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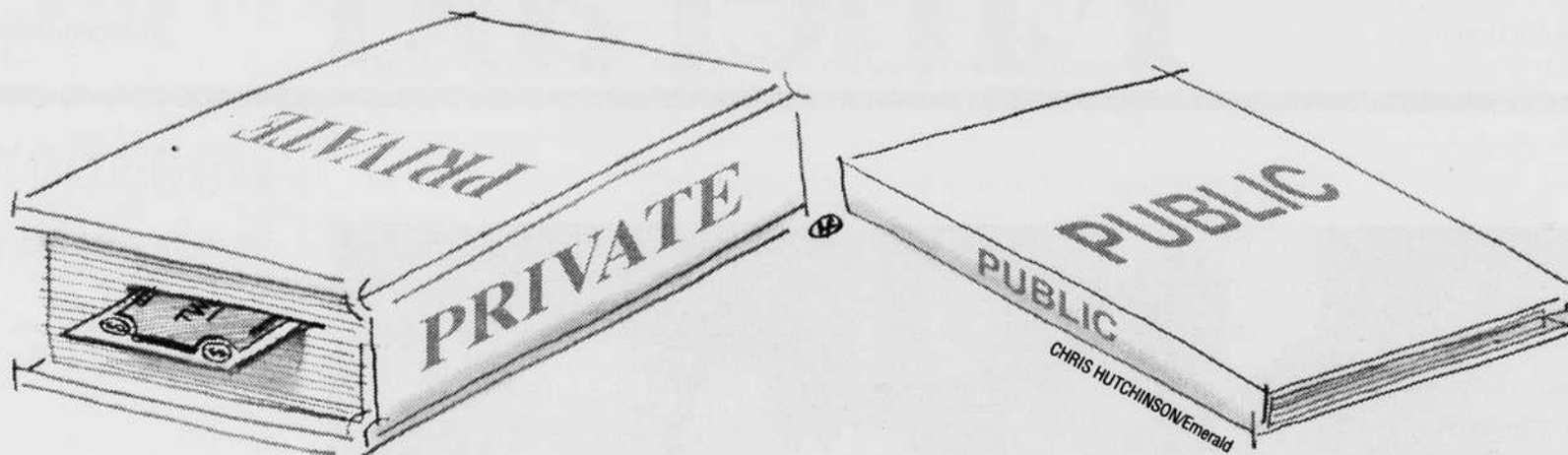
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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Senseless squabbling won't save schools



*A GOP proposal for tax-free savings accounts provides campaign rhetoric but no solution*

**H**ave you every willingly engaged in a discussion with someone who you and your friends secretly despise? Stop hedging and just admit that you have and that you know exactly why you did it. One of the great traditions of human interaction is the superfluous conversation. Even if you don't use that particular terminology, you know what I mean.

They're those conversations that you enter into only because you know you'll be able to build a much better conversation around them later.

No where is superfluous conversation more conspicuously practiced than in American electoral politics. As a case in point, witness the current congressional flap about education.

Last Thursday, the Senate passed a Republican-backed bill that would allow the establishment of special ac-

counts for education. The interest on these accounts would be tax free and the money could be applied to private-school tuition. President Clinton, whose own set of education proposals was rejected during the same session, has vowed to veto the bill.

It would be easy to lump this debate in with the rest of the verbal noise that spews forth from the floor of Congress, but unlike the majority of political squabbles the government engages in, this one is actually about an important issue.

In fact, education is arguably the most important issue facing Americans today. Yet there has been a consistent pattern of failure on the part of the government to address the problems facing education in any way that comes close to being rational or effective.

The schools that are worst off in terms of resources tend to serve the people who are worst off in terms of resources. Yet the backers of this bill would have us believe that it's feasible for these people to find \$2,000 a year to pay for private schools. This begs the obvious question: If families

whose children are languishing in substandard, often dangerous schools could afford to set aside such a sum, wouldn't their children already be in private schools? The obvious answer: Yes. Indeed, the families who would reap the most benefit if this bill were actually enacted would be the ones who already have children enrolled in private schools.

That having been said, let's get to the real issue. Congress' plan is most notable for its complete and utter failure to apply the most elementary principles of logic. And the Republicans themselves are fully aware of this. You can tell they are aware by looking at some of the embarrassingly thin arguments that have been used to support their proposal. These include the assertion that schools are subject to market forces; therefore, the bill would force public schools to improve by introducing the element of competition.

Yes, the Republicans know that their attempt to privatize education is terminally flawed, and they know that it's fated for a quick presidential veto. Moreover, they know that it

wouldn't work anyway. And you know what else? They don't care. They don't care because this whole debate has been an exercise in superfluous conversation — a way to give them something to talk about when election season rolls around.

To be fair, it should be noted that Democrats have engaged in their fair share of bombast as well. Even as recent studies point to an increase in the number of American schools that are literally falling down around students and teachers, Al Gore is vowing to wire them all to the Internet.

Fixing education is going to be hard. It's going to take a lot of time and cost a lot of money. And it needs to start now. If America waits until the elections have been decided and the volume of political posturing has died down to consider our options, there won't be any left.

*Kameron Cole is a columnist for the Emerald. Her work appears on alternate Wednesdays. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.*

**OPINION**



**Kameron Cole**

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**Control spending**

If successful, the McCartan campaign for ASUO Executive would have set a benchmark for future hopefuls as to how much money should be spent in pursuit of a desired outcome. There is some irony in the observation that the campaign that promised so many changes on campus is resorting to the standard tactic that exists in politics today — he who spends the most money wins.

In defense of McCartan, I think she was a worthy candidate and had plenty of excellent references. Her grades and accomplishments can speak for themselves, and being a part of all those committees presumably means that she cares about what happens on campus. However, I see no defense for the manner in which the McCartan campaign was run. Those involved obviously know how people function and felt that by spending money on two \$500 full-page Emerald advertisements plus five dozen T-shirts and a handful of other creative items, their shot at winning the election would greatly increase. While some of the campaign methods were inventive

and amusing, the level the promotion obtained was stupefying. In my opinion, calling a private residence to request a vote is unacceptable.

Currently there is no limit on the amount of money a student can spend on his or her campaign. Perhaps this is because the McCartan campaign was the first one to challenge the ethical limits of the influence of money on the elections. As a result, I see two paths that the students here can take. The first is to ignore what happened this year and allow future classes to use this election as a reference for what must be done in order to win. The other is to place a limit on the amount of money that can be spent during a campaign in order to preserve any of the integrity found in student government — integrity that appears to be lost in state and federal politics.

**Ryan Troseth**  
Economics

**Unethical funding**

Both your columnists Jeff Shaw and Hannah Dillon reliably raise crucial issues and make the intelligent reader stop and think. They are fine journalists and their columns

alone make the ODE worth reading.

Shaw's latest piece, "Dealing with the Defense Department," (ODE, April 22) was a call to the two-edged sword of contemplation and action if ever there was one. Shaw shared some very troubling quotations of justification: "The reason I have no problem taking military money is because they let me do the science," says Matt Ginsberg, founder of the Computational Intelligence Research Lab. For a moment I thought I was reading Dr. Josef Mengele explaining why he was happy to do Herr Hitler's research. Oh, some will say, that was a different time and place. Yet if you stand in the shoes of Iraqi children or balance on the crutches of the countless land-mine casualties around the world — all courtesy of U.S. military-funded "science" — you'll get a pretty good idea of what it may have been like to be taking a ride in the Nazi cattle cars.

But why stop with Pentagon money? By Ginsberg's amoral logic, if the Unabomber could have kicked in enough money, campus labs would have helped him design more efficient "devices." Hold on, this ques-

tion was answered for us by David Etherington, CIRL director. "The federal government is far more able to provide research funding than, say, Federal Express would be." Well, it may look like easy money, but guess whose money it is? The feds being so willing to throw our hard-earned tax dollars at scientists without ethics or principles somehow does not make it easier for me to accept. How about the rest of you, University community?

**Vip Short**  
Eugene

**Democracy wins**

In 1971, OSPIRG was created to challenge the status quo. Since then, unfortunately, they have become the status quo through monopolistic politics to the tune of \$147,000. Therefore, I would like to congratulate my fellow University students for courageously accepting the challenge set forth by the Honesty Campaign, for taking control of our incidental burden and voting no on OSPIRG. Democracy is victorious today.

**Will Arnold**  
Residence Hall Association ASPAC Representative

**CORRECTION**

In the story "OPS officer files discrimination suit" (ODE, April 28), it should have read the investigator "interviewed 16 individuals and received extensive written information from one former employee of OPS" and found that Williams was not promoted due to his performance. In addition, the speaker in the pull quote on Page 1 should have been identified as James Williams.

The Emerald regrets the errors.