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PERSPECTIVES

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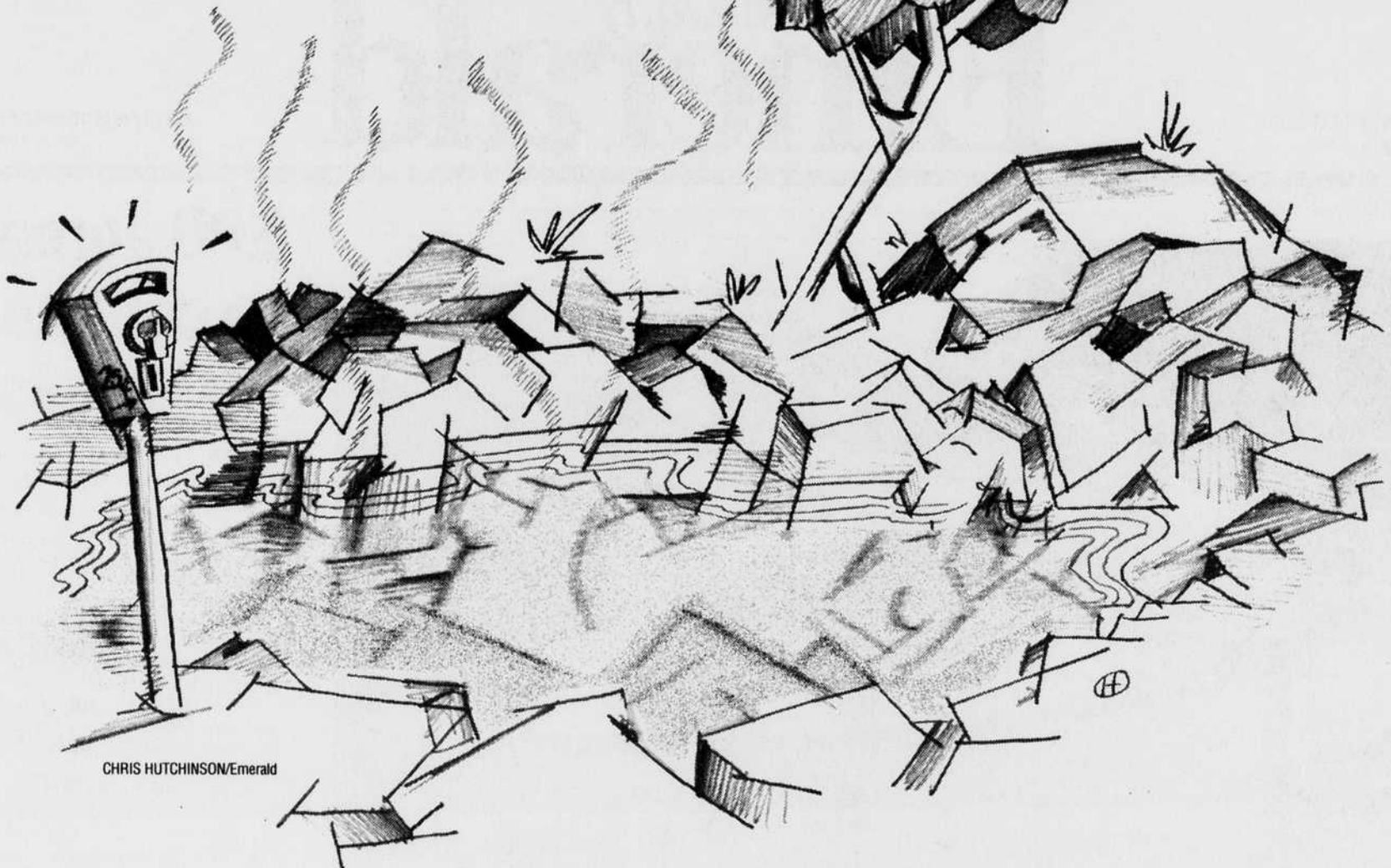
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Fees don't lead to fairness

A proposed \$3 per user fee for Terwilliger Hot Springs is part of a harmful trend in social service policy

This is, in the immortal words of The Register-Guard, an edit about "the half-dozen naked people who spent an otherwise-gloomy Tuesday afternoon lounging in the warmth of Terwilliger Hot Springs." At a broader level, it's also about the future of public lands.

Therefore, let's start with a brief discussion about Social Security.

A recent trend in Social Security planning has been to call for reduced benefits or increased taxes for those recipients who are in higher income brackets. On the surface, it's a proposal in line with the traditions of liberalism and the progressive income tax.

A number of scholars, including one of President Roosevelt's economists, have suggested this plan may end up benefiting the very rich, however. Their theory is that, after the "comfortable" have been removed from the system, political support for Social Security will go the way of backing for welfare — the system doesn't help me, so why should I pay for it?

This steady narrowing and then elimination of social services is one of two trends in public policy today. The other is applicable to proposals dealing with Terwilliger

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Hot Springs, but the parallels between the two policy notions are alarming.

Forest service officials who oversee the Willamette National Forest, where the springs bubble, are proposing to institute a \$3-per-person day-use fee for the area. Such fees, which in various forms are becoming common in Oregon, are part of another theory of public facility management.

For those programs that can't be narrowed out of existence or public hands, state and federal governments are striving to charge users for the services they consume. Like shifting the burdens of Social Security, usage fees make sense on the surface, until one evaluates their end result.

As parks and other facilities become for-profit, the rich who may still use them decide they would rather pay private companies for the additional luxuries they provide. Meanwhile, the truly poor can no longer afford to use supposedly "public" lands.

This leads to an eventual drop in service use and revenue, which in turn causes even higher fees (after all, those with political power have long switched to private sources for their recreation) that simply worsen the situation. Eventually, the federal government surrenders to the logic of the marketplace and corporate lobbyists and decides to privatize another chunk of the parks system.

Think this is absurd? Look at prisons: At

first, federal and state programs called for prisons to pay their own way by instituting forced labor policies; now, an increasing number of prisons across the nation are becoming privately owned and run.

In the end, of course, taxpayer money continues to pour into the privately managed facilities. Privatization of welfare and prisons doesn't mean the government doesn't pay for the services; it just means the people running the services have an incentive to cut costs while adding to the number of enrolled and the cost to taxpayers.

Meanwhile, in the parks system, federal money continues to subsidize resource extraction such as logging, grazing and mining. It seems that, in public land management as well as other social services, waste is OK as long as the extra money goes to corporations.

Of course, the proposal to institute user fees isn't troublesome only because it represents part of a larger trend toward corporate privatization. There is also a simple question of fairness: As previously mentioned, companies that permanently scar the environment pay less than their actions cost, while \$3 a day is almost certainly more than the price of an individual hot spring user's impact on the area.

Moreover, this proposal seems motivated in part by a certain opposition to the counterculture. For one thing, the hot springs are one of the rare free, clothing-

optional locations in the state. (A fact that led The Register-Guard to delight, as always, in the naked state of its interview subjects.)

Additionally, many of the people who use the springs will be deterred by a usage fee, even one as small as \$3. Finally, by imposing the fee on individuals rather than vehicles, the Forest Service would discourage car pooling and communal enjoyment of the area.

The hot springs are not without their problems, but the degree of crime and environmental impact seems greatly overstated. Perhaps this is a result of officials who view the alternative culture that admittedly frequents the area as little more than a bunch of "dirty, homeless hippies."

As a whole, we appreciate the need to maintain and monitor public areas like the hot springs, however. Nevertheless, a user fee as high and broad as the one proposed doesn't seem to be the best option. Alternatives could include imposing it only on vehicles, making it voluntary or even looking for volunteers from local outdoors groups and hot spring frequenters who would be willing to help care for the area.

Or perhaps we should just charge The Register-Guard reporters for the opportunity to gawk at bathers "wearing nothing but a tattoo."

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

Thumbs**To the release of CIA documents:**

Although the process is going slowly and many things remain classified in blatant violation of the federal freedom of information law and President Clinton's or-

der declassifying most information over 25 years old, a few revealing documents have come out. In particular, a report following the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba was released that indicated the CIA

was largely to blame for the mission's failure. Moreover, it went on to suggest that all such destabilizing missions were ill advised. If only the CIA had reviewed its own records in the following 35-plus years.

Thumbs**To continued violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention:**

Even though the Senate signed the CWC last year, U.S. industry continues to be in violation because Congress

has not passed a law compelling private companies to be in compliance.

Until these companies face mandates that force them to carefully document what they export and to

open their records to inspection, the United States will be in a poor position to demand foreign nations comply with international treaties such as the convention.