

PERSPECTIVES

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ILLADVISED AGENDA

Republican lawmakers in Salem are out of line in attempts to cut low-income students from the Oregon Health Plan

Did you hear the one about the college student who became sickly ill, then had to drop out of school because she didn't have proper health insurance?

Sorry, there is no punch line because that potential scenario is no joke.

In fact, if Republican lawmakers in Salem have their way and eliminate low-income students from the Oregon Health Plan, the above script will likely become a common occurrence.

The GOP says it can save the state about \$3.4 million by yanking coverage from 1,700 students. To be eligible for the OHP, a student must be uninsured, meet the plan's income requirements and also qualify for a Pell Grant, which puts that person pretty low on the income scale. Individuals must earn no more than a three-month average of \$687 per month, based on the month they apply and the two previous months. A family of three is al-

lowed to make a measly \$1,157.

Cutting health access for this group is like operating without anesthesia: it's definitely going to hurt like hell.

Do you wanna know the truly sneaky aspect behind this whole idea? The legislators waited until spring term ended, when most students had either already graduated or put their brains on autopilot for the summer, before they announced the cuts. Talk about pulling a fast one.

In addition to a backstabbing approach, at least one politician took a patronizing tone with the issue and its intended victims. Sen. Eileen Qutub, (R-Beaverton), chairwoman of the Human Resources Subcommittee of the Joint Ways and Means Committee, said last week, "[Students] just are a less-vulnerable population. They get riled up real quick because they're young and can be easily influenced."

You know, if the state Legislature had fewer

extraneous subcommittees for every damn suspicious-sounding committee, maybe there would be more money in the budget.

Students have a few do-gooders working for the status quo. Gov. John Kitzhaber wants to keep students on the plan, according to Mark Gibson, policy adviser for health care and human resources. Also, Oregon Student Association representatives are speaking their mind while encouraging others to do the same. Last Wednesday, OSA held a press conference in Salem with speakers from three different state schools.

"This could be forcing [students] to choose between comprehensive health care and their education," said Kellie Shoemaker, legislative director for OSA.

In addition, some Democrats are standing up to the big baddies from the dark side.

"Students have to be eligible for the Pell Grant, which means

that they are really poor," said Rep. Barbara Ross, D-Corvallis. "They don't have a lot of resources."

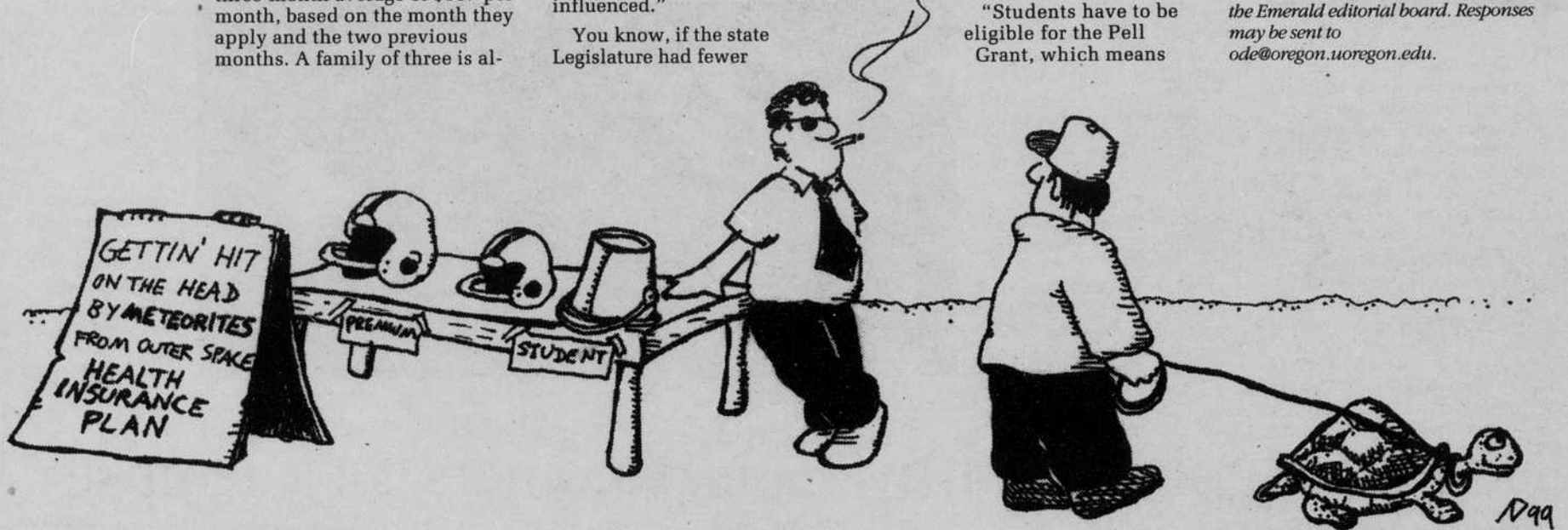
To those who are in the students' corner, we thank you from the bottom of our wallets.

This isn't the first time students have been sliced from the OHP. In 1995, lawmakers carried out the deed, but strong lobbying efforts put students back on in 1997.

Now, two years later, it's déjà vu all over again. Frankly, this on-again, off-again activity is a little dizzying and quite nauseating.

Don't worry about us students, however. We'll just take two aspirin and apply for bankruptcy in the morning.

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



Letters to the Editor

CORRECTION

In the July 8 article "Senate hears money matters," it should have read "ASUO Vice President Mitra Anoushiravani."

Qutub off the mark

Statements made by state Sen. Eileen Qutub in a Register-Guard article on Tuesday, July 6, on students losing coverage under the Oregon Health Plan are as outlandish as the policy decision to ax students themselves.

"They just are a less-vulnerable population," Qutub said.

This is simply not true, when one becomes a student they do not take on superhuman characteristics. In fact, we have the same problems as any other citizen in the state of Oregon — we get sick, sometimes to

the extreme that it creates a need for care beyond the capability of our campus or personal resources.

I am glad that she has "nothing against students," however, she has proved that she has absolutely nothing for us either. Would you attend school if you were a low-income student with a preexisting condition that needed special care if there was no way to receive health coverage? For many students the answer to this is no.

As Qutub notes, higher education did get a lot this session — an expected in-

crease in the Oregon University System's budget and a tuition freeze. These were long over due, as tuition rose more than 80 percent this decade and funding for universities dropped, of course we needed this budget. That does not justify taking money away from students across the board, however. Furthermore, we do have to worry about students enrolled at community colleges or private institutions as well. As the song says, come on Eileen.

Matt Swanson
 State Affairs Coordinator, ASUO

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Oregon Emerald

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