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PERSPECTIVES

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States' rights focus ends when states are 'wrong'

Recent GOP efforts have shown their interest in local government is more political than philosophical

We all know the GOP is a firm supporter of states' rights. Proposals to reform welfare, Medicare, Social Security, parks and even school lunches have included so-called "block grants," in which the federal government hands a pile of cash to state governments for vaguely specified purposes.

Apparently, Republican support for states' rights ends when it comes to the rights of the people within the states. Programs that boost the community or protect the environment have generally faced congressional opposition.

Even more alarming are attempts by legislators to override the will of voters within a state. Congress seems too content to let state legislatures run free, but it cannot stand it when the people who elect the legislatures think and regulate for themselves.

Two recent congressional efforts demonstrate this mentality and are closely related to Oregon politics — the ongoing effort to prevent assisted suicide and the proposal by Sen. Gordon Smith to deny funding for medical marijuana.

Federal intervention in assisted suicide began when a Drug Enforcement Agency administrator argued that doctors could not legally prescribe drugs for assisted suicide. Thomas Constantine decided that assisted suicide is not a legitimate medical purpose, effectively invalidating two decisions by the majority of Oregonians.

Attorney General Janet Reno is evaluating Constantine's claim. According to The Associated Press, this "could effectively block application of the nation's only assisted-suicide law."

This is where Congress leaps into the fray. The Associated Press reports that 53 members of Congress wrote a letter to Reno urging her to back Constantine and punish doctors who prescribe suicide drugs.

Congress certainly has the ability to regu-



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

late illegal substances, but this action is excessive. Worse, some members of Congress are considering drafting new legislation to prevent assisted suicide if Reno does not act as desired.

Assisted suicide was approved by the voters of the state, does not violate either the Constitution or the fundamental purposes of federal government, and concerns

the autonomy of the individual rather than the stability of society. Congress ought not act to restrict the behavior of voters in a state when those voters have legally granted themselves certain freedoms.

Nevertheless, assisted suicide is not the only personal choice Congress wants to interfere with. Smith wants to stop federal money from supporting medical marijuana.

Smith's proposal would block spending on health programs that allocate marijuana for medical purposes as well as research on marijuana. The reason, according to a story by The Register-Guard on the proposal, is that Smith worries medicinal use "sends a mixed message to our children that marijuana use is acceptable."

So what? Well, Smith claims "[marijuana] is dangerous, and it is deadly." Instead, he hopes the government will spend more money on prescription drugs, despite the fact that overdoses and side effects from "legal" drugs kill thousands every year.

Smith's fundamental delineation is that legal things are good, and illegal things are bad. Many voters, including those in California and Arizona who have already approved medical marijuana, clearly disagree with this "logic."

Voters ought to be able to disagree without interference from politicians 3,000 miles away. Marijuana use, like assisted suicide, is a matter for individuals and communities to address.

If Congress and the GOP truly support the concept of states' rights, they ought to strive to protect the individuals within a community. The fundamental premise behind state autonomy is that local actors are more capable of tackling the issues that impact that community.

The reality of states' rights as practiced by Congress currently is that block grants and abdicated authority are really an excuse for legislators to pass on to the states the dirty task of dismantling federal programs the GOP opposes. Republicans are only willing to hand over their power when their policies will be implemented at the state level.

Issues such as assisted suicide and medical marijuana clearly prove that congressional leaders have no concern about the views of state voters if those voters are so foolish as to oppose the divine will of the Republican Revolution.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Abysmal voter turnout

As long as I've been a student at UO, voter turnout in student elections has been abysmal. When you think about it, that shouldn't surprise anyone. Student government seems to be anything but competent or interesting, and tuition is rising so quickly that about 8,700 students needed financial assistance in 1996-97 (and if current trends hold, that number will rise to 9,700 by the end of this year). I think that most students feel like they've got a lot better things to do with their time than pay attention to the shenanigans of pseudo-political wankers.

ASUO is now in control of about \$6.5 million dollars. That's a big responsibility, and most students don't even know they pay over \$500 a year to support it. ASUO gives students the ability to create nationally recognized conferences, support student advocacy organizations, provide students with legal advice, maintain the EMU, and offer services that UO either could not, or would not, provide otherwise.

My point is that ASUO can be-

come competent and continue to offer all these services only if the people who pay for it voice their opinion. Voting is an integral part of voicing your opinion about ASUO.

Please take a few minutes to read the Voter's Guide, talk with people involved in ASUO or a candidate, and take the time to vote in the primary and general elections (April 15-16 and April 22-23). At a university this size each vote really does count.

Selena Brewington
 Computer Science

Tandem Taxi valuable

Your article on evening safety transportation options (ODE, March 31) unfortunately omitted the Tandem Taxi Service. This service, which has gained international recognition, is unique to the UO, but many people still do not know about us. We use bicycles built for two and three to help get people where they need to go. You can ride on our bikes, we will ride along side of you if you are concerned about riding your bike at night, or we will walk with you. Call on us any evening from 8:30 p.m. to 11:15 p.m. The service is free of

charge and unlike the other services mentioned in the article, we can usually meet you within a few minutes of your call.

We want your ideas for ways to serve even more transportation needs. Please call us if you would like a ride, have suggestions or want more info. Contact us at 346-TAXI (346-8294) or bikes@oregon.uoregon.edu. Look for our table at the Solar Fair (April 17) and at the First Annual UO Bike Expo (April 24).

David Niles

Tandem Taxi Coordinator

Pesticide awareness

All students at this University should have an awareness and understanding of pesticide use in the United States. Unfortunately, the average citizen does not know of the implications of pesticide use, nor do they have the right to know about quantities and types of pesticides used on foods they eat. How many people know that most pesticides are chemical derivatives of human-killing nerve gases used in the world wars? How many know that pesticides have been found in our very own

Willamette River? How many dare think about the millions of pounds of these chemicals that are used in this country annually?

On a statewide level, OSPIRG is currently pushing for the citizens' right to know about pesticide use. To do this effectively, we need the help of the student body at the University. We need informed students who understand the issues surrounding pesticides and their use. For the benefit of students and faculty, OSPIRG has coordinated a Pesticide Educational Forum this Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. in the EMU Ben Linder Room. Anyone who is concerned about pesticides and their human and environmental effects is highly encouraged to attend this informative seminar.

Eric Colbeck
 Environmental Studies

Shifting tax burden

In recent years, I have seen an enormous shift of the tax burden to those least able to pay, while corporations have been given large tax breaks and are not paying their share.

In addition, we have taken

much of the funding away from very necessary services such as schools, health care, protection of watersheds, child care, support for children (especially those in single-parent families), environmental protection (including protection of our dwindling salmon resources) and necessary governmental activities.

Instead, we are promoting more prisons and more harsh punishments of young people. Before long, those services that might address prevention and encouraging youth will have been zapped, and we will find that we can no longer afford the "law and order" services, including prisons.

It would be far better to fund services that would help to prevent this sad state of affairs and help people feel they have a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

I hope that we will address these problems in a positive way before the situation becomes even more critical and that we will distribute the tax burden fairly.

Portia Foster
 Eugene