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# COMMENTARY

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## Editorial

### Poor policies pose danger to forests

This is turning out to be one of the most destructive fire seasons in recent memory. The Oregon Department of Forestry reports that as of now, there have already been 801 fires that burned 18,247 total acres. That is nearly twice as much as last year.

Even the city of Portland has witnessed a large brush fire that threatened homes on bluffs overlooking the Willamette River.

The latest report holds that more than two hundred thousand acres across Oregon and Washington are still burning. In a fire near Monument alone, nearly 30,000 acres have already burned, and the fire is only about half contained. As Oregonians, we need to support and praise the firefighters and National Guardsmen who are risking their lives to contain the state's conflagrations and respect local and state regulations designed to prevent more forest fires.

As destructive and horrible as forest fires may appear, experts contend that they are a natural part of the life cycle of any forest. However, years of forest use by humans and highly successful methods of fighting forest fires have altered that natural system to the point where an out-of-control forest fire can be a destructive force of awesome power. In the natural cycle, fires periodically cleared out the underbrush and left large trees relatively untouched. With modern forest firefighting methods, firefighters have been able to stop much of that cleansing, and so a large portion of our forests is thick with underbrush that in the summer becomes tinder dry and can spark massive and uncontrollable fires. But through proper forestry methods, we can clean out that underbrush by harvest or control its growth.

Therefore, because of decades of forest management, humans have paradoxically become both the cause of and bulwark against massive fires.

However, our ability to prevent large fires is threatened by a blanket initiative begun in the late 1990s by former President Bill Clinton to prohibit the use of roadless areas in national forests and also to stop all construction of roads into those areas. While this initiative is questionable on the grounds that it ignores many local and state laws, it is also questionable because it would prevent the type of management that helps stop huge forest fires from occurring. The National Council for Science and the Environment has reported that some of the most

effective methods of preventing forest fires are selective timber sales and underbrush management.

To then block this from happening by locking up thousands of acres of forest lands from use does not make much sense. Advocates say the roadless initiative will bring our forests back to their pristine states. That pristine state, however, allowed thousands of acres to burn unchecked, and as this summer shows, that is a risk few of us should be willing to take.

As this editorial goes to print, the tiny town of Ukiah off Highway 395 in northeastern Oregon is surrounded by fire lines and crews hoping to keep a nearly 10,000-acre fire from destroying parts of that town. Some environmental policies may sound good on paper, but when homes and lives are threatened, those policies quickly lose quite a bit of their appeal.

#### Honoring the memory of a professor

It is unfortunate, to say the least, that when the Emerald takes a moment to spotlight the University Law School, one of its brightest talents has left the stage. Our sympathies and prayers go to the family of Wayne Westling, who passed away recently in a fight with cancer.

He was an internationally known professor whom many colleagues describe as the epitome of the best scholars of the law school and a man who exhibited professionalism and due consideration in the pursuit of the greater goal of knowledge throughout one's life.

As hundreds of law school students begin their classes, they all are continuing their education. Some are fresh from college with only a few years' experience under their belts, while others have been in the professional world for quite some time. But no matter their age or experience, all of them have made the pledge to improve themselves and their society in the pursuit of law. It is a much-maligned profession, probably because some of life's greatest tragedies and horrors are settled by lawyers in a courtroom. But where there is tragedy, there is often glory, and let's hope that this incoming law class will make us all remember the honor of the profession. Because in doing so, they will also honor the memory of Professor Westling.

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

## Reach out to people in despair

### GUEST COMMENTARY

Jason Borbet

It's an indescribable feeling to see such a vital and beautiful thing looking so motionless and fake. Seeing her lying there reminded me of my track coach after he passed away during my senior year in high school. His face was sucked of life, he resembled a doll, he was lifeless. Then to see the girl I spent every day with for the last two years in a similar box with the same light striking her face that did for every day of her nineteen years was just as hard. The difference between those many sunsets is that this is the last one that will ever grace her gentle and loving face.

For weeks after the funeral I stared at a little white envelope with my name scribed desperately in thick black strokes. She never wrote with a heavy hand when she was happy. Finally, when I felt strong enough, I broke the seal and took in her final words.

"Jay, I see my eyes buried deep within my shadow-ridden face. My mouth, void of happiness, reveals the devices with which I tear apart food. These mandibles have crushed animal, bone, and your heart. They oscillate, spitting forth the passions of my inner demons, hurting everyone I love and care about. Like a criminal relative, I have learned to love and accept my mouth because I can never re-

place it. Well, accept anyway, as I have no love for myself anymore. My turmoil and pain come from tangible anguish to inexplicable agony. Sometimes my body aches from a tangible bruise, cut or strain (many of which are the results of my own actions). Other times my brain tortures my heart with wild images and explicit thoughts of crushing reality and speculation. Maybe I seem like a coward to you running away, but you only see what you want to see. Sometimes by staying you are the one running and hiding.

"My heart and being are alone physically, emotionally and mentally. I am so lonely. There have been too many lonely Friday nights. Now look at me. I am here with a serrated dinner knife pressed against my neck and all I can wonder is just how much I will feel it when I summon up the courage to slice my neck and leave this horrible world. I have stared into the mirror until my eyes cascade with clear blood, and all I see is a mistake looking back at me. Finally, I fear nothing: myself, my past, my parents, death ... Am I crazy for entertaining my darkest thoughts? My eyes burn, my body is wasted, it is time for me to go. I will miss you."

She didn't even sign her name. We had been through so much together, from rape to depression, that I was just exhausted. Seeing her writhing on the floor in her world of agony every day, crying and moaning, was something I just couldn't handle. So, to give her

time alone and to get away, I came to Oregon to chase my running dreams. Her episodes (as she called them) got worse and worse from week to week, and the only thing I could do was listen on the other end of a phone three thousand miles away.

She had called me two weeks before I received the news, and I asked her to write me a note if she felt suicidal, hoping it would deter her. Now, all I have is a letter from a broken soul that could not find the strength to go on. Everything inside of me died a little when I heard she was gone. Death isn't a vacation. She isn't studying abroad; she is gone forever. What could I have done to help her more than I did? Why isn't she waking up today? Maybe if I had flown back to Boston to see her, I could have saved her.

Feelings of despair affect not only the person suffering, but the people around them. In this particular instance, someone I love is gone forever, and I am riddled with the guilt over what I could have and should have done. In Christine's case, medication and biweekly therapy sessions weren't enough. However, many people just need someone to lead them to help with a caring and non-judgmental hand. So if you can stop someone in your life from ending everything, do whatever is in your power, because it's a long life to miss someone.

Jason Borbet will be a senior at Boston University and is living in Eugene for the summer.

## OUS treats workers with disrespect

### GUEST COMMENTARY

Star Holmberg

The Emerald's coverage of SEIU Local 085/OPEU's declaration of impasse (in our contract re-opener) as well as our Aug. 6 campus action was much appreciated. It should be noted, though, that it's not the Emerald's fault that the Oregon University System's spokesman, Bob Bruce, dished out a large serving of tripe for the press.

He scored a big zero in my book when he failed to mention that the OUS couldn't come up with any dollar figures for wages even by July 20, when we moved from bargaining to mediation.

Typically, by the end of the fiscal year, business-minded folks have a handle on their dollars and cents, but the OUS could not offer us a full economic proposal, even though by that time it most certainly was aware of its Legislature funding.

Now their self-selected extension has arrived, ironically coinciding with the required (legal) deadline following declaration of impasse, and we're looking at an offer that reflects what some view as progress since it proposes a 2 percent wage increase for each of the next two years. However, what Mr. Bruce fails to mention is that the proposed first raise is delayed, when in fact it should take

effect July 1 of this year. This meager wage proposal is not terribly impressive, especially when viewed in conjunction with the insurance proposal. The OUS apparently does not believe it can manage insurance premium payments comparable to what was offered to our 17,000 union brothers and sisters by the state Department of Administrative Services. The Chancellor's team proposes that classified workers making \$30,000 a year and above pay into the premiums, while those below would not. This would essentially be a loss in pay for them, certainly not an incentive to advance within the classified system and a real swell tool for driving a wedge between union members.

Compound this with all the other familiar surprises being pulled out of the bag, such as contract language that would make it easier to use more temp workers and outside contractors to do our jobs, undermine our seniority rights and attack our earned overtime rights — and I am all the more untrusting of the OUS cyclical cat-and-mouse budgetary game.

In our third bargaining go-round since the OUS was split off (by the Legislature) from the DAS, we continue to be treated like second-class employees. Meanwhile, our DAS counterparts get their contracts worked out in a more timely manner, and what they get offered from the get-go is always better.

Even though the OUS insisted years ago that it could handle its money more efficiently if granted some autonomy, I am seriously unimpressed with how we, as workers, have fared under its academic wing.

Now, once again, we get to watch the biennial drama of priorities unfold. Most faculty, administrators and officers of administration continue to get higher percentage raises than we even ask for. Further, the latter group (the OAs, as we call them) bulges to a ratio of 1 of them to 1.4 of us (in the bargaining unit), and we see no evidence of a reversal in this tilted management trend. Meanwhile, a depiction of Joey Harrington stands in Madison Square Garden to remind us of the \$250,000 of general funds that couldn't possibly have been used for our wages, but will be paid back by athletic backers, we are promised. New construction continues to take place around the state, and a myriad of maintenance projects continue to be funded.

I am among the union workers who keep this bureaucratic monstrosity running, in spite of the disrespectful way we are bargained with, to say nothing of the pittance we are offered at the end of each bargaining cycle, and I am outraged.

Star Holmberg is a member of SEIU Local 085/OPEU and is a delegate of its General Council.