

PERSPECTIVES

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Low voter turnout, apathy killing campus democracy

GUEST COMMENTARY

Steven Lockfield

Our country's greatest and most precious attribute is dying on our college campus today. Our forefathers fought for its survival on the battlefields around the world, while we forget. Other nations yearn and hope for it, while we stand idly by.

This tradition I speak of is democracy. It is democracy we are unconsciously burying here on our campus. How are we committing this disgrace to ourselves? By simply not partaking in it.

One of the phrases I have heard over and over again since my arrival at the University of Oregon is "campus democracy." Our school's democracy is thankfully based on our country's system of three separate-but-equal entities. The ASUO Senate, Executive, and Constitution Court allow us to express our voices or concerns in a system of checks and balances. We are truly fortunate to have this.

However, from the recent primary election results for senate and executive it seems that we might not understand the importance of this freedom. Low voter turnout and enthusiasm show that a good portion of the majority doesn't care or have interest in an important right.

How can they not care? From these results, we might conclude that it is a waste of time to have elections. I wish to believe that it's not true. However, if this current trend of apathy among students continues, it will destroy our campus democracy and mutilate our concept of democracy as a whole.

Voting in our student elections is not only important because we have an equal voice, but also because it is our own money at stake. Forget political ideology and all other barriers for a minute, and think who would be in charge and where your money would be going without your input.

A \$500 student incidental fee is included in our tuition, and this generates roughly \$8 million per year for the ASUO budget. This staggering sum goes to finance Club Sports, the EMU and other student-run organizations. We should be aware of what our hard-earned money is being used for, and by refusing to vote, we are freely throwing our cash away.

Those who see this election as a high-school-style popularity contest are mistaken. I believe that the candidates for every position have all the best intentions and sincerely want to provide the full representation that we should be asking for. They will work to satisfy any pressing wants or concerns. All they ask in return is that students exercise their right to vote. By voting, we will be benefiting ourselves by providing valuable input on how we want our money spent.

Voting in this upcoming election is so fast and easy that it shouldn't take more than two minutes from our busy lives. Having two days to use Duck Web to vote from any computer is a luxury we should not take for granted. We shouldn't expect to have a 90 percent turnout, but 30 percent to 50 percent would show that we still want our campus democracy and appreciate our freedoms.

Go out and participate in campus democracy and vote!

Steven Lockfield is a sophomore history major and a candidate in this year's ASUO election.

Election will be ignored just as the real issues are

GUEST COMMENTARY

Farrab Bostic

I've been dodging Breezeway politics for a few years now, but occasionally somebody involved in student politics e-mails me with a question or update, and I invariably offer my sympathy.

But this time, they asked for money. It got my attention. And here I am, reading the Oregon Daily Emerald online, and it's a little like reading a scrapbook of three years ago.

All the same names are here. All the same issues are repeated using all the same arguments. None of it gets to the larger issue.

Every year, 10 percent of the students at the University vote in campus elections. Ten percent of those run around making posters and phone calls and filing grievances against a process that 90 percent of students ignore.

The Emerald and the Oregon Commentator, faithful to that one percent, lionize that process, making impassioned editorial pleas to reason and duty. It's very quaint.

The truth is, students get screwed every term for a few hundred bucks, of which only a third goes to about 150 student groups that do little. Granted, magazines and newspapers publish, the Student Senate meets and debates being "proactive" or spending others' money, and a few ethnic student unions hold functions that commemorate things secular yet still sacred.

Real corruption takes place with the rest of the money in the Athletic Department and EMU. But local major media outlets will likely dedicate zero stories to the gross apathy that administrators of truly costly programs exhibit every year.

While it is pathetic that the system has not been able to mandate that all programs receiving funding publish line item allocation

requests as part of their budgets, it is worse that the Oregon University System does not make accountable deans and department heads who spend millions.

While it is sad that OSPIRG gets \$8 a year from every student on campus and reallocates it nationwide so anti-OSPIRG forces can properly (and probably illegally) be defeated, it's horrifying that no one cares.

There is a part of me that believes the stage for civil servant behavior is set here, at the University; student governors learn bad behavior on a small stipend before they become real governors and engage in flagrant and felonious behavior.

But there is a part of me that worries more about students learning not to vote. All the grievances and injunctions in the world will not stop the average student from taking one look at Scott Austin or Ben Unger and thinking, "God, what a geek."

We should tell the truth about what this student fee process is: It's a joke. The ongoing election debacles could be solved by common sense and the faintly unsettling revelation that no one cares. Everyone involved should gather into a huddle to chant, "Get over yourself."

If you want students to vote, tell them why. If it sounds even the slightest bit absurd when you say it, imagine how it sounds when they hear it.

Students should hear about real issues: rising tuition costs, lack of available campus parking, unnecessary and ill-conceived construction, what scary people in the state Legislature want to do to your education, and what very frightening people in Congress want to do to your student loans.

Students should be able to expect that.

Farrab Bostic, Class of '98, lives in Los Angeles. She managed the Oregon Commentator from 1995 to 1998, ran for the ASUO twice on joke tickets, and helped get one injunction against the election in 1997.

Letters to the editor

Kudos to Emerald for anti-riot stance

I want to thank your staff at the Emerald for your hard-hitting editorial against rioting.

It is so difficult these days to find people in the media willing to take a firm stance on such controversial issues like mindless property destruction. I have no doubt that your strong anti-rioting opinion and associated argument have turned more than a few people around on the subject. Keep up the good work. I mean that!

Dustin Preuitt
 graduate student
 computer science

Allies are needed in environmental battles

First, consider that oil drilling generates an enormous amount of pollution. Sludge from wells can contaminate the groundwater for decades. Air pollution generated from diesel emissions and methane (a greenhouse gas contributing to global warming) is also released into the environment during drilling.

Consider that companies seeking to drill in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge have terrible environmental records. BP, Exxon-Mobil, Phillips and Chevron have been fined repeatedly for ignoring environmental laws and are responsible for hazardous waste dumps across the country.

Exxon was responsible for the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history, the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989.

In 1987, Chevron was assessed the largest fine in history — \$1.2 million — for violating the federal Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, but then in 1992 paid \$8 million for 65 violations of the Clean Water Act.

In 1999, BP Amoco pleaded guilty to a federal felony conviction connected to illegal dumping of hazardous waste at its Endicott Oil Field near Prudhoe Bay. In a plea agreement, BP Amoco agreed to pay \$22 million in criminal and civil penalties.

Finally, consider that groups like OSPIRG are devoted to environmental conservation in a nation that recently elected to its highest office two former oil-company executives with extremely strong ties to the industry.

In the struggle to save the last area along America's Arctic that is closed to oil and gas drilling, we can use all the allies we can get. Support OSPIRG in next week's elections.

Jen Munson
 freshman
 political science

CORRECTION

In the story about state redistricting, ["Redistricting may split up students," ODE, April 11], Rep. Phil Barnhart, D-Eugene, was assigned to the wrong district. Barnhart represents District 40.

In addition, the story should have reported that Barnhart's district needs to gain 9,000 voters in order to meet the state average target population of 57,000 voters per district. The number of voters in Districts 39 and 41 needs to be reduced in order to meet the average.

The Emerald regrets the error.

Leftfield

Frank Silva

