

Oregon shaken by shooting

The tragedy has affected people from all over the state, including Gov. John Kitzhaber

By Michael Hines
Student Activities Reporter

Sometimes the grief comes shining through, even with the toughest of people.

Tom Hambly, the emergency room manager at McKenzie-Willamette Hospital, dabbed tears from his eyes Thursday evening as he described the heart-wrenching scene unfolding inside.

"It's my job to be strong and tough," said the 26-year trauma veteran, "but there is no way you can be strong when it involves kids."

The tragedy, which left one student dead and another in a deep, irretrievable coma, has reaction gushing from the community, state and country.

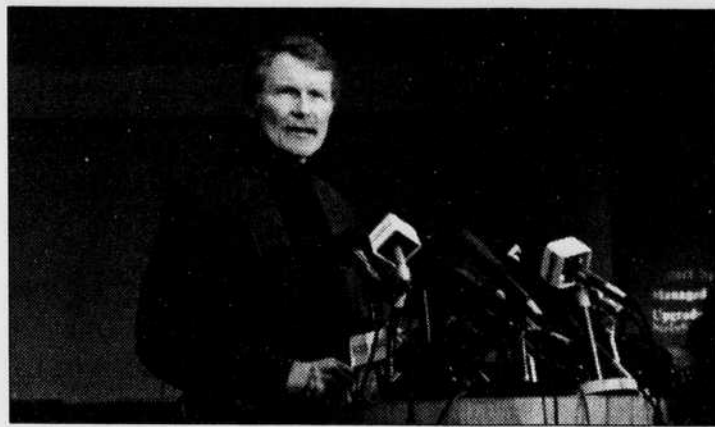
The visibly shaken Oregon governor and state school superintendent addressed a crowd of reporters at a 4 p.m. news conference in Springfield City Hall.

"I would simply like to ask that all Oregonians take a moment from their busy schedules today to offer prayer in their own way to the victims and their friends," said Gov. John Kitzhaber. He only answered three questions from reporters before leaving the news conference.

This incident is evidence that society is failing, he said.

"The fact is this is not just a school problem. This is a much larger issue," Kitzhaber said. "I think we need to ask ourselves: What kind of despair drives children to this kind of violence?" He asked Oregonians to "personally connect" with the shooting by openly and honestly asking themselves questions about society.

"The school and the system have responded well so far," said Norma Paulus, state school superintendent. "This is not a school problem."



LAURA GOSS/Emerald

Governor John Kitzhaber speaks at a press conference Thursday.

The shooting suspect, Thurston High School freshman Kipland Kinkel, had been arrested at school Wednesday for possessing a handgun and was released to the custody of his parents.

Paulus, who was clutching a package of Kleenex and fighting back tears during the press conference, said she was satisfied with how the school district handled the situation, but she questioned past legislative decisions.

"We've built prisons," Paulus said, "but we haven't taken care of our children."

Early in the day, President Clinton called Springfield Mayor Bill Morrisette to express his condolences.

"I appreciate the outpouring of sympathy, support and understanding for what has happened," Morrisette said. "We need to go back and look at what are the most important things in our community."

The fact is, officials said, there is little schools can do to prevent this kind of problem.

"There is no way to prevent anything like this from happening," Morrisette said, "so we must be vigilant, and that's what we will do."

Oregon law says the state cannot sentence juveniles to the death penalty. One reporter asked Kitzhaber if he felt this case calls

the law into question, but the governor refused to discuss the topic.

Another reporter asked Paulus, who only took two questions, if she feels gun control should be stricter. She answered with an impassioned "Yes."

Thurston High School teachers spent Thursday with five to seven counselors to deal with their own grief and to prepare for counseling sessions with students at Thurston Middle School today. Classes were not regularly scheduled for today.

"Today, the primary charge is one of healing, and one of mourning to try to reach out and offer support to the victims and their families and their friends," Kitzhaber said.

"I believe that this society owes it to itself, to its children, and to its future to make a commitment to prevention that is equally as serious as the commitment we have made to punishment."

Before updating the press on the condition of the victims, Peace Health spokesman Kurt Roberts said he also felt unsettled because he has three young boys. "It really touches me deeply to recognize and realize that this kind of tragedy can come to our community," he said.

The tragedy hit everyone hard — even 26-year veterans like the heartbroken Hambly.

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Another Wells Fargo Bank branch robbed

The second robbery of a Eugene-area Wells Fargo Bank branch occurred Thursday afternoon, this time at the 710 Polk St. branch.

At 3:27 p.m., a lone male suspect entered the branch and presented a demand note. Witnesses did not see a gun. The suspect left the bank with an

undetermined amount of money and was last seen headed east.

The suspect is described as a white male in his early 20s, 5 feet 4 inches tall, having a thin build, short brown hair and a beard. He was last seen wearing a red and white hooded sweatshirt and dark pants.

On Tuesday afternoon, the Wells Fargo branch at 207 Coburg Road was also robbed.

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