

Monday, February 3, 2003

Awed by their noble cause

Editorial

It was 17 years ago when the space shuttle Challenger lifted off on a crisp, cold, January morning to take seven astronauts into the heavens. They never made it. Seventy-three seconds later, the flight of Challenger came to a tragic end as the orbiter exploded over the Atlantic Ocean, and the nation went into mourning.

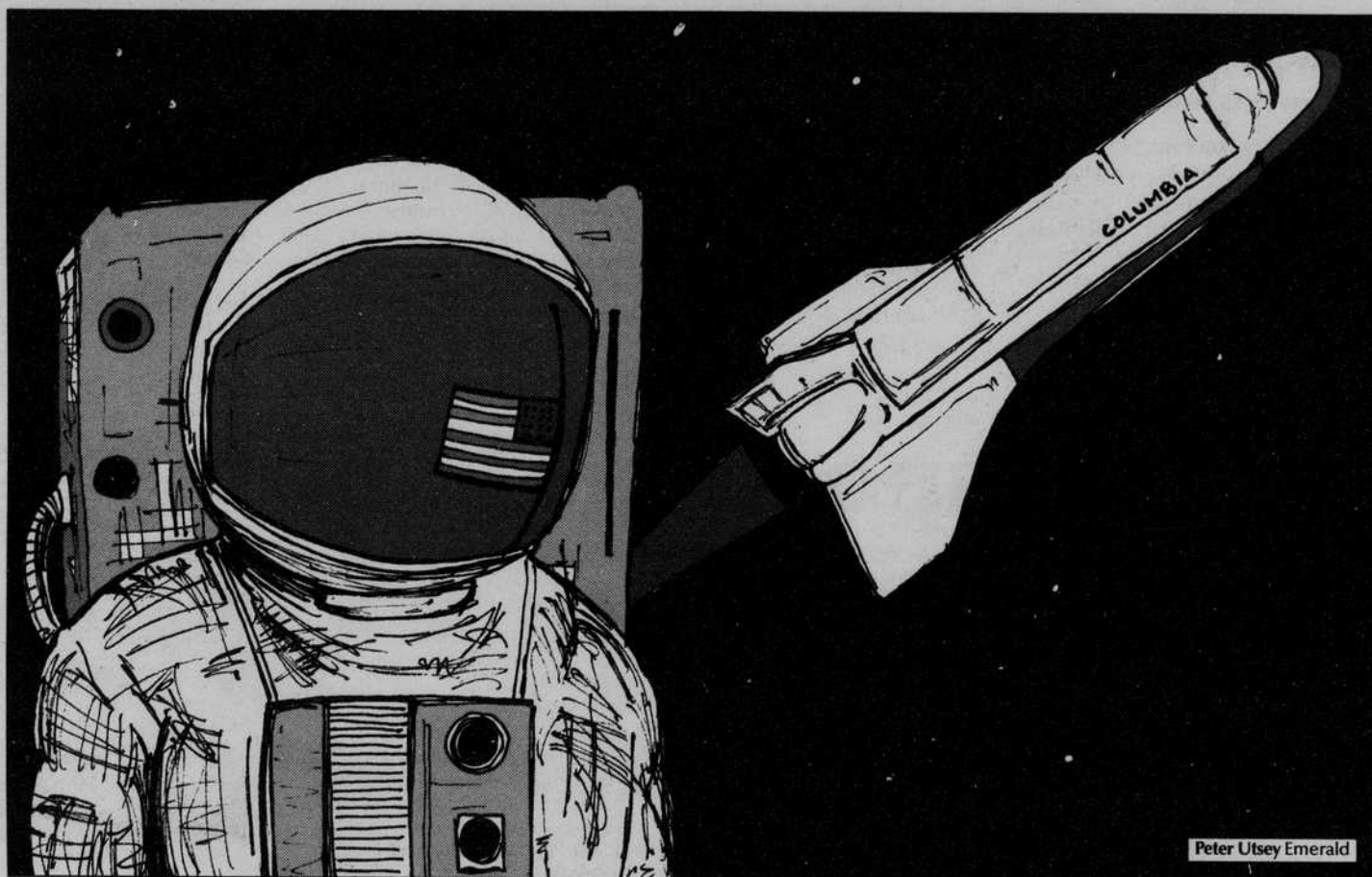
On Saturday, almost 17 years to the day of Challenger's explosion, the nation once again had to face the loss of a space shuttle. Columbia, which in April would have celebrated 22 years in the service of NASA, was returning home from a successful mission when a catastrophic failure caused the orbiter to literally shatter over Texas.

We mourn the fallen: Rick Husband, William McCool, Michael Anderson, David Brown, Kalpana Chawla, Laurel Clark and Israel's first astronaut, Ilan Ramon.

These seven heroes died for a lofty purpose: to increase scientific knowledge and to bring advancements from space down to Earth in service to humanity. Their cause was more noble than being killed for some fleeting glory in a war, or for any of the other petty purposes that people lionize the dead.

Space travel must no longer be taken for granted. It is a highly dangerous pursuit. Of all major space disasters in U.S. history (there now are four), only one of those ended with the victims surviving — the 1971 Apollo 13 saga. In many cases with space flight, once the astronauts are in space, essentially they have already passed the point of no return.

In order to safeguard those explorers, the nation now needs to demand increased funding for NASA. At one time, NASA was the premier space agency on Earth. It is the only group that has sent astronauts to the moon.



Peter Utsey Emerald

Yet its successes since the 1970s have been few. Much of that is because of the drastic cuts in funding that have plagued the administration since the Reagan years — a problem exacerbated by the current threat of an expensive war and a giant tax cut. It is time to reverse this trend.

NASA needs to refit or replace its aging

fleet of space shuttles. It is time to return to the moon and to reach Mars, to make the new International Space Station a gateway for advancements for the betterment of humanity. Certainly, the money exists, if only the nation once again becomes awed by the possibilities of space travel and demands that it be made a priority.

John F. Kennedy made a historic challenge in 1961 that humankind would land on the moon within 10 years. We need a new challenge — something not only for national pride, but world pride. The world's fallen astronauts deserve no less.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

Editorial

Happy Black History Month

Saturday marked the beginning of Black History Month, a time of recognition first celebrated in 1926 as Negro History Week and expanded in 1976 to include the whole month of February.

The month is important because many significant American contributions and inventions have been stripped from their original owners, and the accomplishments of black Americans have been systematically ignored by the recorders of history.

We encourage all campus community members to get involved in the various events celebrating Black History Month and to seek out greater knowledge of the contributions that all Americans have made to the progress of humanity.

The Emerald will recognize the month with an occasional series of stories and with a daily feature, "Leading history," which will briefly highlight the life and work of a black American.

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.

Online poll

Each week, the Emerald publishes the previous week's poll results and the coming week's poll question. Visit www.dailyemerald.com to vote.

Last week: If found guilty, should ASUO Vice President Ben Buzbee be removed from office?

Results: 417 total votes

Yes, he broke the law — 3.8 percent, or 16 votes

Yes, he is a poor representative of the students — 41 percent, or 171 votes

No, his personal and professional life should remain separate — 34.5 percent, or 3 votes

No, it's not that big a deal — 17.7 percent, or 7 votes

Don't know — 1.7 percent, or 2 votes

Leave me alone! — 1.2 percent, or 6 votes

This week: Are University of Oregon scholarships distributed fairly?

Choices: Yes — Individuals that work the hardest get rewarded; Yes — The University has a right to distribute the money as they see fit; No — Too much money is going to athletics over academics; No — Too much reward for accomplishments over financial needs; Don't know; Leave me alone!

CORRECTION

Thursday's column by Sarah Spellman ("Guns and carelessness," ODE, Jan. 30) should have said that Matthew Randall "broke probation by possessing this firearm and is currently serving his full 30-day sentence."

The Emerald regrets the error.

Let Rodney Woods finish his probation

Guest commentary

Second chances are great. As a staff member at the Emerald during the early '90s, I vaguely remember the paper editorializing against rules that would bar felons from enrolling at the University. We argued that people who had fulfilled their debt to society deserved a chance to better themselves with education, and it was in society's long-term best interest not to close off such avenues.

The issue is important now because, with the no-felon rule in place, Duck head coach Mike Bellotti and defensive coordinator Nick Aliotti are petitioning a court in California to reduce recruit Rodney Woods' felony assault to a misdemeanor so that the young man can enroll at the University.

There will probably always be attempts to promote loopholes for exceptions to this rather draconian rule barring felons.

But wouldn't it be more appropriate to make those exceptions because the person in question displayed a proven redeeming value more significant than merely running fast enough to fill a hole in the football team's secondary line?

Rodney Woods is still on probation for the May 19, 2000, beating of Kevin Walker, who tried to stop two of Woods' high school football teammates from beating Christopher O'Leary to death after Woods initially got into an argument with O'Leary.

This isn't some kid who became a felon by putting his foot through the window of a federal building while being caught up in a riot over the Rodney King verdict, as was the example we used in our editorial in the '90s. This is a person who played a part in a man being kicked and punched to death.

He's still on probation for that crime. Let Rodney Woods show that he can fulfill the commitment that the justice system enforced on him before the University grants him de facto clemency.

Pat Malach lives in Hillsboro.