

PERSPECTIVES

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High Energy Prices Give Us Chills

Winter has once again descended on Oregon, and the cold temperatures bring a painful reminder that the United States needs to re-examine its commitment to providing energy. For students and senior citizens on fixed budgets who use natural gas or oil heating, turning up the thermostat means readjusting their budgets. And from California's dangerous experiment with deregulation to President-elect Bush's nominee to head the Department of Energy, the outlook for national energy policy is not good. Partisan politics surrounding energy need to stop, and a commitment must be made to develop cheaper, renewable sources of power.

The economic factors behind the impending energy crisis are fairly straightforward. Population is increasing, demand for power is up, and no public bodies — cities, counties, states or the federal government — have done enough to ensure that citizens' power needs are met. Instead, fights about who should find answers and who should be held accountable take place between Democrats and Republicans. Much of the media frame the issue as "extreme, radical environmentalists versus controlling, corrupt corporations." That outlook is too simple, and it's not the point. We need power.

While Oregon produces most of its own energy, prices are still unstable, and the Bonneville Power Administration, which supplies much of Springfield's energy, will have to raise its wholesale rates soon. The Springfield Utility Board has already approved a rate increase to go into effect in March, and the Eugene Water and Electric Board is considering similar increases.

California's situation is even worse. The state's utilities have refused to invest in new power plants in the last decade, and the lack of power generation, coupled with the state's deregulation of the industry, have brought rolling blackouts and wholesale price increases that are threatening to bankrupt those utilities. The state's government officials, federal agencies and the U.S. Con-

gress are all pointing fingers, assigning blame and doing nothing to fix the situation. Thankfully, California's problems, while far from solved, have been a powerful object lesson to other states tinkering with deregulation. The deregulation monster needs to be put to death.

Electricity is a universal public good, something that cannot properly be handled by a free market interested in top-notch profit margins and low capital investment. The interest in cheap, reliable energy is also universal — while students are certainly hard-hit by upward-spiraling costs, all Americans deserve access to power they can afford. We are, after all, one of the leading industrialized nations in the world, presumably capable of providing public goods to our citizens.

In order to control costs in the short term, there are things students can do. Stop taking long showers. Turn off lights in unoccupied rooms. Turn off and unplug appliances that aren't in use. Turn off the computer at night, do larger loads of laundry, and most importantly, turn the heat down. One does not need to walk around the house in a tank top in January. Sweaters have a heat-providing purpose, and they are substantially cheaper than keeping the thermostat set at 70 degrees. These suggestions won't just save money on individual power meters; if Oregon's energy use doesn't decrease during the winter, rates for everyone are going to go up, and up, and up.

There are also long-term solutions that students can be involved

with. Call and write to elected officials, demanding that long-term solutions be found. The United States should be leading the world in exploring alternative energy sources. The technology exists, but major power manufacturers won't invest in them because non-renewable sources of power are still available. Well, guess what? Those sources aren't going to last long.

In our technology-heavy society, we need to be ahead of the curve. Many power brokers are ahead of the curve, at least as far as purchasing patents on solar and wind power technologies. That's right: Companies such as BP and Exxon currently have working models of alternative energy sources. They bought the patents from individuals who developed these technologies, but the companies won't implement them until there's no other alternative. And when solar and wind power are implemented on a large-scale basis,

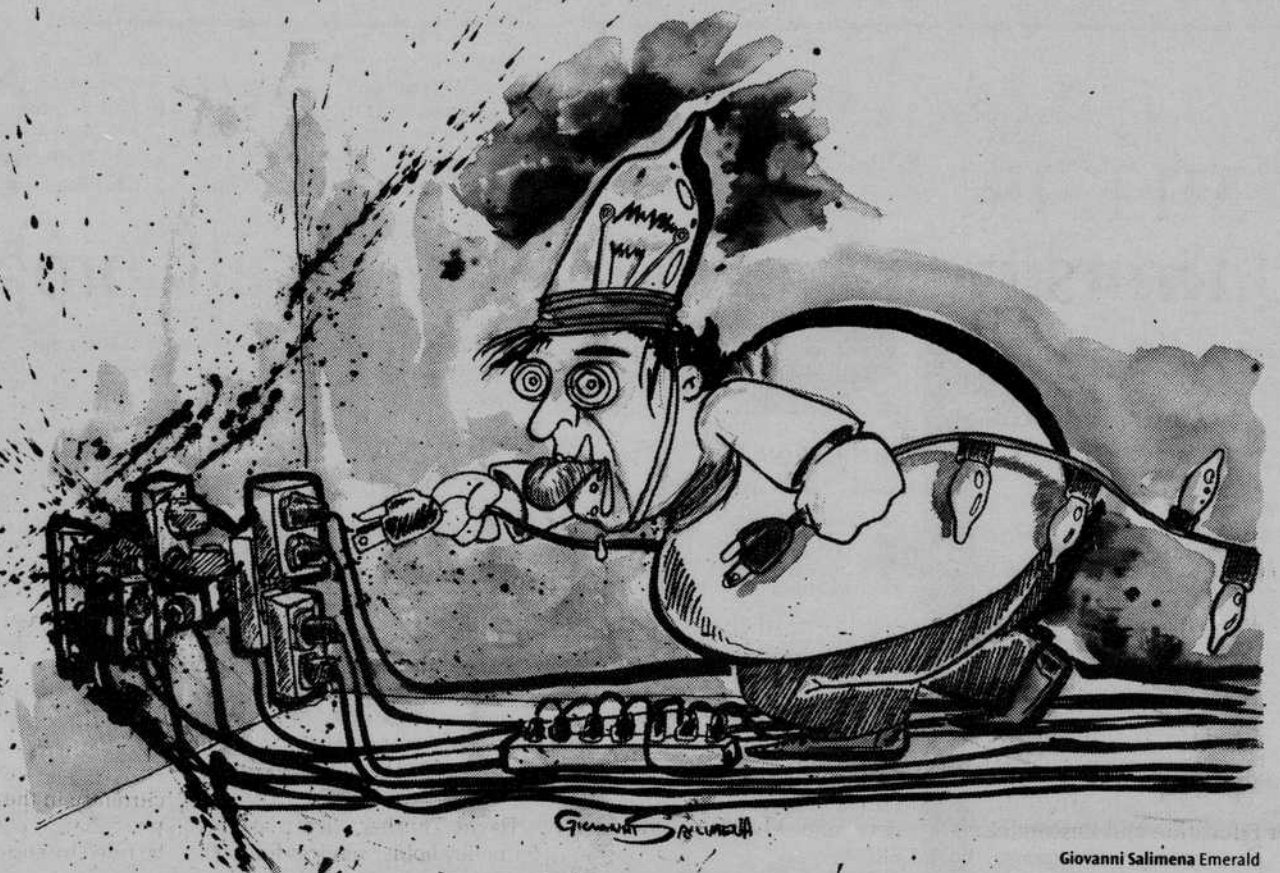
consumers will be forced to pay top dollar for them. That may be good corporate strategy, but it isn't fair, and it isn't right. Our elected officials need pressure to make these technologies happen now, and cheaply.

Unfortunately, putting pressure on the president-elect and Spencer Abraham, Bush's nominee for the Department of Energy, may not be terribly successful. A senator from Michigan from 1994-2000, Abraham proved himself very sympathetic to the interests of the reigning corporate power kings, and very unsympathetic to the energy concerns of average citizens. While in the Senate, Abraham voted against increasing automobile fuel-efficiency standards, sponsored a proposal in 1999 to dismantle the Department of Energy, and worked very hard to build a nuclear waste repository in Nevada, despite the concerns of many environmentalists, Nevada elected officials and

Nevada residents. The Nevada repository is still high on his list of priorities.

The energy kingpins must be upset that Abraham lost his reelection bid to the Senate, because they poured more than \$350,000 into his campaign, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. But then, thanks to Bush, maybe the industry will have all the access it needs to U.S. energy policy. So turn down the thermostat and send a letter off to Washington, asking that the partisan game of squabbling-while-doing-nothing be stopped in favor of immediately moving forward on energy conservation and development. That may be the only way we'll all be able to make it through another cold winter.

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



Giovanni Salimena Emerald

Lack of investment in schools may leave labor pool dry

Our state universities get more money when more students attend them. Each institution competes in what can be compared to a market system, and if you look at the Oregon University System in this manner, the customers in the market are the students. In this scheme, one could argue students are what drive our state universities and their success.

Knowing this, campuses enter-prise to attract students by providing access to what we hope is a quality post-secondary education. If the education provided is not perceived to be of high quality, institutions have a more difficult time attracting students. Students know this, too, and

search for the right high-quality education to suit their needs, both financially and academically. That is, students weigh the financial access opportunities as well as considerations of the academic reputation of institutions before choosing a particular school.

Reputations are developed over long sustained investments in education and, once achieved, dramatically increase the ability of a university to prosper both academically and financially through fundraising. So there is a relationship between the success of a university and its ability to attract good students. What contributes to each of these factors is related just the same, in that providing an accessible high quality education de-

pends on sustained investments.

Currently, what has been proposed for our universities is a \$94 million cut and an 8 percent increase in tuition over the next two years. We are being asked to pay more for less and more for money

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Tim Young

we will never see. That 8 percent increase will generate \$25 million in student money, often hard-earned or borrowed dollars, that will essentially be funneled outside higher education into some other place in the government, such as corrections or the Oregon

Department of Transportation.

That is the trouble we face as Oregonians, and in light of our economic transition from agriculture to high tech, this is a trouble that could haunt us. Without a commitment to our universities, we will never get what we want out of them. Without sustained investments, we will never realize our universities' full potential, and those students most capable in this state will simply follow the market trend — out of the state.

As consumers this is our reality, but as citizens this is our responsibility to change. Private sector giants such as Intel understand this and are going to bat for students, not necessarily out of the goodness of their hearts — al-

though one could argue that — but because this is their labor pool we are talking about. In a more broad sense, this is the labor pool for the whole state, and the capability of those in this pool to succeed and prosper has a relationship with the prosperity of the state. In fact, one could argue that they are one and the same.

The well-being of the educated workforce of tomorrow starts today. What Oregon will be like in 20 years is being crafted now, and if we ignore the importance of that, we are ignoring the future.

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