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Moving TROUBLE

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

Proposals to close the downtown mall at night and exclude those cited for crimes would only move troubled youth elsewhere

CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

And it continues. Most University students put their four or five years in at the school, pack their belongings and abandon Eugene in a hurry. Ongoing trends in local government and community affairs tend to escape their notice.

This is too bad because recent events in Eugene could stand some scrutiny from the University community. Much of Eugene seems determined to protect business owners; perhaps a more locally active campus could add some perspective.

Therefore, once again, we plunge into the increasingly frustrating muddle that is local crime control. Once again, we lament the loss of civil liberties and the discrimination against groups of people taking place in Eugene. And once again, we suspect City Council members will eventually vote with their wallets and not their brains, passing yet another pro-business policy at the cost of community cohesiveness.

The latest attack on non-consumers is being leveled at the youth who frequent the Downtown Mall. According to a story in Monday's Register-Guard, two recent proposals have surfaced that deal with a perceived crime problem in the mall area.

One proposal would ban anyone convicted of a crime on the mall from return-

ing for 60 days. The other would bar access to the mall for everyone between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m.

Reports about rising crime rates on the mall are undoubtedly based on a real phenomenon. While even shop owners conceded the threat from violent crime has been blown up by local media, the Guard story documents numerous occurrences of vandalism and other property crimes.

The problem is that the proposals aren't likely to solve such crimes at a community-wide level. Sure, banning "troublemakers" will reduce trouble in the mall, but the youth at which ordinances are aimed will simply move to another area of town.

Unless efforts are made to combat some of the causes of vagrancy and crime, a pattern of moving problems will emerge in the community. Many of the people causing problems in the mall have already moved off 13th Avenue after the ban on dogs and skateboards was passed.

Now the youth will simply move somewhere else, where a new set of restrictive ordinances will undoubtedly be passed. Eventually, the undesirables of Eugene will end up hanging out someplace where the local community doesn't have the political clout to demand action against crime.

And it will continue.

Meanwhile, back at the mall, violent

crime won't go away. Most of it isn't caused by the youth at which the proposed ordinances are aimed. Moreover, violent crime carries its own kind of exclusion: jail.

The shop owners on the mall aren't really looking for an end to crime. They're hoping the city will help their profit margin. Street kids don't buy enough goods to justify tolerating their presence. Existing ordinances, such as the one banning "sports" on the mall, already prove that the business owners are more concerned about their storefront image and the flow of consumer traffic than they are about the constitutionally guaranteed right to assemble.

According to the ACLU, the new proposal would impede upon another right: due process. Because the exclusion would take place independent of any judicial decree, it could constitute double jeopardy. Additionally, it would grant police and even mall security guards the power to punish and enforce that punishment, rather than leaving it in the hands of the judiciary where it belongs.

Particularly troublesome is the fact that the current exclusion proposal would enforce the ban from the moment a citation is issued, regardless of the eventual outcome of a trial or other court proceeding. So much for the presumption of innocence.

If the proposals were effective, there would at least be something to weigh against the loss of civil rights. As it stands now, however, both proposals make business owners feel better without alleviating crime in Eugene and at the cost of civil rights.

Only in the minds of local business owners does this justify the action. One merchant was quoted in the Guard story as saying, "It blows me away when people bitch and moan about individuals' rights when these kids are having a dramatic effect on the people here."

That's the new values equation of the 1990s: Rights are all well and good until they get in the way of making money. Unfortunately, the only voices the City Council has been listening to are those of business owners making precisely that pitch. Perhaps if college students and other members of the community actively argue that rights still mean something, that will change.

Otherwise, Eugene will see a further decline in community cohesion and personal rights.

And it will continue.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Support for OSPiRG

This is a letter of support for the work that OSPiRG does on this campus and in the community. OSPiRG involves students in socially valuable activities. These activities focus on issues from pesticide poisoning of the Willamette River to hunger and homelessness, and from recycling to the protection of threatened species. Their activities are not just educational but involve social service and action such as volunteering at local shelters and conducting canned-food drives. This past year OSPiRG

volunteers collected signatures on a petition that they presented to Gov. Kitzhaber asking for right-to-know legislation with regards to the pesticides that routinely are sprayed on our food, forests, schoolyards and other areas. OSPiRG volunteers are part of the thousand points of light that are needed in a society with an inadequate safety net for people, wildlife and the environment. It is one way that students gain experience in becoming active citizens.

Bob O'Brien
 Professor, sociology

Vote in elections

It is a sad state of affairs when only 8 percent of the student body turns out for elections. This is the number from last year and it would be a tragedy if it happened again. That is why a group of people called the Progressive Slate are currently working to get students more involved in campus. I am a member of the slate and am running for Student Senate seat No. 8, but I am most concerned about more pressing issues on this campus than my own campaign. I feel that if we as students fail to use our voice giv-

ent to us in the form of votes in regards to student-run programs and student-controlled fees, then we will be in grave danger of losing what little say in this campus we have.

Maybe you won't get who you want in office, but if you vote anyway, you are saying to the administration and other interest groups that "Hey! I'm paying attention." This gives more power to elected representatives to make positive and influential change within this institution. Changes such as increased awareness, especially for sexual-

assault survivors, concerns in Mac Court, protection of the Riverfront Research Park and, most important of all, people who are determined to stop the rising costs of tuition by pressuring the state Legislature to spend more money on students and less money in the form of corporate tax breaks. Is this possible? Hell yeah! It is if we have an active, progressive student government. The ball is in your court: Use your vote, use your rights. Vote Progressive.

Spencer Hamlin
 Candidate, Student Senate seat No. 8