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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Kitzhaber could leave many hungry

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

A recent move by the governor has increased the destructive forces of welfare reform

It just doesn't make any sense. Admittedly, Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber has long played the role of maverick, often diverging from party lines to act as a populist. And Oregon has long treasured its position outside of the political norms, with a high number of independent voters and a record of unique approaches to national problems — Oregon's health care plan, the bottle bill and a high minimum wage.

Nevertheless, none of that would have suggested that Kitzhaber would sell out the working poor in 23 Oregon counties by refusing to apply for a waiver that would have guaranteed them continued food stamps.

Kitzhaber's record as governor is certainly not unimpeachable, and this one act doesn't suggest he should or shouldn't be reelected in November. Overall, however, he has tended to support the individual over the interests of federal regulators or state business owners.

By refusing the request of Oregon politicians, anti-hunger advocates and poor individuals to apply for extended benefits, however, Kitzhaber has insanely attempted to preserve the state's anti-welfare image at the cost of hungry people's health and survival.

The issue hinges upon the governor's decision to not request extension of federal food stamps for unemployed recipients in 23 counties with high unemployment — counties considered to have a "labor surplus."

As explained by Harry Esteve in the May 12 Register-Guard, unemployed single adults in areas not receiving a waiver lost food stamps on April 1. By not applying for the extended waiver, Kitzhaber has doomed the entire state to that fate.

In a story in a recent issue of The Nation, Oregonian columnist David Sarasohn detailed the heavy burden welfare reform has already placed upon regional food banks. According to Sarasohn, as more people are pushed off of federal aid, food-providing charities are worried they will be unable to

find even minimal nourishment for thousands of needy individuals and families.

Kitzhaber has placed rural, unemployed Oregonians who cannot find adequate work and therefore cannot afford to eat on top of that already expanding burden. Because the people in question are young and single, they will receive low priority with charities and are therefore that much more likely to starve.

Kitzhaber's move is part of a growing trend of administrators and politicians to place the blame for poverty on the poor and to drive individuals and families off welfare and into the work force, often with disastrous results. His move doesn't make sense at either a practical or a political level.

Politically, Kitzhaber is seizing the ground of right-wing politicians, such as Bill Sizemore, who oppose any government action that doesn't help big business. Voters who suddenly vote for Kitzhaber because of this one move. Instead, those voters who believe in helping workers and providing reasonable and fair government aid for those who truly need it are likely to become frustrated with Kitzhaber, much the way radical Democrats were furious with President Clinton after he signed the Welfare Reform Act in 1996.

At a practical level, the anti-welfare policy trend makes little sense. Food stamps and other welfare services account for a tiny percentage of federal expenditures — the military budget eclipses spending on major welfare programs dozens of times over.

Moreover, in saturated labor markets such as the ones for which Kitzhaber declined to request a waiver, forcing the poor to work does little to help the individual or the community. The food stamp recipients in this case are single, but welfare reform also targets single parents and families, for whom work is all but impossible.

Because there is no federal provision for childcare, parents driven from the dole face an impossible choice — go to work at a job that doesn't provide adequate money to fund childcare and provide food and housing for a family (especially once you consider that employed parents are almost

never eligible for welfare benefits), or stay at home and lose federal benefits because of welfare "reform."

There is nothing wrong with the premise that all able-bodied adults ought to be able to find jobs. There is something wrong with the approach that has been taken to work by policy reformers in recent years.

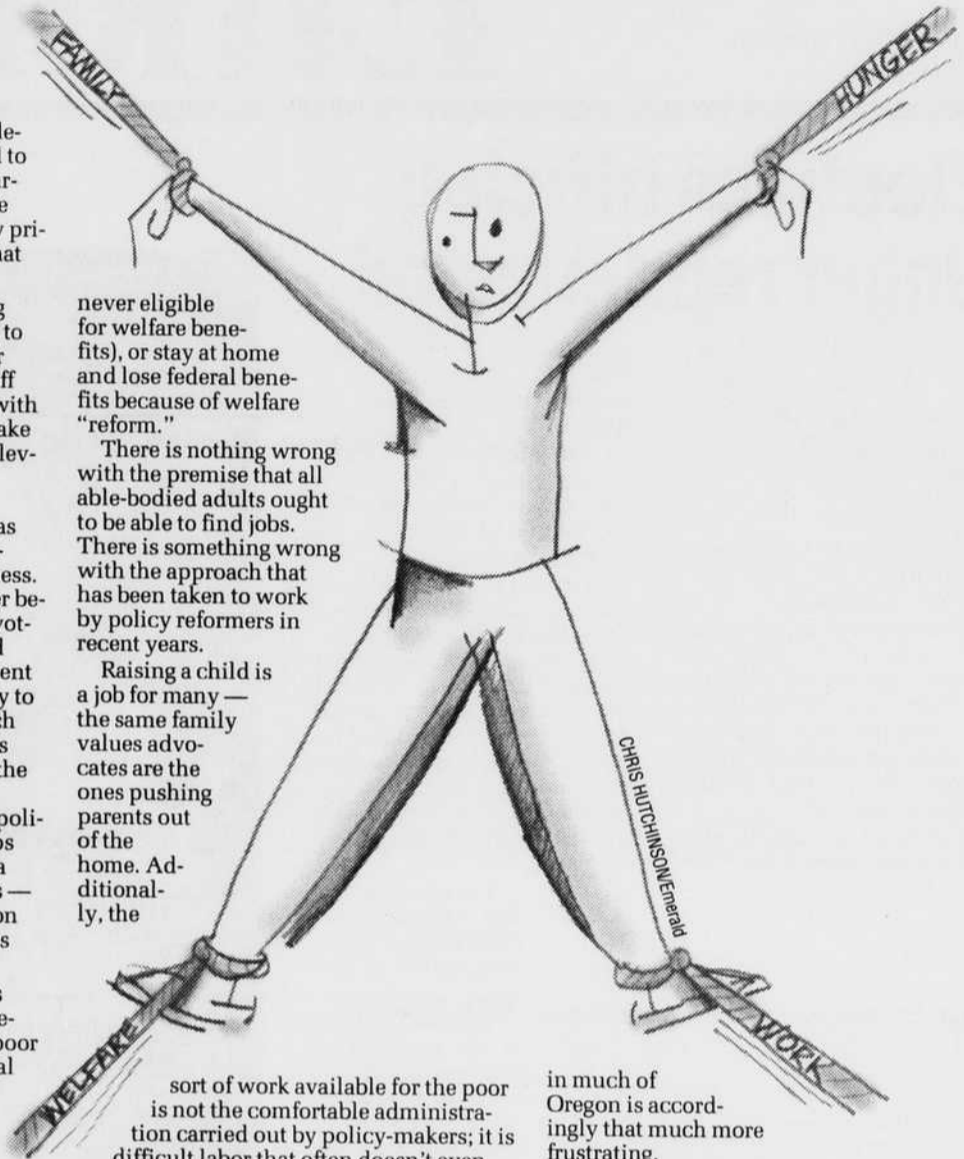
Raising a child is a job for many — the same family values advocates are the ones pushing parents out of the home. Additionally, the sort of work available for the poor is not the comfortable administration carried out by policy-makers; it is difficult labor that often doesn't even pay a living wage.

Until childcare is provided by the federal government, wages are high enough to live on and better job opportunities are available, denying workers food stamps and other welfare benefits is a destructive practice. Kitzhaber should know this, and his apparent denial of the reality of poverty

in much of Oregon is accordingly that much more frustrating.

Federal money for the poor is rare enough these days. It's too bad that in Oregon something even rarer has turned up — a governor too strong willed to take the money when it is available.

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



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Community qualifications

David Sarasohn wrote in The Oregonian on April 14 a convincing editorial about the unintended consequences of the University of California's repeal of affirmative action as one criteria for selecting new students. In a very short, hard-hitting statement, he describes the tremendous damage done to the enrollment mix brought about by relying upon "academic merit," i.e. SAT scores, as the single most important criterion for judging high school graduates' qualification to enter the University. He challenges the institution's continuing place as the state's "university" when it defaults to serve only the state's intellectual elite and brings reality to his argument by citing a short history of the two key players in the Bakke decision, a reverse discrimination lawsuit wherein Bakke, a white student, displaced a black student at UC Davis. Both went on to earn medical degrees. Mr. Bakke is now employed in Wisconsin as a medical researcher, while the black student practices hands-on medicine in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles County. Using SAT scores as the sole criteria for entrance would in all likelihood deny that black student entrance to the University today. Mr. Sarasohn leaves his reader with the obvious conclusion that wherever society requires a license to serve, i.e. a college education, it needs to make sure that the entrance qualifications fit the needs of the profession and the entire community and not simply the inappropriate attention to an intellectual ideal.

Kenneth Jones  
 Eugene

Progressive Oregon

I spent the first 18 years of my life in Eugene and would have agreed with your assessment of Oregon as more or less conservative for most of those 18 years. Spending the last two years in Colorado, however, has changed my mind completely. The Oregon Health Plan, the Death with

Dignity Act, Ron Wyden and Peter DeFazio, no self-serve and no sales tax have given us a reputation, at least in Colorado, as being a liberal state. If you want more proof, compare Oregon to the states around it. Washington has Slade Gordon, one of the most conservative congressmen around. Idaho has LAPD retirees. California has Prop 187. Utah has Orrin Hatch. I think Oregon has plenty of points of pride, and it's about time we started recognizing it.

Mike Myers  
 Denver

Take back the night

In a society where one in three women will be raped in their lifetime, something must change. In a society where rape myths are still firmly believed, there is a need for education. In a society where a woman is raped every six minutes, there is a need for action.

Rape is any unwanted sexual intercourse. Rape is about power and violence. A survivor is never at fault for a rape; in rape the fault lies only with the rapist. Between 80 percent and 88 percent of rapes are date and acquaintance rape. Date and acquaintance rape are also violence, not a difference of opinion. No always means no, and silence does not equal consent. We must all educate ourselves about rape and sexual assault and then take action to bring about change. For, in one way or another, sexual violence touches all of us.

May is Sexual Assault Awareness Month — 31 days in which we can focus our efforts on sexual-assault education, prevention, awareness and activism. The Take Back the Night march takes place during this month. 1998 is the 20th anniversary of the march, which has come to symbolize women protesting all forms of oppression, rape and sexual assault in particular. Take Back the Night is a time for women to walk through the streets of Eugene — one night without fear — protesting violence and making their voices heard.

Take Back the Night, on Thursday, begins at 8 p.m. at the EMU Amphitheater with a rally and then a march to the East Park Block at 8th Avenue and Oak Street, where there will be a speak-out. To the women of Eugene: Please come and share your voices.

Rebecca Farmer  
 English/Women's Studies

'Seinfeld' defense

On behalf of "Seinfeld" fans everywhere, I would like to respond to Kameron Cole's column on the show (ODE, May 13). Never before have I witnessed such an embarrassing display of unsubstantiated generalizations. Her message is clear: We "Seinfeld" fans are mindless consumers of "pop culture," with nothing better to do than watch a "show about nothing." And it is apparent that Cole views herself above the popular culture. That is fine. Nobody is required to like "Seinfeld." But I suggest she watch the show before she offers her insight.

By representing all of pop culture in a single stroke, she denies the consumer of pop the intelligence required to distinguish quality programming from poor programming. Am I really "defined by something as trivial as a television series"? I am not, but I would expect such rash judgments from someone who, with a straight face, can say that the '90s — an entire decade — are "a decade about nothing." Nothing?

Cole states that pop culture "is not representative of a majority of people." This is not news. The American people are too diverse, too complex and too real to be "represented" on television. Cole's notion of a '90s "homogenization" is a myth. "Seinfeld" is popular precisely because it does not pretend to represent the higher moral virtues Cole seems to expect from television. It's entertainment. Too bad Cole has missed the fun.

Damon Pavaglio  
 English