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Editor in chief: Jack Clifford
 Associate Editors: Rebecca Newell, Jeff Smith
 Newsroom: (541) 346-5511
 Room 300, Erb Memorial Union
 P.O. Box 3159, Eugene, OR 97403
 E-mail: ode@oregon.uoregon.edu

Perspectives

Don't pull the plug — WRC could turn out just fine

"Doctor, is the patient going to live?"
 "Well, we're not sure. The patient won't allow us all the way in to find out what's wrong and we're not allowed to use the 'tools of the industry,' so to speak. Plus, this patient's financial status is questionable, so we hesitate to even get involved."

"But, doctor, what about the patient's heart and soul? What about this patient's dream to some day be something? Sure, it's looking bad now, but doctor you can't give up. You must help."

"Well, I can't promise anything, but the diagnosis looks bad. You don't happen to have \$30 million to help out with payments do you?"

OK, so that faux exchange is intended as a humorous assessment of the Worker Rights Consortium, at least as it stands on this University campus. But there is a very serious side to the ramifications caused by the possibility of University officials backpedaling out of the student-driven, labor-monitoring organization.

First, however, does the University, especially administrators who are paid to do just that, administrate, have the right to question whether the time, money and effort needed to get it off the ground is going to be worth-

while? Absolutely.

Are there legitimate concerns about this fledgling group that has snagged headlines around the country for the past several months? Yes. Sorry, but in this day and age, a budget of \$295,000 doesn't go very far, especially in New York City, where the WRC office is to be located. Besides, approximately half of that is not even in the group's bank account yet, but instead is just "hoped-for" funds in the form of grants and gifts.

At the same time, student leaders and WRC officials are correct in their opinions that the organization's goal is a good one, with designs — admittedly long-range plans — on rooting out unfair labor practices at overseas apparel-industry factories. Even University officials agree that the desired goal of the WRC is an admirable one.

And one of the University's conditions set at the beginning of this whole drama, more representation on the WRC governing board, was addressed and changed at Thursday's meeting, if not necessarily to President Dave Frohnmayer's and Vice President for Public Affairs Duncan McDonald's complete satisfaction.

And what about industry representation on the WRC board? Almost everyone involved with the WRC

says that is not going to happen, although the group's treasurer, Marcella David, does say that she welcomes outreach and dialogue with the various apparel industries that eventually will be monitored. The kind of relationship that is established will be crucial to the WRC's success and longevity, however, because gaining access to the thousands of factories will depend on industry's willingness to open the doors.

Demonizing the corporations in this case will not fly and shouldn't be expected to work. Direct representation on the board isn't necessary, but corporations need to be included in pertinent discussions surrounding the monitoring process. We're in the year 2000 and there is little disagreement among all parties that sweatshop conditions are unacceptable, but finding ways to eliminate the last vestiges of them needs to be a collaborative effort.

The University's beef that WRC board meetings should be open to the public and the media is a very credible one. We're not sure how things are done over on the East Coast, but here in Oregon meetings are generally open, as they should be.

Open the doors and let the sunshine in, people.

So, how can this "patient" survive? How does the WRC show that it can become something?

With a little bit of patience. Nobody knows what is going through Frohnmayer's mind concerning the future status of a WRC-UO partnership except the president. His comments to the media are far from circuitous, however: He's not impressed at this juncture. The University Senate committee set up to regularly review the WRC reads the newspapers and watches the TV news, if they aren't getting direct input from Frohnmayer himself.

So, the plug could be pulled before next April, when the year commitment evaporates.

But, it shouldn't be yanked just yet, no matter how loudly the University donors and alums howl or how "disorganized" the organization may seem. Give the WRC a chance to work out its problems, if for no other reason than to follow through on the commitment that was made on April 12.

Remember the last time someone broke a commitment over this issue, the scene wasn't pretty.

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

It's time to lift the smoke screen from businesses

In industrial workplaces around the nation, pollutants including toxins and carcinogens are banned — unless they're coming from the end of a lit cigarette.

Smoking should be a cut and dry issue. The hard reality is that tobacco causes or contributes to almost 25 percent of all deaths in Oregon, according to an article written last November by Grant Higgison, a state health officer with the Oregon Health Division. Every-



Rebecca Newell

one — with the exception of claims from those who recently won large settlements against the tobacco industry — starts smoking with the knowledge it's unhealthy.

However, that's the benefit of freedom of choice — smokers have the right to make the decision whether or

not to put a "death stick" in their mouth. But do the rest of us?

If the Eugene City Council chooses to put to vote an ordinance which would ban smoking in all businesses of two or more employees, Eugene residents will have that choice.

Corvallis passed a "smoke-free business" law in 1998, the same year that the Oregon Health Division kicked off its tobacco-use reduction program. During the last two years, Oregon tobacco consumption has been reduced by 11 percent, and the number of smokers fell by 6.4 percent, a total of 35,000 smokers.

That's 500 million fewer cigarettes sold each year with a future savings of over \$150 million — in Oregon alone. Impressive numbers and a clear indicator that the program and efforts on the part of cities such as Corvallis are working.

As Eugene faces an attack from the anti-tobacco movement, City Council members are turning to Corvallis as an example for what worked and what didn't.

Though many agree that the idea of smoke-free businesses is a good one,

criticism from bars has some claiming mixed views. Some smokers and bar owners argue that a part of bar tradition is the smoky atmosphere, and that bar patrons can choose not to visit the bar if that's a problem.

How fair is that, considering 66 percent of bar patrons are non-smokers? Don't they deserve the clean air? After all, those with a drink can't exactly "step outside" to get out of the smoke in the way smokers can take a "step outside" to allow the rest of us to breathe uncontaminated air.

Besides the customers, it doesn't give the employees of businesses a choice, especially the bartenders or cocktail servers who are often burned by carelessly held cigarettes, and who are exposed to second-hand smoke.

Speaking of second-hand smoke, what about the children in restaurants who are exposed to this health risk? According to the World Health Organization, second-hand smoke seriously damages the health of almost half the world's children. And we're worried about kids washing their hands to prevent germs and illness?

However, old habits die hard. The

question of concern is: Will isolating the one-third of bar patrons who do smoke irreparably damage the bar scene as we now know it?

According to the OHD, no. Sixty-five percent of Corvallis bar customers say they like the bar experience better now than when smoking was allowed. Of course, it doesn't take a genius to realize that those are likely the 65 percent of bar customers who don't smoke.

However, food and alcohol sales have not been affected, and nine of 10 customers in the Corvallis area are spending as much or more time in bars as they did before the ordinance went into effect.

The numbers are in and it's about common sense. If the Eugene ban is put into effect — which it should be — we'll look back two years from now and wonder how we ever thought allowing smoking in public places was "no big deal."

Rebecca Newell is an associate editor for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. She can be reached at rnewell@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

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"It's almost as though now guys will pick events to play in and play the Tiger-less tour to have a chance to win. The guy is simply in a different league."

— Nick Faldo, a professional golfer who became one of the many victims of Tiger Woods at last weekend's British Open. The Oregonian, July 24.

"Poetry has the power to show you who you really are."

— Sarah Einowski, a 17-year-old Beaverton resident and one of 42 young people who are traveling around the country, teaching poetry workshops in conjunction with the Seattle-based Institute for Community Leadership. The Oregonian, July 24.

"My friends, we have a chance to become Big Publishing's worst nightmare. Not only are we going glueless, look Ma, no e-Book! No tire-some encryption!"

— Stephen King, of his experiment of posting the first installment of a new novel on-line and asking readers to pay through the honor system. The Oregonian, July 24.

"All Al Gore proves when he claims Texas has a budget shortfall when it really has a \$1.4 billion surplus is that Al Gore himself has a serious shortfall when it comes to telling the truth."

— George W. Bush, presidential candidate and Texas governor in response to Gore's blasting his budget policies. The Register Guard, July 22.

Letters to the editor

Give it some time

Let me begin with some business terminology, the lingo common to both University administrators and corporate donors who instruct them. The University's decision to join the WRC was an investment. Like all investments, time and careful guidance are necessary for fruition. Sometimes years are necessary before any profit or benefit can be acquired.

Those who advocated for WRC membership were very clear and outspoken on the amount of time needed for the WRC to become effective. This is why a five-year membership was requested.

University administrators should be well aware of the long-term nature

of projects involving large social change. A faculty, staff, student and administrative team has been working to increase diversity on campus for more than a year now without success. The Code of Conduct Committee, which voted unanimously to adopt the WRC, took more than a year to reach a decision. These tasks are nothing compared to that of global networking between human rights groups and monitoring corporations which do not want to be monitored.

President Frohnmayer's four issues are his alone. No democratic body at the University has ever voted for them to be enacted. Even then, one of his issues, that of university representation, has already been addressed at the WRC meeting. That seems like rather quick work to me.

In the Register-Guard article (July

21), University Professor Lynn Kahle referred to the WRC as being in an infant state. No argument here. The question is: Should we nurture this infant or abandon it?

Chad Sullivan
Music

Smoking ban an infringement on rights

First, I'd like to say that I am not a smoker, but the arguments for the proposed ban on smoking in bars are ridiculous.

The argument that second-hand smoke is bad and no one should be subjected to it is moot. Whether second-hand smoke is harmful is still debated, but even if it (probably) is, no one is forced to enter these establishments. Even the employees at the bars could find other jobs in this time

of record employment. Besides, they had to know people smoked there when they turned in their application.

The argument that people will spend more in a non-smoking bar does not stand up either. If it did, there would be no need to enact a ban — the bars would do it voluntarily.

The biggest argument against this ban should be that these bars are private businesses open to adults, and it should be left to the proprietors to decide what legal activities go on inside. Taking away the freedoms of people to do what is legal because a group just doesn't like it is un-American.

Dustin Preuitt
Computer and
Information Science