

# PERSPECTIVES

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## Hook, Line and Sink

Recent developments in the ongoing Worker Rights Consortium controversy give us serious pause. Nike President and CEO Phil Knight has resumed attending University football games, and the media have portrayed Knight as a wounded but well-meaning donor who is beginning to warm up to the University again, now that University President Dave Frohnmayer is distancing the University from the WRC.

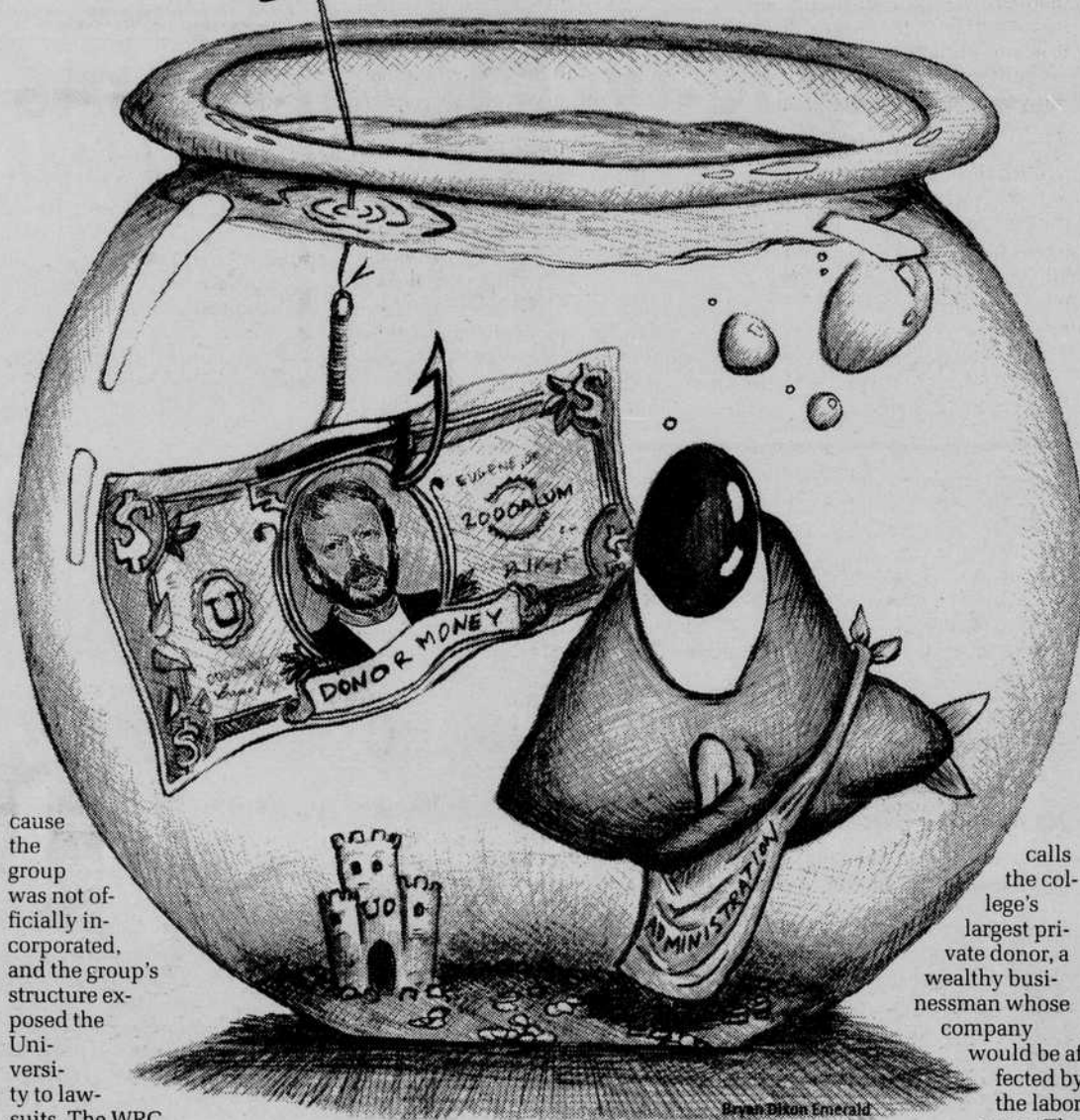
What this represents is the wholesale auction of University policy to private donors, and the campus community should be upset. The University doesn't have adequate funding from the state, so it's willing to sell its reputation and its decisions to whoever can pony up enough money. For shame.

After the University agreed to join the WRC earlier this year, Knight pulled his \$30 million pledge to help fund the expansion of Autzen Stadium. Knight said he was upset that he hadn't been consulted about the decision.

Frohnmayer repeatedly insisted that Knight wasn't trying to buy control of University policy, but that he had deserved a phone call first. This is plain wrong — no one voice, especially one with a lot of money — should have an overriding say in a public university's decisions.

As soon as Knight pulled his money, Frohnmayer began distancing the University from the WRC. Concerns were raised about the group's formation, operation and ability to monitor working conditions. The University dragged its feet and refused to help the WRC address the concerns that were raised.

During the summer, Frohnmayer joined the Fair Labor Association, another labor-monitoring group established by the government in conjunction with the apparel industry. And recently, the University's legal counsel, at Frohnmayer's request, issued an opinion that the University could not pay its dues to the WRC be-



cause the group was not officially incorporated, and the group's structure exposed the University to lawsuits. The WRC responded with a statement that none of the University's opinions are true.

Then the media got involved. The Register-Guard ran an article and a column about Phil Knight's return to Oregon football games, saying now that the University has backed away from the WRC, Knight feels the relationship is being repaired, and he might again be able to give money to his alma mater someday. Local television stations have dramatically present-

ed the situation as though the University has already cut off the WRC, and the Eugene Weekly's recent cover story seemed to assume the University's pull-out is as good as done.

If this saga were a novel, critics would laugh at the plot for being so obvious. How would the fictionalized version of events read? A public college moves to join a labor group unfriendly to the apparel industry. The college president

calls the college's largest private donor, a wealthy businessman whose company would be affected by the labor group. The president explains that the handwriting is on the wall; students are protesting and he needs to join the labor group to appear that he's doing the right thing. The businessman says to go ahead and join the group.

When you join, the businessman says, I'll pull my money and help demonize the labor group in the eyes of the community. The community will pressure you to drop your association, and as you pull away, I'll say that the relationship

is being repaired. When you finally drop out of the group, the businessman says, I'll give my money back, and this will ensure that any attempt to rejoin the group will be soundly defeated. Sounds great, says the college president.

Unfortunately, what has actually happened has occurred behind closed doors. Yet it seems as though it's still too transparent. Thanks to a stingy Oregon Legislature, the University doesn't have the money to fund its programs and expand its football facilities at the same time. And with the recent passage of Measures 88 and 7, the funding situation isn't likely to get better any time soon. So the University is relying on private donations, which would be fine if they were really charitable. But Knight has shown that this is not charitable giving; it's a successful attempt to buy control.

If the Legislature wants the University to be privately funded and controlled, than it should sell the college to the highest bidder. Knight could then make all the decisions he wants about the campus' apparel manufacturing. Until that happens, however, the University is still a public institution. It should receive adequate funding and make decisions based on what's right and what the whole community wants — not on the financial impact to one private donor.

With the current state of affairs, the University and Frohnmayer look like pawns to the rest of the country, bought and sold by Knight. The University of California system hasn't buckled to business pressures — they've paid their dues to the WRC and are active in the organization. This University, however, has earned its nickname of Nike U.

Despite Frohnmayer's protests to the contrary, the campus community should be embarrassed that, for lack of public funding, private donors can boss around the University.

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

### Letters to the editor

#### The Electoral College: an unfair antiquity

Despite the uncertainty and confusion surrounding the outcome of the presidential election, our democracy is strong and stable.

The League of Women Voters believes wholeheartedly that the current legal steps being taken to decide the outcome of the 2000 presidential election should be pursued to their final conclusion.

The League has advocated abolition of the Electoral College since 1970. What more evidence do we need that it is time to bring our elections into the 21st century?

The course of American history has been an inexorable trend toward greater fairness, uniformity and inclusiveness in our democracy. Yet, some systems for electing the most important representative of the American people are stuck in a time warp. We need a technology upgrade.

The Electoral College, a curious vestige of

the 18th century, violates the principle of "one person, one vote." The time has come to evaluate it. It's time to ensure that the president of the United States is directly elected by the people he or she will represent. It's time to guarantee that, across the country, every person's vote counts — and counts the same.

Karen Rikhoff  
 president of the League of Women Voters  
 of Lane County

#### Leadership positions open to anyone

The issue at hand in Emily Gust's article ("Student workers demand pay-offs," ODE, Nov. 8) is that these students are victims of an attempt to make student leadership positions open to only those who can afford to be in them. The current system allows leadership positions to be accessible to anyone, regardless of financial need.

Traditionally, most leaders in ASUO-recognized programs are paid small stipends for the many hours of hard work that they do. Because these leaders put so much time into their organizations, they may not have time to work other jobs. Those that qualify for

work study, a federal financial aid program, can use these jobs to earn their work study — at almost no extra cost to the organizations.

These federal matching dollars create a win/win situation for students and groups. All of this work-study money is earmarked for tuition and educational expenses. We are committed to ensuring that student organizations and leadership positions are accessible to everyone, regardless of financial status. We urge you to send a strong message to the Student Senate that you are too.

C.J. Gabbe  
 ASUO student senator  
 Katie Howard  
 ASUO student senator

#### Preserving the wild

As one of millions of Americans who are concerned about protecting what's left of our country's wild heritage, I would like to direct attention to the Forest Service's final plan for roadless area management in our national forests.

Monday, Nov. 13, it was released. It is the most expansive preservation act since 1907,

when the Forest Service was created. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) would end commodity logging in roadless areas, but would delay protections for the Tongass Rainforest in Alaska — the largest national forest — for four years. In addition, the FEIS would include "stewardship" activities, or in other words, getting rid of fire threats by cutting certain areas. In recent years, however, about two-thirds of the timber volume cut from national forest lands has been derived from stewardship, and the Forest Service has been very lenient with this definition.

Many are pleased to see progress in the Forest Service plan, though it still falls short of the full protection the American people have asked for. The Clinton administration now has 30 days, as of Monday, and a unique opportunity to permanently protect all 60 million acres of unprotected wilderness in our national forests.

Brad Schallert  
 freshman  
 journalism