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Make the mailbox a ballot box

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

Tuesday's election demonstrates the cost and inconvenience of a polling-place election

Remember election day? Sitting around the television, watching results come in, cheering when the right candidates won, booing when they didn't? Little graphics that appeared at the bottom of the screen, telling you that, with 70 or 80 percent of the precincts reporting in, so-and-so was the next such-and-such?

None of that made a regular appearance Tuesday evening. Granted, it was only a primary. Granted, most of the "important" races were uncontested, and there was only one statewide ballot measure. Granted, people just don't care about the process like they ought to.

Nevertheless, the biggest reason is that this election was "a dysfunctional, costly mess," according to a quote from Secretary of State Phil Keisling in Wednesday's Register-Guard.

Although it was officially a traditional polling-place election, more than 60 percent of ballots cast in the primary were sent in by mail, according to The Register-Guard. In order to ensure people didn't vote twice (by mail and at the polls), county elections officials didn't start counting absentee ballots until they had recorded all non-mail votes.

This left candidates, reporters and political observers wondering just what had happened. While some races were obvious,

most close contests remained unresolved well into Wednesday.

It also left state elections officials staggered by the cost of the whole affair, despite the fact that turnout was near a record low. According to The Register-Guard, Keisling reports that the \$4 million price tag was more than twice what a purely vote-by-mail election would have cost.

The solution should be obvious. A vote-by-mail only election would have eliminated confusion — thereby increasing turnout — and lowered the cost of the election. It would also have allowed workers to begin counting the ballots earlier, meaning candidates and the public would have a clear idea of who won and lost on the night of the election.

Keisling has long been an advocate of mail-in elections. Despite his position and the clear practical reason for going to vote-by-mail, Republican legislators worked to block a proposal to make the switch during the 1997 state Legislature session.

All the blame doesn't rest with the GOP, however. According to The Register-Guard, Gov. Kitzhaber vetoed a vote-by-mail bill that was passed two years earlier.

It doesn't make sense. In another Keisling quote from The Register-Guard, he sums up the absurdity of continuing

polling place elections nicely: "It's irrational and absurd to have this hybrid system."

Another opportunity for change is coming up. Keisling and the League of Women Voters are collecting signatures to place a measure on the November ballot that would mandate vote-by-mail elections.

Unfortunately, according to a Register-Guard editorial, this effort has collected less than half the 73,600 signatures needed to place the measure on the fall ballot. This is due in part to the coalition's refusal to use paid signature gatherers — an admirable stance.

The group is looking for citizens to help gather signatures in time to make the July 2 deadline. Students interested in the political process should consider helping; the group can be contacted toll-free at 1-877-868-3826.

At the very least, registered Oregon voters should add their own names to the stack of signatures. The money needed to run a more expensive election is your money, and the cost of voter apathy is a less effective system.

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

Thumbs



To Take Back the Night:

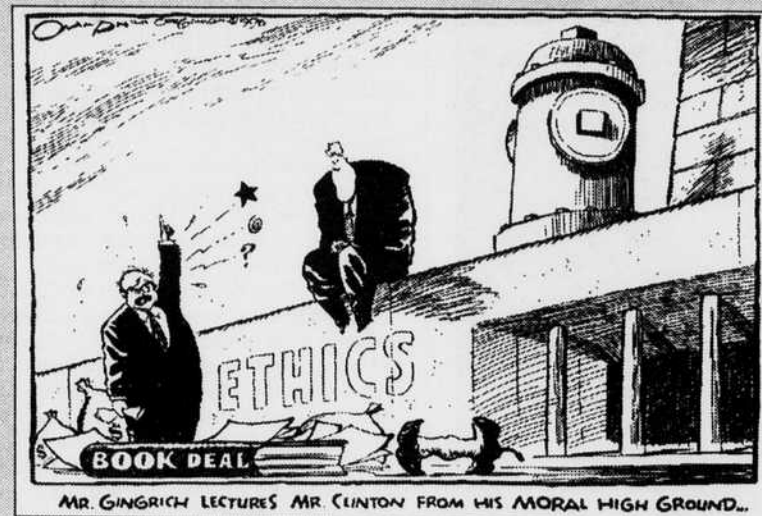
The idea behind this event is admirable and the format necessary. While it isn't true for all women at all times, many women often feel afraid to be out alone at night. No one should have to restrict their activities out of fear. Take Back the Night, which will gather between 6:45 p.m. and 9 p.m. tonight in the EMU Amphitheater, is an opportunity to protest that fear. Therefore, it makes sense that the event require men interested in supporting the movement to march separately from women — anything else would miss the point. Women should be able to walk on their own; an effective protest thus involves women marching on their own.



To Oliver North:

North compared Oregon and its legalization of assisted suicide to Nazi euthanasia practices twice during a speech. This is troublesome for two reasons. For one thing, Oregon's law doesn't allow euthanasia, in which a doctor actively ends the life of a terminally ill patient. Instead, assisted suicide requires a patient to take the fatal dose of medication. Additionally, the comparison is insulting to Oregon voters and offensive to those who survived Nazi Germany. It has become far too common for politicians and activists to rely upon comparisons to Nazi practices, which has the effect of dulling people's sense of how horrific the actual events of World War II and the Holocaust were.

DRAWING BOARD



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hallelujah Herald

Editor and publisher Tony Baker calls his newspaper The Register-Guard. Some Lane County freethinkers wryly refer to the lopsidedly evangelistic diurnal as the Hallelujah Herald. This sobriquet has its genesis not only in the plethora of front-page opinion pieces authored by piety promoter Jeff Wright, but also in clericalist editorials such as the one titled "Good ruling on scouts" that aptly appeared on April Fool's Day.

The Register-Guard, to use Baker's appellation, contends that deputy superintendent of public instruction Greg McMurdo is correct in viewing the Boy Scouts of America as essentially secular despite the fact that the youth organization's leaders — through blackballing and expulsion — preach intolerance for all who are not heterosexual adherents to a theistic religion. Eugene's daily newspaper thereby encourages the state Department of Education to bulldoze a gaping hole in the First Amendment by continuing to allow the BSA to use the public schools for recruitment campaigns that inevitably result in the indoctrination of youngsters with fundamentalist bigotry.

While defending McMurdo's flawed interpretation of church-state separation, the intrepid pal-

adins on The Register-Guard's editorial board offer absolutely no opinion about the ethicality of the Boy Scouts' discriminatory practices, which are clearly based on religious dogma.

A newspaper does not take a stand by burying its masthead in the sands of tacit approval. If The Register-Guard supports the BSA's brainwashing of Oregon schoolchildren with intolerance for non-theistic Theravada Buddhists, agnostics, secular humanists, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and other minorities, the publication should speak out and say so.

Ron Black
 Junction City

Change rape education

Throughout this school year, I have watched the blundering of various women's services on campus, hoping that eventually they would stumble onto a rational path. However, May 18's display of deep and meaningful T-shirts convinced me that they really have gone off the deep end. The techniques of the Women's Center and its affiliates portray women as victims and men as a malevolent race, some of whom can be acceptable after they have been properly trained.

I find these ideas offensive and incorrect. Rape

is an extremely traumatizing experience, and because of this, the causes of rape need to be identified, and all women should be able to defend themselves and, if assaulted, go immediately to the police, prosecute the male and begin the healing process. All this is a given, but like any other shattering experience, after a certain point life must go on and wallowing is counter-productive. Judging from reactions I have seen and heard, your manner of dealing with the issue is off-putting at least.

Nowhere have I seen an ad for a forum dealing with why rape and sexual assault occurs, and interestingly enough I have never seen a workshop or anything else for women who falsely accuse men of rape. This occurs frequently and is just as psychologically damaging to men as the act of rape is to women. How do you expect to empower women and gain respect if you cannot even allow for the possibility that men are not beasts? The message you are sending right now is that women are victims and men are evil, and this is demoralizing to the student body. I would suggest rethinking your tactics, since no one could find fault with your cause.

Kate Queary
 History