

OSPIRG carries on tradition of local, global activism

Guest commentary

In regards to concerns about OSPIRG's budget, I would like to delineate a few things about the organization.

Our society is not perfect, and students have historically been at the forefront of social change. From the civil rights movement to the peace movement to the environmental movement, students have been instrumental in instituting progress on a local, national and global scale.

The students who launched the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group here at the University in the early 1970s took on some of the most pressing problems facing the

public, from consumer rip-offs, to hunger, to pollution in our air and drinking water. They were idealistic, yet realistic enough to know that while these problems affect the student body, they could not be solved if work is limited to campus boundaries.

Students established incidental fee-funded chapters at other Oregon schools, pooled their money and hired lawyers and experts to address the issues. This enabled students to solve problems without having to lift a finger. As they nevertheless wanted to, the students hired additional full-time campus staff to provide them with leadership training and organizing skills essential to running successful projects on campus.

Today, students are no different. We want to make a difference but do not have the time, money or credentials to influence decision-makers. We do, however, have access to the student fee, which allows us to pitch in \$2 per term to generate \$400,000 dollars worth of social change. Because of OSPIRG's distinctive funding mechanism, the student group can do more than hold meetings and pizza parties. The organization views students as citizens and offers opportunities to make a lasting change.

OSPIRG is needed on the University campus now just as it was 30 years ago. It is the leading student group fighting such critical prob-

lems as homelessness in Eugene, potential drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, logging, mining and road building in our forests and national monuments, and toxic dumping in the Willamette River. Seeing that 105 new students attended OSPIRG's fall general interest meeting — we didn't even serve food — and turnouts for our other events have been equally large, OSPIRG's campaigns are well received at the University. Furthermore, OSPIRG continues to be a popular resource to students when it comes to renter's rights, credit card hazards and loan debt.

Contrary to misconceptions some have expressed, OSPIRG

skimps on administrative costs and staff salaries. It does not have an office in Salem and does not use student fees to finance partisan politics or lobby the Legislature. If you have met any OSPIRG students, you know that we are honest and conscientious, and we put our heart, soul and grueling unpaid hours into the work that we do, simply because we care.

OSPIRG's funding structure is what gives us the ability to make an impact and get results, and has been proven effective for 30 years.

Vivian Vassall is the board chair of OSPIRG, pending the officers' election. She lives in Seattle.

U.S. companies, officials partly responsible for war crimes

Guest commentary

For the Bush administration, the question is embarrassing: Who supplied Saddam Hussein with materials of mass destruction? Where did his military regime, known for its atrocities against the Iranians and Kurds, acquire fighter planes, helicopters, tanks, germs and lethal chemicals — an arsenal of terror?

The answer is no longer in dispute. In violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which outlaws chemical warfare, the Reagan administration authorized the sale of poisonous chemicals and deadly biological viruses throughout the '80s. In 1982, while Hussein constructed his machinery of war, Reagan removed Iraq

from the State Department list of terrorist states.

As special envoy for Reagan, Donald Rumsfeld met with Hussein in December 1983 to offer U.S. military backing in Iraq's war against Iran, during which millions of civilians were slaughtered. According to newly declassified documents, Iraq was already using chemical weapons on an "almost daily basis," when Rumsfeld consolidated this military alliance.

The Pentagon supplied logistical and military support and the CIA, using a Chilean conduit, increased Hussein's supply of cluster bombs. U.S. companies also supplied, ironically, the types of weapons materials for which the U.N. Security Council is now searching.

U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-

Ohio, head of the Progressive Caucus, uncovered more information recently. As late as 1989 and 1990, U.S. companies, under permits from the first Bush administration, sent mustard gas precursors and live cultures for bacteriological research to Iraq. U.S. companies helped Iraq build a chemical weapons factory, and then shipped Hussein hydrogen cyanide precursors and parts for a new nuclear plant.

The infamous massacre at Halabja — the gassing of the Kurds — took place in March 1988. On Sept. 19, 1988, six months later, U.S. companies sent 11 strains of germs to Iraq, including a microbe strain called 11966 developed for germ warfare at Fort Detrick in the '50s. When Hussein's atrocities fulfilled U.S. strategic aims, war sup-

plies flowed unendingly. Bush turned against Hussein only after he threatened Western access to oil in the Gulf.

The vast, lucrative arms trade in the Middle East laid the groundwork for Hussein's aggression against Kuwait. Without high-tech weapons from Europe and the U.S., Iraq's wars against Iran and Kuwait would never have taken place. Revelations of the U.S. role in Iraq's arms buildup spawn a host of questions: Why aren't U.S. and European scientists, who invented and produced lethal materials for Hussein, subject to interrogations, like their counterparts in Iraq?

Are U.S. companies sending their deadly material to other dictators? Why are there no Congressional hearings on the companies

that profit from the traffic in arms?

Now the world is faced with a tragic irony: The world's leading merchant of death is taking us to war to stop arms proliferation in the region to which it shipped chemicals and arms for more than 10 years. If a war crimes trial were held today, U.S. officials and company executives could be tried for crimes against humanity along with Hussein's own regime.

Under the Nuremberg principles and the laws of war, human rights are measured by one yardstick. It's not just the buyers, it is the suppliers of death who are accountable for their handiwork.

Paul Rockwell is a freelance writer from Oakland, Calif.

'Nigger' has several meanings used to show acceptance, kindness

Guest commentary

In reference to "Still just a 'dream,'" (ODE, Jan. 21): My skin color says I'm of the white race, the word "white" holding numerous positive connotations: white hat, white lie, etc. We may also call a black person black, but "black's" connotations are negative: black mood, black Sabbath. So, to soften "black" as applied to people, we use the foreign Spanish/Portuguese/Italian "negro." Or one might say "colored person" or "person of color," but the words/expressions with the fewest

syllables tend to win out. African American is doubly misleading because some whites hail from Africa and some negroes are native to parts of Asia and the South Pacific.

We sometimes like to have a separate term for our familiars, so here we would use a derivative of a French word for black, *negre*. In fact, there is a lullaby still sung in New Orleans, repeating soothingly over and over, "*Ti negre, ti negre*," where "*ti*" is short for petite and the expression is literally "little black" or "little nigger." It's a term of endearment. In Jamaica, "you're my nigger," is idiomatic for "I love you."

MLK's "dream" speech is perhaps misleading in that the original American experiment in equality had little or nothing to do with the equality of the races, but was more concerned over whether shopkeepers could run the government. Be that as it may, we have embarked upon a new experiment in racial equality.

It is understandable that negroes want to forget about their heritage as slaves, where the familiar term applied to them as cared-for members of a slave-holder's household is not welcome in the new experiment.

Furthermore, a personal term

applied to someone with whom one is not on familiar terms can be construed as an insult. You tell an older man to get out of your way: "Move it, pops" rather than "Excuse me, sir." That is degrading. Thus the word "nigger" has been used in some circles as an insult.

When my sister eloped with a black man, our parents didn't much care for it, and for a time, my sister was acting almost ashamed of her husband to appease the folks. This didn't set well with me, so I made a point of acknowledging him in our family, which brought me flak from all sides — parents and sister. At the

time, it seemed that the only side that I was on was that of my new brother-in-law.

In the "Still just a 'dream'" article, the columnist expressed shock at hearing a friend refer to another friend as "nigger." I know on occasion I have, in informal speech among friends, used that word for my brother-in-law meaning only that he is accepted by me as a brother, and I might suggest that this friend's black friend may actually be cool with the term. In the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," the head of the house tolerated no disrespect, but his son still could call him "pops."

Earl Gosnell lives in Eugene.

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