issues instead of just book learning."
David Lester
Psychology / Asian studies



"Give more money to the fine arts department and get new computers."
Yolin May
Fine arts



"It should add some more student parking because there's not enough right now, and the fees are way too high for the parking it does have. It should also fix the EMU and offer more food courts."
Valerie Knutson
Business



"I like the way it's functioning. I love the graduate program. They could have rethought the student activities center they're building. I don't like the fact that they're getting rid of the covered tennis courts."
Lisa Granger
Graduate student



"Increase student-faculty interaction and the opportunity for it."
Katie Nesse
Political science



"I feel the University should restructure its student fees to benefit the students in a more positive and individual way."
Rhaetia Hanscum
Psychology / Theater arts