

COMMENTARY

Wednesday, February 19, 2003

Letters to the editor

Critic needs to get his facts right

Zachary Vishanoff is certainly entitled to his opinion (ODE, Feb. 17), but if he would first get his facts straight, we'd be more likely to have a useful discussion. Contrary to his statement, none of my re-election materials said that my support for a housing code was restricted to "privately-held" properties.

The only place his statement comes close to reality is that my voter's pamphlet statement said that I was "working with ASUO to improve the condition of private-market housing." The words "private-market" are there only because that is what ASUO is working on!

David Kelly
 Eugene city councilor
 Ward 3

Anti-war protests do show mercy

In her opening statement about the impending war on Iraq, Salena De La Cruz ("Time for action against Iraq," ODE, Feb. 17) said, "Blow the bastards away!" Which bastards is she talking about? Does she think that bombs find their way only to the leaders of a country? Or is every Iraqi a bastard because they live in a country whose ruler's ideology opposes that of the United States?

Secondly, she says that if we don't act, American citizens will be "falling to their knees for mercy and be denied that small act." What small act is mercy? I would venture to say that most of the millions of people who protested against the war last Saturday would say that their actions were in part aimed at showing mercy to the civilians in and around Iraq. This is no small act we are asking for — millions asked, and we are still waiting, on edge, for this "small act" to be considered by our government.

Finally she asks us "what is to stop them from entering our country and taking what little we would have left?" Even on our knees we would still be the wealthiest country in the world. Do we really have so little that people are unable to think about things like recreation? Almost all of us have cars for which we trade food for oil with Iraq. Maybe if we didn't have so much, our entire relationship with Iraq would be different.

Mona Jones
 junior
 environmental science

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.



WHEN WILL THE LIES STOP?!

Steve Baggs Emerald

Contain Hussein's weapons, avoid war

Guest commentary

In the name of protecting the world from the threat of weapons of mass destruction, President George W. Bush is on the verge of ordering the action which is most likely to cause these terrible weapons to be used. Rather than pursue a policy which could keep Hussein's arsenal hemmed in and contained, Bush is heading toward a war that could unleash these weapons on defenseless civilians both in America and Iraq.

The Bush administration is rationalizing a pre-emptive strike as necessary in order to prevent a "future" threat to U.S. civilians, ignoring the fact that Hussein is capable *right now* of orchestrating such attacks. Bush himself admitted in his State of the Union speech that there are bioweapons against which the United States

has no protection. This is why he proposed "Project Bioshield" to develop antidotes.

According to the American Medical Association, botulinum toxin is the "most poisonous substance known." An extremely tiny amount can kill in six to 24 hours, usually through respiratory collapse. Iraq has already admitted to previous inspectors the production of large quantities. The U.S. Army's "top biological defense expert" — Col. Erik Henchal — recently reaffirmed U.S. vulnerability to several bioweapons when he described "serious holes in the U.S. military's defenses against weapons such as the nerve poison botulinum toxin, plague bacteria and viruses that cause brain infections" (New York Times, Jan. 8).

Despite such lack of protection, Bush still presses for the destruction of Hussein's regime, which even the CIA has advised would

cause Hussein to "become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions ... a WMD (weapons of mass destruction) attack against the United States would be his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him."

President Bush is poking an exceedingly venomous cobra. Hussein has had ample time to set up a retaliatory plan. With his brutal history, does anyone really expect him to "go quietly?" It is not only Bush's fingers that may get bitten. Bush is gambling with the lives of large numbers of American and Iraqi civilians.

A huge story is not getting out. Lack of media investigation has led the public to believe that the war will be "over there." In the little time left, this state of denial must be overcome and hard questions asked, such as "what remedy will be offered to people in Portland ex-

posed to botulinum?"

America is faced with a momentous choice. Will it choose the path almost guaranteed to unleash these demonic weapons, or one that can keep these weapons bottled up? The return of inspectors has already been a remarkable success. Hussein's weapons are under a microscope, his arsenal essentially hemmed in. To keep it pinned down indefinitely, the temporary inspection process could be expanded into an ongoing, long-term weapons monitoring program administered by the United Nations. The world can choose to "contain" Hussein. There is still time to step back from this abyss.

Jane Cramer is a professor of political science. Gary "Spruce" Houser is a co-producer and writer for a documentary on accidental nuclear war broadcast on public TV stations prior to the 1991 Gulf War.

Voter Power seeks marijuana law reforms

Guest commentary

On Feb. 10, the Eugene City Council approved a fine increase for marijuana possession, despite protests from the medical marijuana community. Citizens raised concerns that the fine increase would affect patients who could not afford the \$150 registration fee required by the state medical marijuana program. Patients who cannot afford the \$150 fee are forced to obtain marijuana illegally and will become subject to the increasingly severe fines if caught. The effect may be to force patients who need marijuana to ease medical symptoms into a treatment program they do not need.

However, recourse may be available. On Feb. 8, Voter Power, a local nonprofit organization, held a signing party for OMMA2, an initiative to amend the state's medical marijuana law. If the initiative gathers the required signatures and makes the ballot, Oregon will be able to vote to decrease the cost of Oregon's medical marijuana program from \$150 to \$20. If the initiative is

successful, all Eugene residents who require medical marijuana will be able to afford it. This, in effect, will counteract any problems posed to marijuana patients by the recent fine increase by the City Council.

Yet the initiative is more ambitious still. Some of the changes it will make include protecting medical marijuana users from losing their jobs because of their marijuana use; create dispensaries, so patients do not have to acquire marijuana on the streets; protect out-of-state visitors who are legally recognized to use marijuana by their own states; and increase the number of plants patients are allowed to personally grow from seven to 10.

Though ambitious, each change the initiative seeks is a change based on problems arising out of the original medical marijuana initiative passed in 1998. Several patients have been fired from their jobs for their lawful use of marijuana. Some patients cannot harvest enough marijuana to treat themselves from the seven plants they are allowed to grow. As well, patients are currently unable to legally obtain marijuana until their plants mature, a process that takes sev-

eral months.

The initiative offers a timely opportunity for Oregon to reassert its support of medical marijuana. The Bush administration has made it a top priority to shut down medical marijuana dispensaries in California and has been harassing patients and providers with excessive federal raids and threats of legal action. Currently Arkansas, Connecticut, Maryland, Montana, New Mexico, Vermont and Wyoming are considering legislation to allow medical use of marijuana. If each bill passes, medical marijuana will be legal in 15 states. By reasserting their support for medical marijuana, Oregon voters can join these states to force the Bush administration to respectfully address this situation.

Voter Power formally filed OMMA2 on Friday. Medical marijuana patients and the citizens of Oregon will have to gather some 100,000 signatures to ensure enough valid signatures exist for ballot placement. To contact Voter Power, visit its Web site at www.voterpower.org.

Kevin Feeney lives in Eugene.