

COMMENTARY

Editor in Chief:
 Michael J. Kleckner
 Managing Editor:
 Jessica Richelderfer
 Editorial Editor:
 Pat Payne

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Editorial

Higher city fine lets first-time pot convictions go up in smoke

The Eugene City Council voted Monday night to raise the fine for misdemeanor possession of marijuana from \$100 to \$250. At first, we were torn on the issue, as it does put an unfair added burden on those who have a legal right to possess marijuana. On the other hand, the new diversion program accompanying the fine hike will give students a second chance.

The way Oregon's medicinal marijuana system works can already be a potent Catch-22 for patients, and increasing the fine seems to be punishing the wrong people. It is not illegal to possess marijuana if you have a medical condition and a license from the state — but there is no legal place to purchase marijuana. So patients sometimes resort to illegal sales and run the risk of arrest.

Then again, so does anyone who wants to buy weed. College students often are users of marijuana, and they, too, can face an unfair price for indulging.

According to federal law, once you are convicted of a drug offense — any drug offense, even a misdemeanor — you risk losing any future financial aid. This burden is high — too high for students engaging in an activity that is not so much harmful to others as it is annoying to the status quo — at least as regards marijuana use.

That is why, ironically, we like the idea of increasing the fines for misdemeanor possession. The city is starting a new diversion program for first-time offenders that will allow them to clear the conviction. "Marijuana and Other Drugs" will be offered by the University and will cost only \$90. So the idea behind increasing the penalty is that first-time offenders will be more likely to pick the \$90 diversion over a \$250 fine.

We don't like the thrust of the BUSTED-style diversion programs, as they lean too heavily on hyperbole and propaganda. We don't really know many people who substantially changed their recreational use habits as a result of them. But we like the idea that people convicted for the first time on an essentially harmless offense could have it cleared from their record.

Of course, the best-case scenario would be to decriminalize possession of small amounts of marijuana. There is a major difference between someone who uses meth or PCP — or alcohol for that matter, as all three have a tendency to bring out aggressive behavior — and someone smoking marijuana.

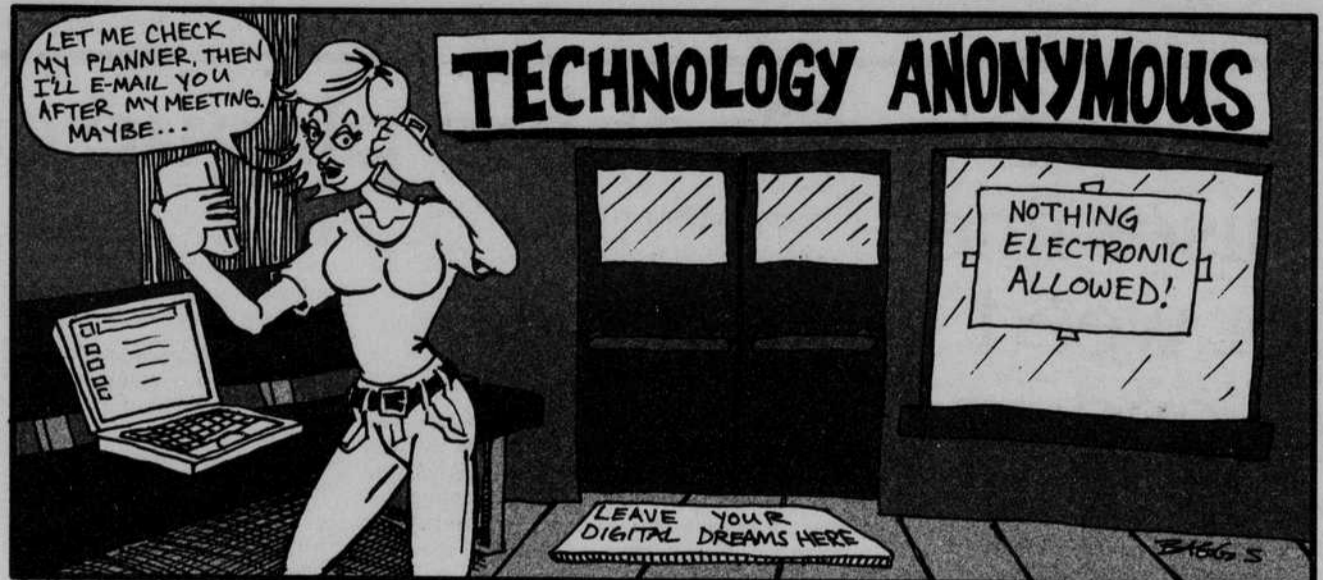
All marijuana prohibition accomplishes is injustice; the penalties are out of line with the offense. But until someone is able to garner enough support to change the law, we support the fine increase, as it is likely to encourage students to clear their record on first-time offenses.

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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Steve Baggs Emerald

Nothing but a tech thing

It would be going too far to call myself a Luddite, but at one time I firmly believed that most emerging technology was a waste of time. I thought that laptop computers were for the object-oriented, DVD players were idiotic, that cell phones pressed on ears was a disgusting sight and personalized ring tones were obnoxious.

Now, after watching a movie on DVD, I begin typing this column on a laptop on which I am also downloading MP3 files and burning them onto a CD. In case I miss

any calls on my home phone, I have my cell phone to use as a backup. And yes, I do have a personalized ring tone. Neil Diamond's "America," anyone? Talk about obnoxious.

It is unclear when my conversion to loving technology took place exactly. I don't remember when I first got a cell phone, and I certainly don't know how I ever lived without one. I do remember justifying getting a cell phone when I finally decided that it was time. "Well," I asked myself, "what happens if I am in the woods somewhere and my car breaks down or I get lost?"

"Call someone on my cell phone," seemed like the most logical answer. Sounds like a convincing argument, I

suppose, but the damn phone probably wouldn't even get any reception in the woods, anyway.

I suppose if I were to use a global positioning system, I could justify it the same way.

To be an even bigger hypocrite, I am horribly impatient when people are slow to adapt to a new technology or if I have to resort to the "old" way of doing things.

I get galled when I have to sit and wait for a tape to rewind when I know that with a DVD, I could skip to the beginning or middle with the push of a single button.

I get chafed at my friends who don't have cell phones for inconveniencing me by not allowing me access to talk to them whenever I see fit (But, after sitting here and thinking about it for a few minutes, I can only think of three people I know that don't have cell phones, and of those three, I know one is in the process of getting one).

Use a typewriter? I don't even know where I could find one.

I wish that I could go back to a time before I knew the joys of technology. I feel like an ex-drug addict who wishes that they never found the delectation of opiates, or an ex-alcoholic who wishes they never took a sip from the first bottle. If there were a local 12-step program available for technology addiction, I would have to sign up.

I was watching television a while ago and was flipping through the channels when I came to OPB. Before my eyes

was the solution to my problem: "Frontier House." The series is a reality show minus the trash factor. The premise behind "Frontier House" is a family moves to the middle of nowhere and is made to live as if they were homesteaders in the still-wilderness state of Montana in 1883.

The family gets an allotment of money and enough things to keep them alive. Then, all of the goods they acquired outside of those a person from 1883 would be expected to have are confiscated — particularly cell phones. They keep in touch with family and friends via the Postal Service and telegraphs, and can't be bothered with television and computers because they hadn't been invented yet. The family gets the privilege of returning to a simpler time when survival was dependent on working hard and not being distracted by electronic gadgets. It would be a perfect escape.

Until I check into technology rehab, or sign up to be on "Frontier House," I will continue to look up Web sites and glance over prices for things that I know I don't need but absolutely want. This week, I want a new PowerBook G4 — with the 17-inch screen of course — and a Nokia 7650 — because taking pictures with a cell phone is so unnecessary, but so cool.

Contact the columnist at kathrynpetersen@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



Kathryn Petersen
In other words

Letters to the editor

Faculty is wise to not pass war resolution

In "UO Assembly, groups discuss war resolution" (ODE, Feb. 2), the Emerald notes that the National Association of Scholars says in the Chronicle of Higher Education that university senates "should stick to education and curriculum, and remain separate from foreign politics." The Oregon chapter of the National Association of Scholars has taken no official position on the Iraq resolutions passed by the senate of Oregon State University and rejected by the University Senate.

However, as head of the Oregon chapter of NAS, I believe the University Senate has acted wisely in heeding University President Dave Frohnmayer's call for official neutrality. Frohnmayer is to be commended for his leadership on this issue.

Michael Kellman
professor
chemistry

Shuttle disaster calls for reflection

In "Awd by their noble cause," (ODE, Feb. 3) it was said that the ill-fated STS-107 crew died in the service of country, science, and humanity. I could not agree more with this statement. However, it was also stated: "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."

Is the Emerald aware that among the dead are five members of our armed forces? These five were chosen as astronauts in part because of their excellence in the service of their country's defense.

This excellence almost surely does not include a desire for glory through warmongering. With heavy hearts, we watched on television the fate of these brave astronauts just minutes from safety.

Unfortunately, it is this catastrophic image that has made astronauts Rick Husband, William McCool, Michael Anderson, David Brown, Kalpana Chawla, Laurel Clark, and Ilan Ramon famous. I think their loved ones would rather have them ultimately remembered not by this event, but by who they were and what they accomplished.

This tragedy is not a platform to make anti-war statements. It is disrespectful to the families and friends who are grieving. Please allow this to be a time for reflection: On what the past was and what the future can be.

Jim Gutierrez
second-year graduate
physics