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COMMENTARY

Tuesday, August 6, 2002

Letters to the editor

Society should value children more

As a mother of four, I must respond to Meghann Farnsworth's commentary ("Women face more challenges when balancing career, family," ODE, July 23).

Farnsworth presents the problem of balancing motherhood and career in a very black and white way, as if there is nothing between. While I agree with most of her underlying message, I think the solution is more complicated than she presents.

Yes, men must be responsible for caring for children as well. I have been in both types of relationships (where a man does not share in child-rearing responsibilities, and one where these are shared equally). Not only is this support important for the mom, but it is also very important for the child — and the dad.

Women, however, are the ones who carry the babies and who lactate, and naturally, often the ones who stay home with a young child. What these women really need is support from their employers and the government. We live in a country that does not value mothers in general.

Yes, men need to participate in child rearing, which I think they are increasingly doing every generation. But America needs to value mothers and families. Women (or men) should not be punished by their employers for trying to raise healthy, well-adjusted children. Government and/or employer funding should be better for maternity and paternity programs for new families.

Maybe what we really need is a country that is a little less concerned with the all-mighty dollar and more concerned with its children.

Donna Ralstin-Lewis
 graduate assistant
 sociology

Don't forget J. Michaels Books

As someone who has visited used bookstores throughout the Willamette Valley, I was amazed and rather horrified to see that your article on Eugene bookstores ("Independent bookstores thrive despite big chains," ODE, July 25) did not even mention J. Michaels Books. I believe it is the best bookstore in Eugene — and perhaps in the Northwest. This isn't biased by the fact that I once worked there; there is lots of objective support.

The store offers the best of all worlds — a wonderful mixture of used, remaindered and selected new books. The majority is used material — primarily good-quality reading copies, but including antiquarian materials for the book lover to explore.

And the prices are very reasonable. I suspect the greatest barrier to this store being "discovered" is that, because it presents quality books in a well-organized setting, many people assume it is expensive. Comparison shopping will show this is a major misperception. Remaindered titles have standard prices, and the selection of remainders is wonderful. And a used book of comparable quality and condition could cost you more elsewhere.

It is difficult to summarize the many excellent selections for the specialist. But I have to say the visual arts selection is truly outstanding. Perhaps one-third of the stock is related in some way. Anyone with an interest in the visual arts is missing out if they do not know about this store.

J. Michaels deserves a whole article to itself. I am curious how you could omit such a phenomenal resource from your listing.

Caris Nixon
 Eugene

Environmentalists know what they're doing

Liz VanLeeuwen's vitriolic diatribe against the forest management policies of the "environmental extremists" ("Tom Daschle should learn logical forest management," ODE, Aug. 1) would be laughable if it were not for the likelihood that many people will accept it at face value without realizing that it has no basis in fact whatsoever.

The "environmental extremists" have never been allowed to determine forest management policy. For years, environmentalists have been calling for small controlled burns to reduce the fuel load in forests. This policy would reduce the number and magnitude of the mega-fires that have been occurring. These mega-fires are actually the result of misguided forest management policies dictated by property owners.

What has happened is that naturally occurring fires have been suppressed as quickly as possible, instead of being allowed to run their course. This has allowed an unnatural amount of fuel load to accumulate in our forests. These mega-fires are, as VanLeeuwen points out, "environmentally destructive," but a natural forest fire is not.

A natural forest fire does not destroy all of the flora and fauna in the burn area, nor does it destroy the soil structure. If the forest management policies of environmentalists had truly been followed, we would not be having such extreme fires.

This lady is scary! I sure hope she doesn't get elected. Oh, by the way, Daschle's treason just goes to show you that Democrats are only green when they're out of office.

Randy Sullivan
 chemistry instructor

Fighting war on drugs seems futile, harmful

GUEST COMMENTARY

Kari
 Dequine

News coverage of the present state of affairs in Colombia may be overshadowed (conveniently) by the Middle Eastern conflicts, but it will soon be impossible to ignore. Words like Vietnam have even been mentioned in comparison to the direction we are heading with our involvement in Colombia.

The United States has obviously lost the war on drugs. There is no argument against this. Our war against cocaine in Colombia has proven not only ineffective but also harmful.

Within our borders, cocaine consumption is unfaltering, and the number of deaths caused by cocaine abuse is higher than ever. Outside our borders, the amounts of coca produced and cocaine processed are increasing.

So why do we continue to fight with the same foolish tactics? Is it possible that we don't actually want to win the war? And if this is the case, why are we really in Colombia?

The line between the war on drugs and the war on terrorism in Colombia has been blurred for quite some time. But with President George W. Bush's approval of a new counterterrorism bill that includes \$35 million in funding to Colombia, that line has been crossed.

Millions have already been spent on weapons and helicopters and military training, but all under the pretext of counternarcotics efforts. The "war on drugs" made for a convenient cover, but now we can go after what we really want. The Bush Administration is enjoying the heroic role of attacking all who threaten "democracy" and our indulgent way of life, and Colombia threatens this for various reasons.

A major reason for our involvement is indeed to fight terrorism. There are three Colombian groups that are on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations. The primary target is a leftist rebel group known as FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. There is also another leftist guerilla group known as the National Liberation Army. But they are not powerful enough to be of great concern.

The third group, however, raises more questions. This group, called the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, is a right-wing paramilitary militia who is responsible for most of the human rights abuses and massacres that have occurred in the Colombian civil war. This group has a known (even by the United States) connection to the Colombian government and military.

Corruption runs rampant in Colombian government, but the United States doesn't seem to mind this particular alliance. We do, after all, have the same enemy. But we certainly don't have much to say about supporting known terrorists.

We also care about Colombia for the same reason we care about Iraq. Oil. It was oil in Desert Storm, too, wasn't it? We need it and will do what it takes to ensure that we can continue in our wasteful ways. That pesky FARC group keeps bombing an important oil line. How dare they!

Another reason we are in Colombia is because of drugs, but not to rid the world of them, as we claim. Everyone profits from drug money — even the United States government.

In addition to direct revenue, pretending to fight drugs creates countless jobs. The government would lose serious amounts of money if cocaine was suddenly not such a big "problem," and not such a lucrative market ... like, say, if it were legalized.

The recent expansion of our involvement in Colombian affairs is just the beginning of what will be a long and gruesome struggle. There are already U.S. troops and personnel deep in the jungles of Colombia, and more soon to come. Anti-American sentiment is growing among the Colombians.

It is evident that the United States is no longer just fighting drugs. It is also evident that we are not very concerned about helping a socially and economically devastated country. Instead we are bringing in more death and destruction. We are in Colombia to protect our own interests, but President Bush underestimates FARC.

This war may indeed not be so different from Vietnam.

Kari Dequine is a freelance columnist. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Letters to the editor and guest commentaries policy

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.

CORRECTION

One of the cover photos for the summer getaways special (ODE, Aug. 1) incorrectly identified Spencer Butte. The Emerald regrets the error.

CLARIFICATION

The Emerald ran two stories in the summer getaways special (Aug. 1) mentioning the height of Spencer Butte. Sports editor Brad Schmidt reported the height at 2,062 feet,

which he found on the Qwest map in the phone book.

Photo editor Adam Jones reported it at 2,054 feet, which he found on a guide book map.

According to the Eugene Parks & Open Space Division, which is the agency responsible for administering the park, Spencer Butte is 2,052 feet tall. The Emerald regrets the confusion.

