

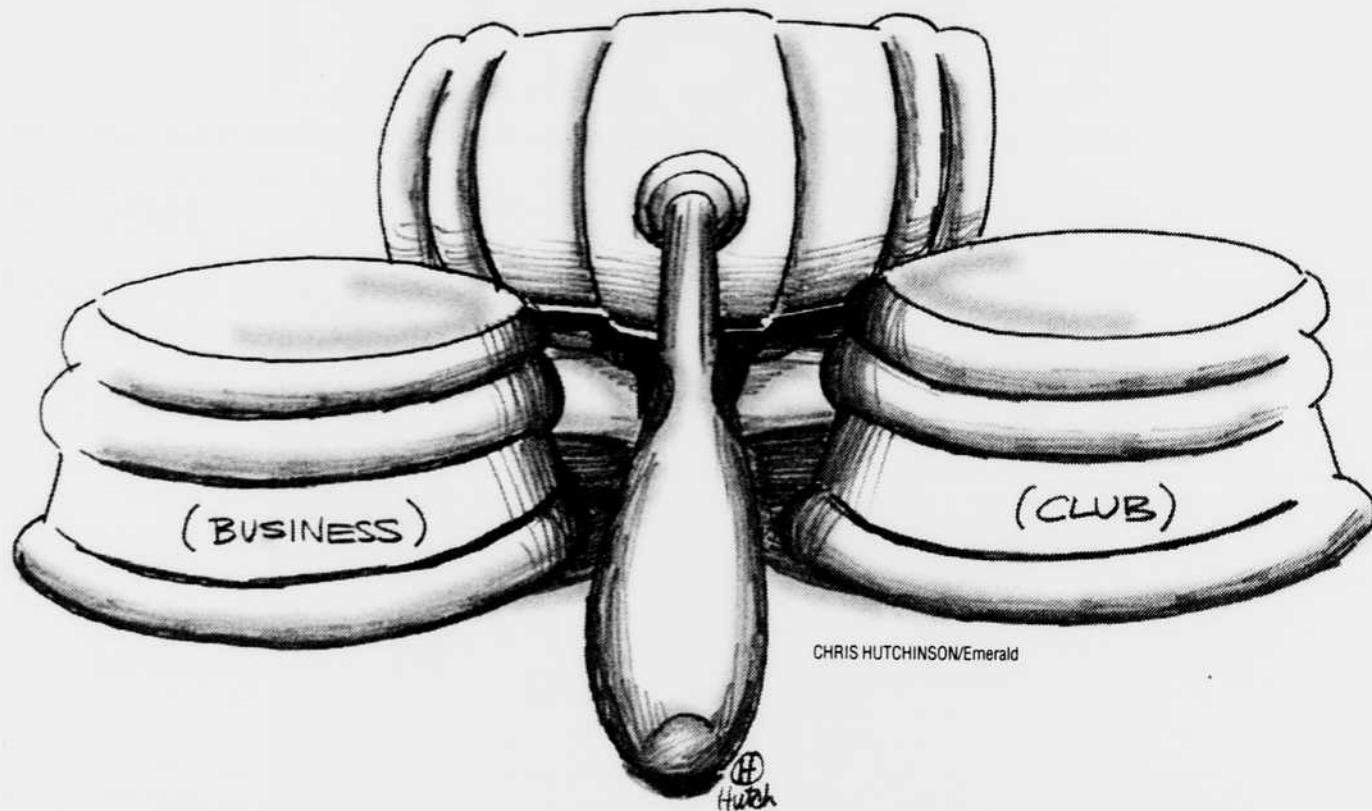
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PERSPECTIVES

Boy Scouts should not discriminate



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

Religious beliefs and sexual orientation should not be taken into account for membership in the Scouts

California seems to generate controversy. Whether it's banning benefits for immigrants or eliminating affirmative action, the actions taken by the voters and courts of the state have addressed many "hot" political questions.

Now, the California Supreme Court has the opportunity to bring an aging institution into modern times; the court is hearing arguments in two suits filed against the Boy Scouts of America.

One suit was filed by twin boys who were expelled from an Orange County troop because they are atheists. The other concerns a man who was barred from a position as an assistant scoutmaster because he was revealed as being gay.

In both cases, the court must decide whether the scouts constitute a business or

a club. If the court decides the Boy Scout organization is the former, it will mean drastic changes for scouting. Under federal and state rules, businesses cannot discriminate against people on the basis of a variety of traits, including religion.

Discrimination against gender would also be forbidden, which means the Scouts would be compelled to admit girls into their group. Currently, women are allowed to be Explorer Scouts but cannot participate in traditional troops.

There are other legal issues involved as well, of course. The question is not as simple as determining if the Boy Scouts of America are a business.

Nevertheless, even that question is hardly a simple one. The legality of current Scout policies is an issue we will leave to the courts to decide.

Regardless of what they choose, however, we think the Boy Scouts ought to admit all interested parties into their organization. At an ethical level, it isn't right to deny the many opportunities scouting presents just because someone doesn't believe in God, for example.

Not everyone wants to be a Boy Scout or understands why the group might be appealing. For many people, however, especially in smaller communities, the group offers the chance to socialize, learn and be with other kids — opportunities that might not otherwise be available. Conversely, for many urban youths, the Scouts offer a chance to learn about nature and even get into the woods, something many kids growing up in cities might never get to do on their own.

Additionally, the Scouts are well known. Membership in the Scouts can improve the possibility of admission to many other organizations and schools; it provides leadership experience that is valued by the military and employers. Even if the Scouts are neither a public agency nor a business, they are admired by both public and private groups.

It is particularly difficult for us to understand why the Scouts would deny membership to atheists. Some of us were Boy Scouts, and what we remember from our days in blue or khaki has little to do with God or religion.

Personal beliefs are not an integral part of the Scouts. While the word "God" may appear in the pledge, and while Eagle boards might ask about religious dedication, the reality of the organization is that it emphasizes community service, a variety of skills and an understanding of nature. Monotheistic faith is at best tangentially related.

Nevertheless, there is no reason scouting can't continue to use traditional pledges and ceremonies. Allowances simply need to be made for those who aren't religious. If someone doesn't want to swear to any god, there is no reason to compel him or her to do so.

As a whole, we admire the Scouts. Most of their practices benefit the community. We simply wish the group would recognize what its purpose should be: to improve the lives of youths, rather than to arbitrarily and unfairly discriminate against random groups.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Computer labs closed

I am writing to the Emerald to express my Thanksgiving break grievance and hope that it might be published in an edition of the paper.

Due to not being one of the fortunate people who own a computer, the Microcomputing Lab at the EMU has been my haven for typing papers — more specifically, foreign language essays. As far as I know, it is the only computer lab that has the program Foreign Language Word. This program is a blessing for those majoring in romance languages, such as myself. The EMU Computer Lab has the most convenient location, and every Sunday this entire term has been sacrificed to write, or rewrite, an essay for my French 303 class. However, it was most discouraging to find it closed, at possibly one of the most crucial times of the term, the weekend before Dead

Week. I came, as per usual, on Sunday to write my last and most important essay of the term, and was incredibly annoyed at this inconvenience.

In the future, I wish for the person(s) behind this decision to consider those faithful patrons of the EMU Microcomputing Lab, and to not cause such an inconvenience again. I am still typing my papers there, but wish for my grievance to be recognized.

Allison Lowden
 Romance languages

McDonald is a puppet

I was glad to see University Vice President Duncan McDonald's words in the media once again (ODE, Jan. 6). The more he spews, the more the ruthlessness with which he carries forward the dominant paradigm at this University becomes clear. Unfortunately, our tuition is going to

pay the salary of people who are overtly against the idea of students' freedom of thought and expression. He even commanded the Emerald to not only censor student views that may ruffle a few feathers among those in positions of power, but that they should spend their time and student fees vilifying and rebuking the thoughts of students who have put a great deal of energy into meticulously researching the positions on which they are not afraid to take a stand.

What does he have to complain about? As opposed to the numerous days students have to wait for a letter to the editor to be published in the Emerald, his showed up the day after submission. In addition, the Emerald's coverage of the student rally last semester lent half of the article to his sound bites, even giving him the final word, and a local television station gave him an on-cam-

era interview that took up more time than that allotted to the rally scene.

McDonald says the "dialogue from these groups that want to 'save' the University ranges from disingenuous to dishonest." I wonder what "dialogue" he is referring to. Students have made their concerns clear that dialogue, in the form of student and faculty representation on some of the most important decision-making bodies responsible for the present and future welfare of our University, is what is truly in need. Claudia Villena and many others have been bringing forth a comprehensive analysis of just what it means that the University is becoming more and more dependent on private funding. To this point, though, the efforts have obviously fallen not on deaf, but hostile ears.

The spine-chilling feeling that motivated my response came

from McDonald's line about donors being "the real heroes." As spokesman for the University administration and the Oregon Foundation, McDonald demonstrates concisely their belief that the ends do indeed justify the means.

But McDonald is only a puppet whose strings are firmly pulled by the masters who have put him in his public-relations position. I have only so much time to waste in becoming too entangled in his rhetoric not to see the important issues that lie behind his forceful and overwhelmingly arrogant veneer. I admire the dedication of those who have done their best in the face of a campus atmosphere that is too often antagonizing and apathetic to keep the student body and the community informed about what is really going on.

Kevin Aaron
 Environmental studies / sociology