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The STAR-BLOCKING BANNER

Plans to place a flag on Skinner Butte are fine, as long as they address concerns about aesthetics and light pollution

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

Some cities strive for consensus. Eugene appears to strive for controversy.

The latest hastily assembled battle is over a proposal by local veterans and others in the community to place a large flag on top of Skinner Butte as a war memorial. This flag would replace a massive cross that stood on the site until common sense and the Constitution prevailed and a judge ordered the religious marker removed from public land.

To some extent, the fight over the cross was understandable. Those opposed to the cross had a solid legal and ethical basis for their arguments, and those who supported it saw the removal as a slight to firmly held personal beliefs and to the veterans whom the cross supposedly honored.

The new fight is somewhat more absurd. Flag opponents have complained that Eugene would look like a military installation, while supporters have spouted patriotic rhetoric and hidden themselves in the symbolism of the flag. If both sides would use a little common sense, they would realize the idea of a modest display is a reasonable one.

Opponents of the flag have raised several important questions, the most significant of which concerns light pollution. If the flag is of the size and height currently proposed — 20 feet by 38 feet

in size and on a 100-foot pole — it would be too difficult to raise and lower it each day. That would require the flag being lit at night, as regulations require.

The bright, upward-pointed spotlights required to illuminate a flag of that size would contribute greatly to light pollution in the Eugene area. Such pollution is a concern for local and international groups around the world.

Those groups worry about light pollution for several reasons. Aesthetically, electrically lit skies cover up stars and cheapen the appearance of an area. At a more practical level, the cost of essentially wasted illumination is high — as much as \$1 billion a year, according to the International Dark-Skies Association.

Also troublesome, especially in a university community, is that light pollution makes astronomy difficult. Bright city lights blot out previously bright astronomical objects.

Several council members also complained, accurately, that a 100-foot-high flagpole would be out of scale with Skinner Butte and the area as a whole. Perhaps, as Register-Guard columnist Don Bishoff suggested, giant flags are best left to used-car lots and fast-food restaurants.

Then, of course, there was councilwoman Betty Taylor's infamous remark that the flag would make Eugene

look like a military outpost. Veterans, with some justification, were upset, but the reaction was far beyond what the innocently intended remark warranted.

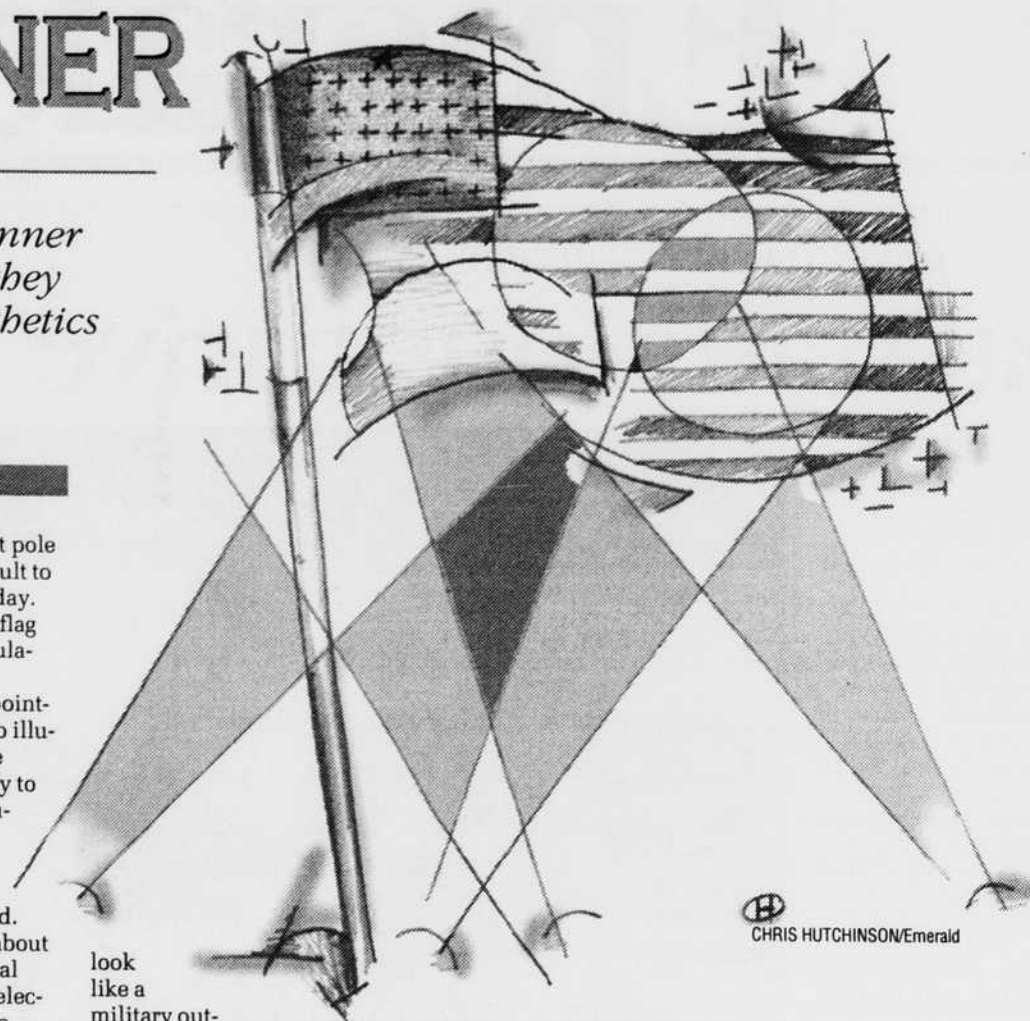
Of course, a monument to war veterans would have military undertones. And, of course, many Americans, with justification, see the flag as a symbol of U.S. aggression and imperialism. The flag wasn't intended for those Americans — it is supposed to be a reminder of the admirable service done by veterans, who didn't choose the conflicts they fought in or the way they would be waged.

Veterans and council opponents of Taylor could have, quite reasonably, pointed that out. Instead, they muttered angrily under their breath and spoke angrily out loud. Councilman Pat Farr was quoted in The Register-Guard as saying Taylor's statement was "repugnant."

Significantly more repugnant than Taylor's comment is the concept that anything less than total adoration of the flag — any flag, no matter how tall or out of place — is treason. Americans should have the right to salute the flag and the right not to — otherwise it loses any symbolic meaning it has left.

More unnecessary squabbling will undoubtedly ensue when the proposal comes up at a public hearing. For some reason, Eugene appears to feel aimless without a Skinner Butte controversy to distract the public's attention.

We certainly don't support every military and political action taken by the U.S. government. Nevertheless, we understand why the flag



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

would be an appropriate symbol to honor veterans, who certainly deserve credit.

If private money is available to build the monument, and if the project can be adequately small to address aesthetic concerns and ensure the flag will come down at night, we see no reason why the council shouldn't stop fighting about a hill and plant a flag at the top instead.

Consider it a monument to community cooperation. Now maybe the council can worry about growth, multinational corporations, the continuing decay of the environment and the civil liberties of Eugene residents.

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

Thumbs



TO BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Everybody's buddy Bibi is holding up the Middle East peace process. His latest move was to refuse to concede to a U.S. demand to make plans for a small pullout from what will be Palestinian territory. Talks are, accordingly, stalled. While Netanyahu and the Israeli government are certainly in a position to shove the Palestinians around because of their military advantage, the moral imperative to obey U.N. and U.S. demands for good-faith negotiating ought to nag at the Israeli leader.

TO U.S. SENATE APPROVAL OF NATO EXPANSION: Despite objections raised by liberal and conservative leaders, foreign-policy pundits and several major newspapers, senators approving the military blanket of NATO over three more nations. As the Emerald argued earlier, expansion could potentially cost the U.S. billions — senators rejected a move to limit America's potential economic liability — and risk angering Russia, a nuclear power that should be made to feel welcome, not isolated, in the midst of its ongoing economic crisis.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Riverfront feedback

I am a member of a committee that was recently formed by University President Dave Frohnmayer to review the proposed expansion of the Riverfront Research Park. The committee is seeking written input from students and the community on any matter related to the research park. We recognize the strong need for feedback from the people who will be affected by this expansion and invite anyone with arguments related to the development to submit them to us in writing. In particular, we are interested in reasoned arguments that add to the already substantial dialogue that currently exists. These arguments may be incorporated into the report that we present to the president. In addition, those with especially compelling arguments may be invited to speak at a

committee hearing. Statements can be sent to: rreview@lists.uoregon.edu or Riverfront Research Park Review Committee, c/o President's Office, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403.

Michelle Johnston
 Student Senate President

Moral standards change

I would like to take issue with at least one point made by Gordon Melby in his letter (ODE, May 4).

Cultures, like life forms, tend to change over time to suit new conditions.

This is called evolution, a concept which admittedly may be difficult for some believers in the god of "Abraham, Moses," et al (and for that matter Inquisitors, witch-hunters and Klansmen) to accept, but the evidence, both in the written and

the fossil records respectively, overwhelmingly indicates that indeed such processes take place.

When these changes are rapid and profound, conflict, even violence, often results. Those who adhere to the "old ways" thus unfailingly utter thundering pomposities alluding to "a complete breakdown of moral standards," when what is actually occurring is a shift from an outdated system of ethics to one which is hopefully more appropriate for the times.

More simply put, moral standards do not vanish, they merely transform. And if one loudly chooses not to subscribe to the new code, well, then one becomes a member of "a large, vocal minority" oneself.

Bill Smee
 Public Safety