

COMMENTARY

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Friday, October 4, 2002

OUS presidents' bid for expanded power is corrupt idea full of good suggestions

Seven Oregon University System presidents are trying to play God with higher education. The presidents sent a letter to the State Board of Higher Education asking for substantially more administrative power over their colleges.

Who do they think they are? Power is a mighty weapon — and even with the greatest of intentions, it can work against the cause.

Some of the presidents' proposals to create more revenue and address budget situations do have merit. But they are clouding those persuasions with their need for power.

The Emerald editorial board reviewed the letter addressed to the Strategic Planning Committee, dated June 20, 2002, and we adamantly oppose the presidents being granted any more power.

What possible good for students could come from their longing to gain full management responsibility for all legal, financial and contract issues regarding higher education? The OUS presidents further their stream of bad ideas by saying they should have authority to buy, hold and sell real and personal property. What was so wrong with doing that under the oversight of the State Board? Students are already looking at the possibility of a 10 percent increase in tuition in January. The presidents hope to be given full authority to set tuition and fees, basing them on the current market status. Oregon's market isn't that good, anyway. Students could then be looking at more increases in the coming months. Ridiculous!

And in the event the presidents do gain full autonomy, where will students go to appeal decisions they don't like or don't agree with? It will no longer be an option to appeal to the State Board of Higher Education if the OUS leaders are cut free.

This proposal smells suspiciously like the OUS presidents are trying to become a private entity — which runs counter to the notion of a public higher education. They should be held publicly accountable, just like other governmental bodies.

Not only do the presidents want sole power to do these things, they also wish to protect personal information about donors from the public. What are they trying to hide, anyway? What happened to the public's right to know?

We should reiterate the fact that some of their points do have merit — for example, they say they will educate all qualified resident undergraduates. But they cancel out that good idea by expressing their need to manage enrollment according to resources available to them. Again, some of the worst plans began with the best of intentions.

Here's some advice for the OUS presidents: You may want to discuss this with the entire university body — which would include student, faculty and staff representatives. Only when you've heard the opinions of the entire university system will your proposal not only be good, but be a good plan for action.

Editorial policy

This editorial represents 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. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

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Airport screening: in need of revision

Earlier this week, a Bulgarian national, Nikolay Volodiev Dzhonev, was arrested at an airport in Atlantic City, N.J., after security screeners found a pair of scissors in a soap dish and two box cutters in a box of aftershave.

Normal people do not, as a matter of course, hide cutting tools in their personal hygiene products. Dzhonev was released two days later. His only apparent crime was being dumb enough to get caught taking knives onto a post Sept. 11-era airline flight.

Without a doubt, the Transportation Security Administration will use this situation to show that the system works. They couldn't be more wrong. Finding Dzhonev was a lucky break. All too often, airport screeners have let real weapons or weapon-like objects through while confiscating harmless objects and humiliating innocents.

It's all part of a growing problem: Even with all the noise from the government about beefing up airline security, we're not much safer now than we were before.

A 9-year-old boy's "G.I. Joe" action figure was one of the few "people" unceremoniously disarmed by security screeners so far. The child, Ryan Scott, of Plover, Wis., was boarding a plane in a Central Wisconsin airport in August, when his carry-on luggage was selected for a random screening. Screeners found a 4-inch, by-no-means-functional replica rifle meant for (Sgt. Lt. Commodore?) Joe to carry while blasting random pieces off Charlie and Cobra. Airport security officials removed it as an "illegal replica" of a weapon, according to the Stevens Point Journal.

Oh. Wow. You idiots found a potentially lethal hunk of rubber. I mean, somebody could have choked! Yet, around that same time, a woman was arrested in Philadelphia for carrying a real .357 handgun and 25 rounds of ammo as she entered the terminal getting off

her flight — a gun that she had when she boarded the first leg of her flight in Atlanta.

To repeat, screeners did not find the gun until she deboarded from the plane. This makes me feel just warm and fuzzy all over. If they can crack down on a li'l plastic M-16, certainly it'd be easier to find the real McCoy, right?

An 86-year-old general and ace fighter pilot has even been the target of some of the more imbecile searches. Gen. Joseph Foss was waiting to catch a flight to Arlington, Va., at Phoenix International Airport. He had to be searched manually, as he had a pacemaker and couldn't go through the metal detector. So far, so good. Then they found his Medal of Honor, a star-shaped medal that is the highest honor a serviceman can earn. It was alleged later that the screeners were worried that the medal could be used as a throwing star. This, along with a small dummy bullet on his keychain and a small set of nail clippers, set into motion the demand that he be strip-searched three times.

It is almost insulting to the intelligence to think that someone who had earned the Medal of Honor would somehow use it as a makeshift weapon — and by an 86-year-old to boot! It adds insult to injury to find that now, 10 months after the fact, the head of the TSA, James Loy, has characterized the checks as more hassle than they're worth.

I firmly believe that the function of security screening for the airlines should be taken over by the government, and their promise to federalize screeners is a step in the right direction. However, I believe that the people who should be doing the screening should not be the usual airport screeners.

Instead, hire and train police officers to handle the screening process. They have the education to make judgments with more certainty about what should and should not be confiscated and who should and shouldn't be searched.

Contact the editorial editor at patpayne@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



Pat Payne
The return of Captain Fantastic



C'MON HORSEY, GIDDYAP! WE GOT A WAR TO FIGHT.

Peter Utsey Emerald

Letter to the editor

Sept. 11 gratitude for county commissioner

My younger brother lived in Manhattan last September and was awakened on Sept. 11 by the sound of a jet smashing into the WTC tower. Through his eyes, I saw it all.

As I stood at the Federal Building

in Eugene this Sept. 11, in the midst of many others witnessing for peace, my brother spoke to me of the mood now in New York City, of people still united in love, sharing hope, recognizing the human connection we all share. Retribution and war is not on their minds.

Many of us understand when we practice war, it is our own brothers who die. Among those who

understand is our county commissioner — Pete Sorenson. He alone among local office holders was there with us, feeling the power of truth, standing strong against the forces of fear.

I love this town. And Pete Sorenson is one reason why. Thanks for being here, Pete.

Tim Mueller
Eugene