

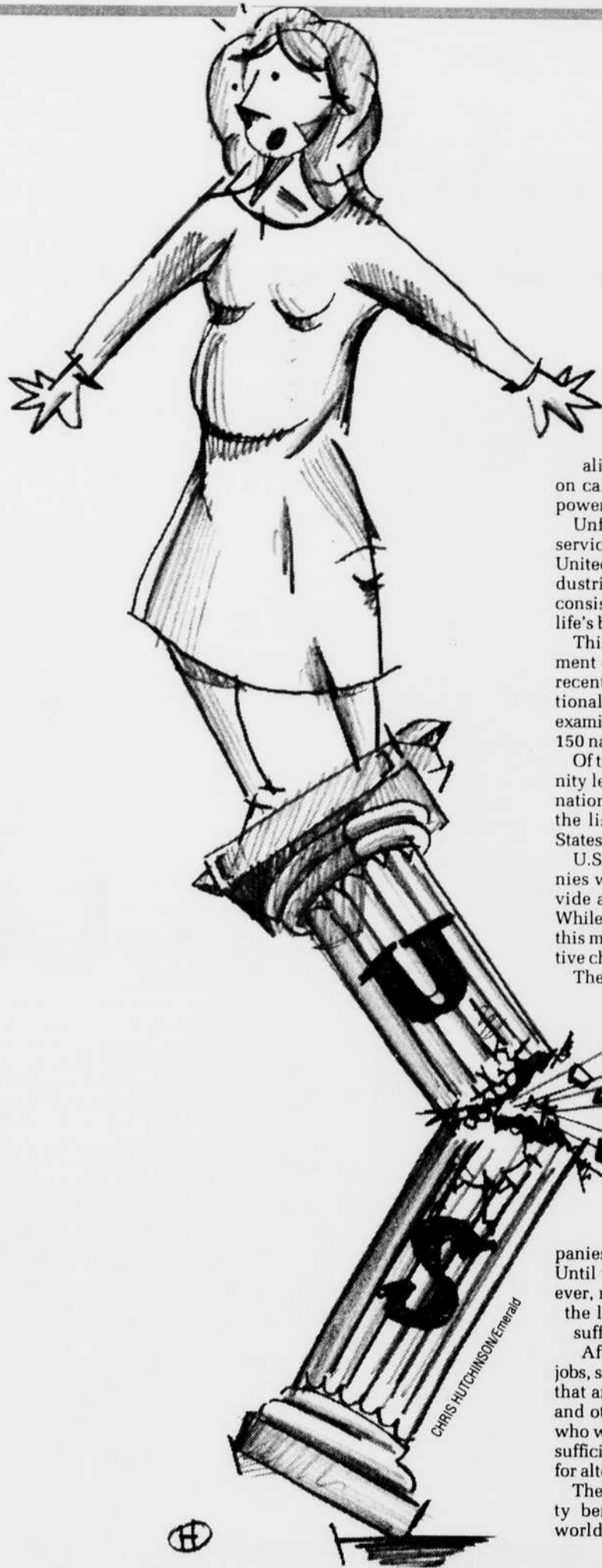
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U.S. fails to care for mothers

A recent report indicates the United States fails to mandate adequate maternity leave or to protect the rights of pregnant women

The United States has usually prided itself on being different from the other nations of the world. Even in this age of increasing globalization, the U.S. government insists on calling itself the world's last superpower. Unfortunately, when it comes to social services and employment benefits, the United States is different. Unlike most industrialized nations, the United States consistently imposes policies that place life's burdens solely upon the workers. This trend is exemplified by our treatment of working mothers, as shown in a recently released report by the International Labour Organization. The report examined maternity benefits in more than 150 nations.

Of those, over 120 mandate paid maternity leave, including most industrialized nations, according to the report. Left off the list — none other than the United States.

U.S. law requires employers at companies with more than 50 workers to provide at least 12 weeks of unpaid leave. While admirable for being gender neutral, this mandate is far short of being an effective childcare provision.

The problems with current legislation are numerous. Most significant, of course, is the unpaid nature of the leave. Many women cannot afford to take 12 weeks off work without pay; the report indicated that all women who opt not to take leave do so because of the cost.

Some individual companies and states do provide paid leave. Until this is universally mandated, however, many of those who can least afford the lost pay will be the most likely to suffer under the current law.

After all, it is usually lower-paying jobs, such as those in the service industry, that are unwilling to provide paid leave and other employment benefits. Women who work in these jobs usually don't have sufficient savings to take time off or to pay for alternate childcare.

There are other problems with maternity benefits in the United States and worldwide as well. Among the difficul-

ties cited in the report is a lack of job security.

According to The Associated Press, women who take time off to have children are not guaranteed they won't lose their job, be placed in a lower position or sacrifice the opportunity for promotion. In addition, women who continue to work while pregnant are often subject to discrimination when they are passed up for advancement or are moved away from publicly visible positions.

Although U.S. law does provide some protection, provisions should be added that guarantee women will not suffer job discrimination of any kind because of pregnancy. Such laws exist in almost 30 nations, according to the ILO report.

Another problem many women face is an inability to find childcare when they do return to work. Even if women are allowed to take paid time off and keep their current positions, they are often unable to return to work because they cannot afford care for their infant.

President Clinton has made some proposals that would improve this situation, but until these are approved and more steps are taken, lack of childcare will remain a form of workplace discrimination against parents in general and mothers in particular.

Finally, a lack of health care protection specifically tailored to pregnant women and families with young children is troublesome. Universal health care that includes prenatal care would come close to solving this, but such a proposal is a long way off.

For now, clear regulations requiring businesses to protect the health of mothers while on the job, as well as childcare facilities that include both prenatal and infant care, would serve to allow women to continue working without risking their health or the health of their children.

Overall, the United States needs to introduce a range of federal mandates that would improve maternity benefits and function to dramatically reduce discrimination against pregnant women. Doing so would make us stick out at the international level not because we mistreat our workers, but because we protect them. That is the sort of international leadership role we ought to be filling.

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

Thumbs



TO U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE THOMAS HOGAN:

In a decision that makes perfect legal sense to us, Hogan declared the line-item veto unconstitutional. The veto allows the president to slice so-called "pork," or district-specific spending, from any bill. President Clinton exercised it against a few proposals passed by Congress last year, and the groups who were affected brought suit. Now Clinton can appeal to the Supreme Court; we hope it finds the same way Hogan did and continues to maintain the separation of powers called for in the Constitution.



TO VOTERS IN MAINE:

In a recent special election, voters approved a Christian Coalition-backed proposal to repeal the state's protection of the rights of homosexuals. We have always argued that provisions that ensure gays and lesbians receive equal treatment are not only fair but also necessary in a discriminatory society. This represents a disappointing victory for the forces of fear and ignorance.

TO MARK ANDERSON:

The Arizona state legislator had the gall to suggest that a woman who sought state help in caring for her children should instead consider finding a new husband for the financial benefits such a move might incur. Clearly, this man is both ignorant and offensive.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OSPIRG budget large

After being mildly harassed by an OSPIRG volunteer today, I was glad to see this dinosaur of student organizations — second only to the ASUO Executive in funding — is finally doing something with their gargantuan \$147,000 allocation of student incidental fees. Their "pesticides kill" campaign (etymologically redundant, no less) is virtuous, and I greatly respect their efforts, but do agendas like these really cost such a heaping wad of cash?

Their Streamwalk initiative is one I fully support as well, but can some-

thing of this nature cost that much more to organize? I thought these were volunteer organizations; how much could their stipends possibly pay? And do posters and sidewalk handouts really cost that much to print? I can't imagine they do...

Like I mentioned, out of all student groups, only the ASUO Executive gets more money. OSPIRG gets more in student fees than the Emerald, the Women's Center, Student Legal Services, the Oregon Marching Band and numerous other programs that are much more visible and useful to the campus community.

How does a volunteer organiza-

tion such as OSPIRG justify such an enormous budget? I agree with many of OSPIRG's objectives; I just don't see how \$150,000 per year in student money helps it to do them any better.

Andy Combs
Political science

Evaluations informative

As a freshman, I have been exploring possible fields of study and looking for good professors and courses. I found choosing classes for fall and winter term to be a matter of scheduling by class times, not according to instructor or class quality. Asking

other students about their previous course experiences generated the most helpful feedback, although I couldn't always find someone who had taken the classes I was interested in.

With the help of the "Professor/Course Evaluations" book, I can find out what other students thought about every class on campus as well as the quality of the professors teaching them. Hopefully, this information will also help other students in deciding which courses to take for spring term.

Helen Stocklin-Enright
Intern, ASUO legislative team