

# COMMENTARY

Friday, November, 15, 2002

## Editorial

### Go give blood, but beware of discrimination

The University has teamed up with Oregon State University to sponsor a Civil War Blood Drive this year, and blood collection is happening in the EMU Taylor Lounge today. The University's Alumni Association Web page states that "all alumni, students, faculty, staff, and fans of both universities are invited" to participate.

Blood donation is important, and we would also like to encourage the entire community to give. Unfortunately, we can't.

See, many students, faculty, staff, alumni and fans aren't allowed to give blood, and we feel they should be warned in advance that they will be discriminated against if they try. The University isn't offering this warning — although they certainly should — so we will.

According to Food and Drug Administration guidelines, if you are a male and admit to having sex with a male any time since 1977, you won't be able to give blood. If you have piercings or tattoos (and the blood bank staff notice), you may not be able to give blood.

Other groups also are singled out as having a high risk for diseased blood and are not allowed to donate: people from many African countries, people who spent more than six months in some European countries, people who recently snorted coke, and the list goes on.

Some situations may increase the likelihood of diseased blood, and the country certainly needs to protect its blood supply. But there are significant problems with the male-male sex factor and the piercing factor, and these regulations need to change — or at least, be enforced fairly.

Men who have had sex with men since 1977 are not a monolithic group. Their sexual behaviors are not all of one type, and to group them together and consider them "more likely to be diseased" is prejudice, plain and simple.

First on the list of major concerns is that people are likely to lie when asked such personal questions. What good does it do, then, except to discriminate? The questionnaire does not attempt to determine the riskiness of the donor. Was the sex oral, anal or other? Was it safe sex or not? Was it one monogamous partner or not?

Of even more concern is that these questions are not asked of heterosexuals. There is a percentage of students who pass sexually transmitted diseases around like notes for a midterm. Why are we taking these students' blood? Maybe we should only take blood from virgins, because in addition to the ritualistic appeal of such a rule, that's the only way to nearly guarantee STD-free blood.

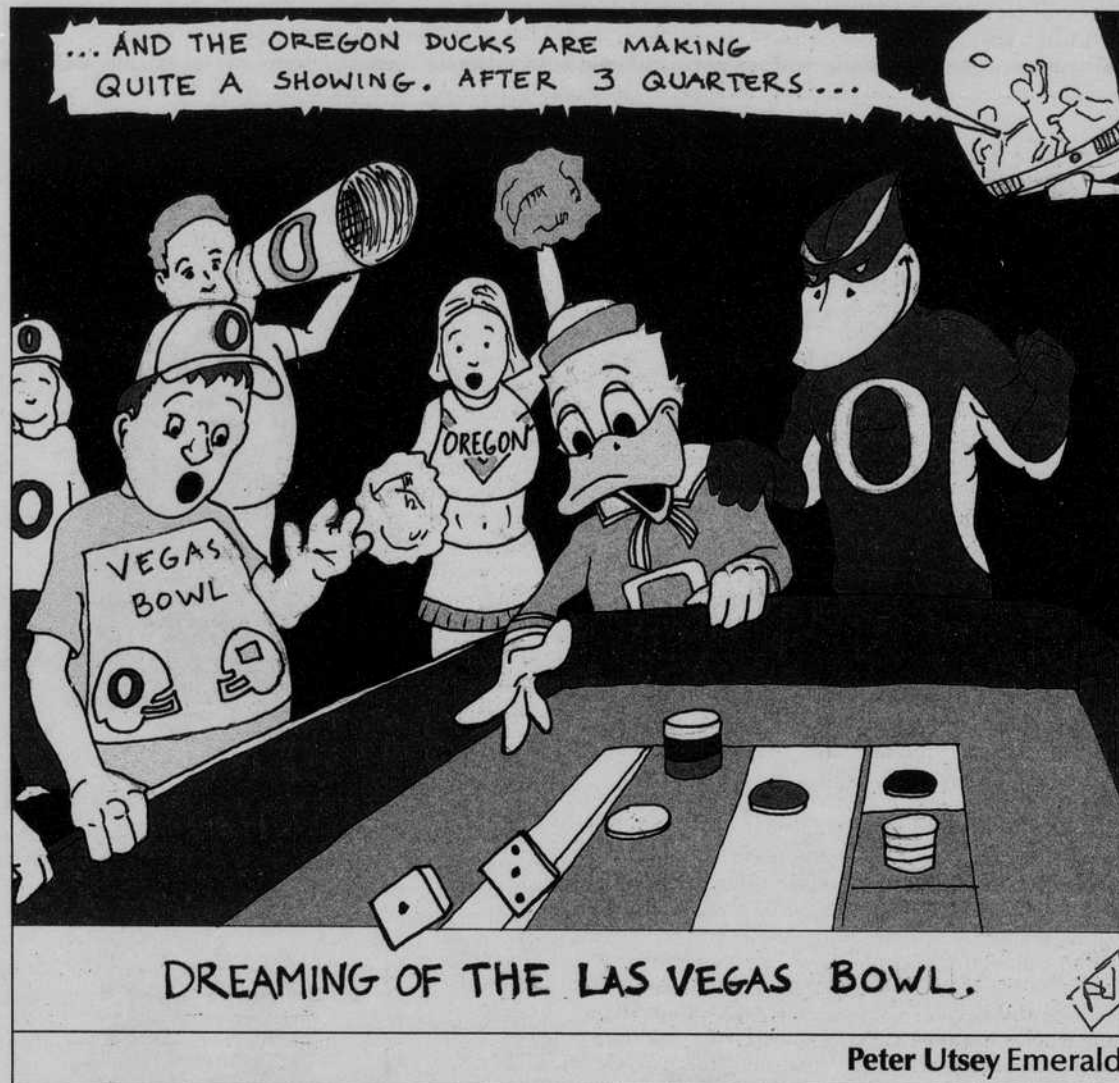
The piercing rule, in the editorial board's experience, is applied based solely on appearance — another gross discrimination. Women with pierced ears are not regularly asked about their piercings, even though these may have been done in unsanitary conditions or in other states. But people with "weird" piercings are asked when the piercing was done and are told that it must have been done in Oregon and they must know the name of their piercer. Why isn't this asked of everyone with piercings?

There is an easy answer to all of this prejudice: Test the blood. But wait: They already do. So if the country really does have a blood shortage, why are blood banks discriminating, and why isn't all blood from any willing donor taken, tested and used if it's clean?

We don't have an easy answer, but community members should know that the University is asking them to participate in an event where they may encounter discrimination. With that said, give blood. If you can.

#### 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. 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.



## Letters to the editor

### Medical marijuana laws are not justified

Your article on federal efforts to undermine Oregon's voter-approved medical marijuana law ("Search and Seizure," ODE, Nov. 8) underscored the need for a state distribution system free from federal intrusion.

The first marijuana laws were enacted in response to Mexican migration during the early 1900s, despite opposition from the American Medical Association. White Americans did not even begin to smoke marijuana until a soon-to-be entrenched government bureaucracy began funding "reefer madness" propaganda.

Dire warnings that marijuana inspires homicidal rages have been counterproductive at best. An estimated 38 percent of Americans have now smoked pot. The reefer madness myths have long been discredited, forcing the drug war gravy train to spend millions of tax dollars on politicized research, trying to find harm in a relatively harmless plant.

The direct experience of millions of Americans contradicts the sensationalistic myths used to justify marijuana prohibition. Illegal drug use is the only public health issue wherein key stakeholders are not only ignored, but actively persecuted and incarcerated. In terms of medical marijuana, those stakeholders happen to be cancer and AIDS patients. Oregon patients may be protected, but medical marijuana providers aren't.

The Drug Enforcement Administration has conducted numerous paramilitary raids on providers in California and Oregon. The very same DEA that claims illicit drug use funds terrorism is forcing sick patients into the hands of street dealers. Apparently federal marijuana laws are more important than protecting the country from terrorism. Students interested in helping reform harmful drug laws should contact Students for Sensible Drug Policy at [www.ssdp.org](http://www.ssdp.org).

Robert Sharpe  
 program officer  
 Drug Policy Alliance  
 Washington, D.C.

### It's their money

I was outraged to read your editorial suggesting that Bill Gates and other "ultra-rich" be forced to pay a special tax to eliminate homelessness, ("Communities should pressure richest citizens to help homeless," ODE, Nov. 5).

It is unclear from your piece at what time Gates starts living his life for the sake of your opinion. Is it as soon as you made your demand for his money? The fact that you have put your claim to Gates' money above Gates' claim to his own money should be morally offensive to all of your readers. And before responding with some comment about need, remember what happens when capital is distributed based on need.

Scott Parker  
 senior  
 general science

### Don't grade opinions

It utterly and thoroughly sickened me to read the so-called "advice" from Natasha Chilingierian in her Pulse column, "Ask Nat" ("Don't let politics get in the way of grades," Nov. 12, ODE).

It pertained to a student who received an F on his/her paper. Professors that are willing to flunk students because of their political views, and then themselves stand on their ivory towers of Ph.D.s and prestige in order to pontificate their political beliefs upon impressionable students, are nothing more than petty tyrants who do not deserve to be teaching students, much less receiving tenure.

A university is a place to learn — and this is achieved by hearing all sides of the debate. Here is a bit of advice to the student: Be proud of your beliefs, and never let a professor bully you into thinking that their way is the only way toward receiving an A.

Jarrett White  
 junior, business  
 chairman  
 College Republicans

### Thanks for the support

I want to thank the residents of Oregon's Congressional District 4 for a strong vote of support in the election. It is a tremendous opportunity and honor to

once again be chosen to represent South-west Oregon in Congress.

I will continue to do my best to actively represent concerns and unique Oregon perspectives in Congress.

As always, please write, e-mail, call or visit one of my three district offices to express your opinions and concerns on federal issues or to ask for help with problems you are having with the federal agency or program.

Peter DeFazio  
 member of Congress

### Measure 23's failure will cause crisis

Measure 23 volunteers were terrific, breaking signature-gathering records and educating their friends. As the medical crisis becomes more evident, voters will recognize their missed opportunity.

More than \$20 billion will be spent in 2005 for health care in Oregon, and 25 to 40 percent will go to corporate insurance-related charges. The same amount of money under Measure 23 would have paid for every Oregonian's medically necessary health care. I do anguish for all the million individuals without coverage or not enough coverage, especially seniors with no dental, prescription or long term care. Premiums in 2005 are predicted to be 50 percent higher, and fewer and fewer citizens will afford insurance. Measure 23 would have been cheaper except for the richest 10 percent.

Hundreds of rural communities today have no health care, and by 2005 there will also be fewer medical centers. There will be an increase in bankruptcies, now 45 percent because of health costs. More Oregon companies will become self-insured for their healthy working population, and the rest of us will pay for the sick, disabled and the elderly.

Everyone must become better informed about health care, work for campaign finance reform and contact their elected officials about the importance of having a single payer plan for Oregon.

Ruth Duemler  
 Eugene