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COMMENTARY

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Editorial

ELF's violence is an ineffective approach

Eugene police detectives have announced they are investigating three suspects they believe are connected to two local arsons that have been tied to the Earth Liberation Front. The local arsons in question include firebomb attacks on the West University Police Substation and a Romania Chevrolet dealership.

The group has already claimed responsibility for millions of dollars' worth of damage from sabotage that it claims helps achieve its goal of defending the environment from capitalist-driven exploitation.

In the national environment debate, the ELF is the extreme edge of the projectionist viewpoint. Its members are several steps past the activists chained to trees behind roadblocks who attempt to halt timber sales. But it is too easy to categorize individuals from a portrayal through their actions. The individuals who created the firebombs that scorched dozens of sport utility vehicles here in Eugene must have thought what they were doing was morally right, or they would not have gone to such an extreme.

In this country, our popular culture praises people who act outside the law to achieve their own moral victories. Perhaps this is because this nation has a tradition of civil disobedience. The average hero from any discount action movie usually breaks the law to put the criminals in jail. And in the case of the ELF, its members must believe their sabotage is necessary to stop what they perceive as the criminal abuse of the natural world. But the ELF is not justified in pursuing such a course of action, despite the glamorization of the renegade with justice on his or her side, because that image has no basis in any real political truth.

Looking at their actions in this light, it is not so difficult to understand these home-grown terrorists. They likely do not

think of themselves as terrorists, but as moral crusaders. Yet this concept does not appear to have been accepted by anyone because the ELF continues to be lambasted for its violent means by most logical folks who have an opinion on the matter.

Fortunately, this is true because most logical people understand that when individuals reach a point where they believe anything they do, including violence, is justified because of their faith in the moral standing of their political agenda, they have crossed a line in our society.

The attacks connected to groups within the ELF are un-American not because they target capitalism, SUVs or police officers. There is no glamor in violence when it comes to changing public policy because history shows that most political change came through nonviolent means. Martin Luther King Jr. isn't a national hero because he torched buses in Montgomery, Ala.

We have become a civilized, rational society, with rules to follow when enacting public-policy change. The ELF may desire change, but people who adhere to its philosophy and have chosen violence also chose to separate themselves from the American public. At one time, this country's citizens did have to resort to violent means to pursue their agenda, but that time, thankfully, is behind us.

Environmental terrorists do not draw fire from rational individuals because of their beliefs, but because of their actions. Saving the environment is a noble pursuit, and one that has been taken up quite effectively by more sensible organizations. Political violence just hurts the work done by non-violent activists and gives a bad name to the environmental cause.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald's editor in chief and does not necessarily represent the views of the Oregon Daily Emerald.

Letters to the editor

Classified staff's opinion on Cox wasn't represented

With the announcement of Joe Cox's "non-retirement," the media has gone to heroic lengths to praise his "accomplishments." Indeed, one would think he was the greatest thing to happen to higher education since the advent of the microprocessor.

Of all the people interviewed, however, not one classified staff member was asked for an opinion. This doesn't surprise me with The Register-Guard; given their own labor problems, they would like to forget the people who do real work altogether. And I suppose The Oregonian is just too big to go into much detail where something as trivial as higher education is concerned. As for the ODE — well, perhaps clerks, janitors and plumbers just aren't

sexy enough to warrant attention. However, had some enterprising journalist deigned to inquire within the cubicles and dishrooms, or even put in a call to OPEU headquarters, he or she might have found a somewhat different point of view. Space limitations will not permit me to go into much detail, but the short list would include: increased management and decreased classified numbers to an unconscionable 1-1.4 ratio; a lowered standard of living across the board for staff; contentious relations between management and labor far beyond anything I have witnessed in my nearly 23 years here; and the plummeting of morale in general to new lows.

At the risk of sounding petulant, then: "Joe, we wished we'd never known ye."

Bill Smee

Service Employees International
 Union Local 503, Oregon Public
 Employees Union Steward

Editorials overlook smoking's risks

GUEST COMMENTARY

Julia Abeles
 Paula Staight

The July 3rd and 12th editorials criticizing Eugene's smoking ban are misleading and fail to address the law's real purpose. The new smoke-free workplace law was not designed to make smokers quit. Nor will it prevent people from smoking outside.

The true purpose of the smoke-free workplace law is to protect workers (and members of the general public while they are inside others' workplaces) from the harm caused by secondhand smoke. Bar and restaurant employees in Eugene will enjoy the same protection as office personnel, retail clerks and many other workers who were already protected before July 1st by either government or individual employer policies.

When it comes to workplace hazards, there is no difference between secondhand smoke and toxins such as asbestos, except that secondhand smoke sickens and kills many more people. The Environmental Protection Agency categorizes secondhand smoke as a known human carcinogen, placing it in the most dangerous category reserved for substances including radon, benzene and asbestos. The only practical way to deal with a workplace hazard like secondhand smoke is to remove it.

Tobacco continues to be the No. 1 preventable killer in Oregon and the United States. For every eight smokers who die from a smoking-related illness, one nonsmoker perishes with them. The new law will prevent some of those needless deaths.

In addition to increased protection from secondhand smoke, requiring smokers to take it outside will decrease the social acceptability of smoking. Seven out of 10 smokers say they want to quit, and some will use the change as an opportunity to cut

down or quit altogether. Eugene's smoke-free workplace law will save lives.

The Eugene City Council spent a great deal of time and energy examining the issue of secondhand smoke in the workplace. The council heard from hundreds of supporters and opponents, citizens, employers and business groups by phone, e-mail and letter and in marathon-long public hearings. After enduring this arduous process, seven out of eight city councilors voted to protect workers from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

Though the Emerald's editor may seek out smoke-filled watering holes for himself, most prefer to avoid exposure to secondhand smoke while eating and/or drinking. According to the University Health Center's annual survey of University students, a mere 15 percent say they are regular smokers. Anyone who frequents Eugene's bar scene would be forgiven for thinking those numbers were much higher. Think of all the missing nonsmokers who want to breathe clean air while socializing, listening to live music and enjoying Eugene's night life.

Contrary to the editorial opinion that prohibition politics do not work, the Californian experience shows just how effective a comprehensive prohibition on smoking in the workplace can be. After three years of smoke-free workplaces, including bars, not only are most Californian workers protected from secondhand smoke, but smoking rates and lung-cancer deaths are declining faster than anywhere else in the country, increasing numbers of

Californians do not allow smoking in their homes and a majority of Californian smokers say they prefer to dine out in smoke-free restaurants.

Many businesses waited until the last minute to obtain a building permit application for a smoking area to receive a short-term reprieve from the ban. The last-minute influx caused confusion among employees and customers alike. Of those 31 businesses with the exemption, some have no place to build outdoors and others already have ample outdoor seating. Undoubtedly, a handful of obstinate business owners have exploited the temporary exemption that was intended to give small businesses the necessary time to fund and build outside seating.

Fortunately, the city of Eugene is following up to ensure businesses are constructing outdoor seating in accordance with the law, and it seems likely that many of those currently exempted will be given less than six more months to become smoke-free.

Finally, what message does the Emerald send when it aligns itself with the personal rights mantra of the tobacco industry? Smoke-free workplace laws that lead to lower consumption of cigarettes threaten big tobacco. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence, the industry continues to lie about the dangers of secondhand smoke in order to protect its profits. The Emerald has a responsibility to the University community. A pro-tobacco slant only serves to line the pockets of greedy corporations and jeopardize the health of students.

Paula Staight is the health education director for the University Health Center and Julia Abeles is the tobacco prevention coordinator for Eugene with Tobacco Free Lane County.



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