

COMMENTARY

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Tuesday, March 13, 2002

Editorial

Nation should be colorblind to Homeland Security plan

On Tuesday, domestic security chief Tom Ridge proved what we'd been suspecting all along — that the newly established Office of Homeland Security is an utterly useless, ridiculous waste of money.

In response to public complaints that government alerts since Sept. 11 only scared people and didn't provide enough guidance, Ridge announced that OHS created a five-level system intended to specify what state of "alert" the country should be on for terrorist attacks, as well as actions government agencies should take. Like stop lights, the system is based on colors, with each color signifying a certain level of risk. For example, Ridge says we are at "yellow" right now, which means an "elevated condition" with significant risk for attack.

The color-coded system was meant to provide a "common vocabulary" and make it easier for government agencies and the public to react to terrorist threats. However, all this will do is cause more confusion. The common traffic signal colors — red, yellow and green — would be a much simpler way to communicate. But what is the point anyway? What do we know now that we didn't know Monday? We're on condition yellow now. That doesn't make things clearer than "medium" or "highest" level of alert. The OHS could simply nix the color idea and — outrageous, we know — simply tell people what to do.

If the system is so simple, why did it take so long to create? If OHS was truly providing a useful service, a streamlined system would have been issued months ago. We also have to wonder how much money the process of creating this idea cost. With a bloated \$37.7 billion budget, OHS should have the resources to devise more innovative strategies than useless color schemes.

While Ridge doesn't have the legal power to implement this system on his own, he urged officials everywhere to adopt it. We've got a better idea: Officials should claim to be colorblind and disregard the five-level system entirely. Even better, let's get rid of the Office of Homeland Security altogether, since it is obviously not doing the job it was intended to do.

C-list celebs refusing to fade into obscurity

It's a sad commentary on the state of small-screen entertainment when high-profile scandal mongers and former child television stars face each other in the boxing ring to duke it out for the title of biggest wash-up.

The prerecorded bouts will air tonight on Fox with Paula Jones, who accused former President Bill Clinton of unwanted sexual advances, pitted against the "pride of Portland" Tonya Harding. Former "Brady Bunch" star Barry Williams will go toe-to-toe with "Partridge Family" mediocre-actor-cum-mediocre-talk-show-host Danny Bonaduce. Originally Amy "Long Island Lolita" Fisher was set to fight Harding but she backed out, presumably to salvage some integrity. You could say Fox has sunk to new levels with "Celebrity Boxing," but then again we can't expect anything less from a network that has aired such pop culture jewels as "Temptation Island," and "Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire."

So why does Fox keep producing these kinds of shows? Because C-list-type celebrities simply refuse to forgo their 15 minutes of fame and fade into obscurity like any self-respecting loser would. It's time people like Harding and Jones leave the American public alone — if we want to watch a staged fight, we'll watch WWF.

Editorial Policy

These editorials represent the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Please include contact information. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

No one likes a back-seat driver

I would like to respond to Diane Huber's article about the Designated Driver Shuttle ("Shuttle criticized for unsafe climate," ODE 3/8). First of all, DDS is not Saferide. Saferide is a wonderful program, which I support. However, if you need to get home at 2:30 in the morning, call DDS. Please understand that your fellow riders have been partying all night. Adjust your expectations accordingly.

Apparently Melissa* doesn't have a clear idea of what DDS is here for. DDS's primary mission is to get inebriated University students home safely. You need to understand this when you get in the van. These are drunken students. They are not all going to be polite, they are not all going to be on their best behavior. The people that work for DDS understand this. Often the bad behavior is directed at us. People yell at us, curse us and threaten us. For the most part, unless it becomes physical, we ignore it. When Melissa spoke to the van operators about someone yelling "fuck" and apparently being boisterous and was told not to worry about it, it was probably because there was nothing to worry about. Our judgment of the difference between a

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Donald Thompson

dangerous situation and the standard behavior of drunks is probably better than Melissa's. We've done this before.

Additionally, we don't know you. We don't know what relationships may exist between you and others that we pick up. People get on the vans and start hugging one another all the time; they also argue with one another. More than one couple has gotten in the van and proceeded to verbally rip one another apart. When they get dropped off they walk away with their arms around each other. We are not going to get involved in your personal relationships. If someone is physically touching you and you don't want him or her to do so, you have to tell us. We can't read minds. If someone is threatening you, you have to tell us. We are not monitoring people's conversations. The person will be told to cease the activity. If they do not, their alternate choices are to get out of the van and walk home or have a conversation with

DPS or EPD.

I can address the issue of the puking incident personally since I was the driver at that time. The girl puked all over my navigator. In addition to being a repulsive substance, vomit is a biohazard. Perhaps you've heard of AIDS and hepatitis? My navigator was not going to sit there, covered in vomit, the floor of the van awash in vomit, while we ferried you home. People were told to call the DDS office and have the other van scheduled to pick them up. Not to do so was their choice. Please have Ms. Wilkins send me her phone number. Next time I "presumably" go to clean vomit out of a van, I'll call her to help me and she can "presumably" enjoy it as much as I did.

Life is often messy. People sometimes act inappropriately, they drink and use bad words. They burp, fart and vomit. Sometimes their actions irritate you. I'm sorry, but get over it. The purpose of DDS is to take drunks home. It is not to provide you with a Disneyland experience.

*Last name omitted for privacy. Donald Thompson is a senior anthropology major and a DDS employee.

Letters to the editor

Oregon's future depends on saving the Opportunity Grant

As a result of the recession, Oregon is experiencing budget cuts that must be made. However, higher education is not the place to do it. The Oregon Opportunity Grant was created in 1971 as a means of giving low-income students the opportunity for access to post-secondary education. At its creation, it was designed to cover tuition and books as well as additional educational costs.

However, more than 30 years later, the grant has been cut down to cover only 11 percent of the cost of education, and many eligible students are turned away as a result of this lack of funding.

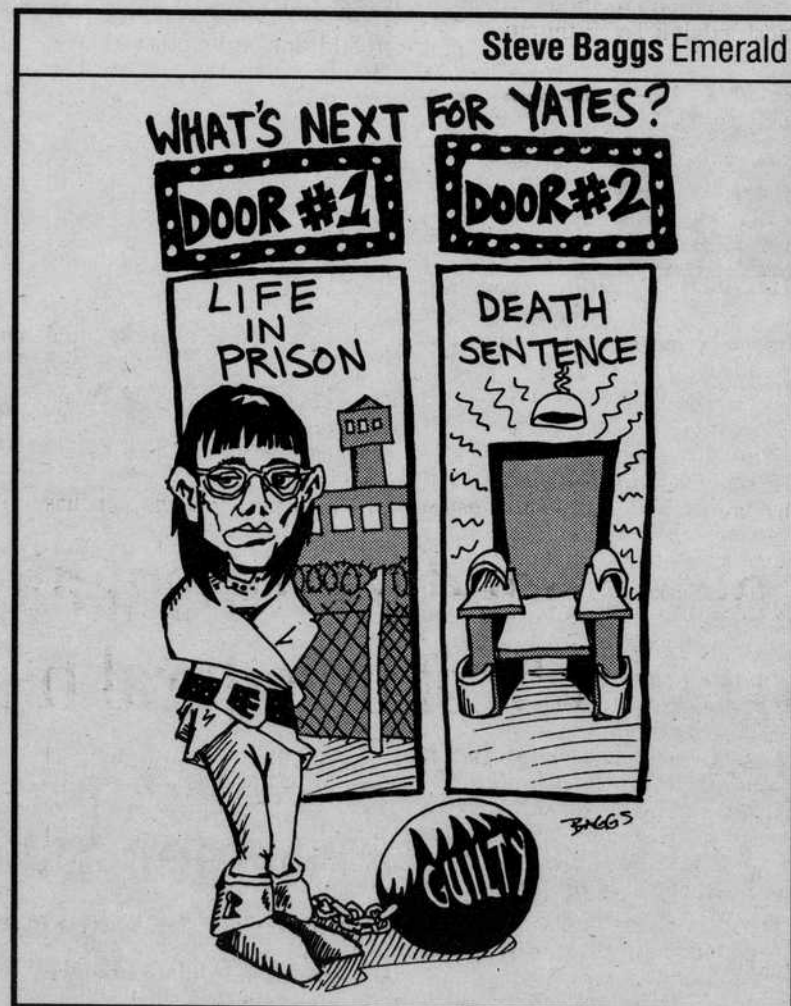
In 2001, almost 10,000 eligible students were turned away because of the grant's inadequate funding. An estimated 1,500 to 3,000 students will lose the grants promised to them in 2002, leaving some dedicated and deserving students with no options but to leave school. We must urge legislators to prioritize funding for all eligible students.

During this economic recession, Oregon should prioritize increasing access to higher education by building on such programs as the Oregon Opportunity Grant. This will allow people to gain the education skills necessary to contribute to a strong Oregon economy in the future.

Lauren Olson
freshman
undeclared

Students need to get involved

The democratic system has empowered citizens with the opportunity to voice their opinions and exercise choice through the vote. Today's youth, college students in particular, must learn to take advantage of this right. The first step toward obtaining a voice in politics



is registering to vote. Statistics show that of the students throughout Oregon who are registered, 80 percent finish the process by turning in their ballots.

Last year, the Oregon Student Association successfully registered 27,000 students. This year, OSA is working on a statewide youth vote campaign, with the goal of registering 5,000 students to vote in the May primary governor election.

With the number of issues affecting student life and activities, including everything from education funding to housing codes, it is increasingly crucial for University

students to get involved. Registering to vote and exercising choice puts students in a position to be heard and represented. Furthermore, the more students that play a part in the democratic process, the more accountable elected officials become to the student contingency.

The power to elect will serve as a valuable weapon to achieve student initiatives. It is essential for students to get involved, and the first step toward this is registering to vote.

Coral Snell
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