

Stand up, speak out for more public school funding

Guest commentary

Since the national and state economic crisis, you have encountered challenges. In order to guarantee that Oregon's schools remain one of the nation's best, I am asking for your help. Step back for a minute and evaluate your education experience, not only as a student, but as an Oregonian as well. It should be obvious education is the key that unlocks the door to success. How do you improve the quality of our education system?

It's simple. Prove to those around you that your generation's future and the institutions you learn in are worth the public's investment. Every

cent counts toward the necessary tools that enable you to learn everyday, from textbooks to teachers. If the public doesn't continue to fund education, we will send the wrong message to everyone involved. Let's encourage Oregonians to properly fund one of the best public education systems in the nation.

Some people think our schools already have enough money. Let's look at some facts. In a well-known Northwest economist firm's study, it was discovered that in 1990, Oregon was spending 4.6 percent of the total state income on K-12 education; in 2000, Oregon spent only 4.2 percent. Put another way, the governor's published budget is \$1 billion short of what's needed to have the

same education product we had two years ago.

A big misconception about spending is that the CIM and CAM costs hundreds of millions of dollars per year. Not true. The cost of this assessment system is \$30 to \$40 million. It is impossible to eliminate student assessments, as they are now mandated by the federal government's No Child Left Behind Act.

During my March 21, 2003, testimony to the Oregon House of Representatives Revenue Committee, I advocated for increasing public investment in our schools and our future. I summed up our situation like this:

"We, and the federal government, are demanding dramatic improve-

ments from our schools — and it appears we are about to give them dramatically less money than they need. It's as if we were telling a baseball manager, 'Win 100 games and the Series this year, or you're fired — and by the way you've got to cut payroll by 20 percent.'"

After reading this, education's future must appear pretty bleak, but you know better. Oregon schools are worth fighting for. Oregon has been No. 1 or No. 2 in SAT scores for the past 13 years. Oregon teachers are among the most qualified in the nation. By every objective standard, Oregon schools are among the best in the nation!

Failure to invest in our schools would surely stifle our chance to

keep our lead, as well as harm students and their futures.

You can change this situation, strengthen our schools and safeguard your future all at the same time by making a simple commitment. Whenever possible, educate those around you concerning what the statewide budget cuts have done to the learning process in your school and community. Become an education advocate. If you can touch the lives close to you — your family, your friends, their families — you can help sway public opinion toward investing in Oregon's education — investing in your future.

Susan Castillo is Oregon's superintendent of public instruction.

Limiting late-term abortions violates reproductive equality

Guest commentary

The vote March 13 in the U.S. Senate to limit late-term abortions was not only an attack on a woman's right to control her own medical and reproductive choices, but also an attack on gender equality and basic human rights.

As a matter of clarification, only

1.4 percent of all abortions occur in the second half of pregnancy, and these are typically done in an effort to save the life of the mother, or in instances where the fetus will not survive past delivery.

That having been said, the attempts made to legislate this decision, to take a personal, often medically necessary, choice away from women and their care

providers is a symbol of the very real and evident inequality that continues to exist in our society. As a further example of this, one only need look at who the decision makers were this week — the vote in the Senate was composed of 14 women and 86 men.

The ripple effects of this decision and others like it are something that concerns all of us as citizens and as

students. One's educational opportunities and economic well-being are dramatically affected by his or her ability to make comprehensive, informed decisions about when and how to start a family.

Women need to be able to control when they have children to get a good education, and they need a good education to ensure that they can support the children that they

want to have.

This is not the first attack on the reproductive rights of women, and it most likely will not be the last. Knowing this, the time for complacency, if ever there was one, is over. To ignore one's rights is to lose them — advocate for equality now.

Rachel Pilliod is a junior political science major.

Letter to the editor

Free speech in classes shouldn't be stifled

Nanci McChesney-Henry, an anatomy teacher at Sheldon High School in Eugene, recently focused on the link between the environment and the human body. A student question regarding the environ-

mental effect of oil triggered an open discussion. About half of the 32 students offered comments.

"My class," said the teacher, "is about a free exchange of ideas." For thousands of years this has been the classic definition of education in a free society — education that W.B. Yeats calls "not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of the fire."

However, Shawn Haggard, 17, "a

self-described conservative who favors war against Iraq," contacted Lars Larson and appeared on KEZI news to complain about the teacher. According to other students in class, including Kristina Turner, also a Bush supporter, Haggard almost completely misrepresented what happened in class. Principal Bob Bolden has been fielding angry calls and e-mails from around the state

and beyond ever since.

Instead of being publicly vilified, McChesney-Henry should be praised and honored. Anyone aware of the extremist assault on public education led by the fundamentalist and evangelical Christian wing of Bush's Republican Party, however, knows that these know-nothings consider true education dangerous. Subversive. Un-American. They

much prefer rote memory, religious monopoly and unquestioning, lock-step indoctrination posing as patriotism. Through intimidation, they wish to smother the free interchange of ideas.

We cannot allow teachers on any level to be threatened in this way by American Taliban or anyone else.

Jerome Garger
Eugene

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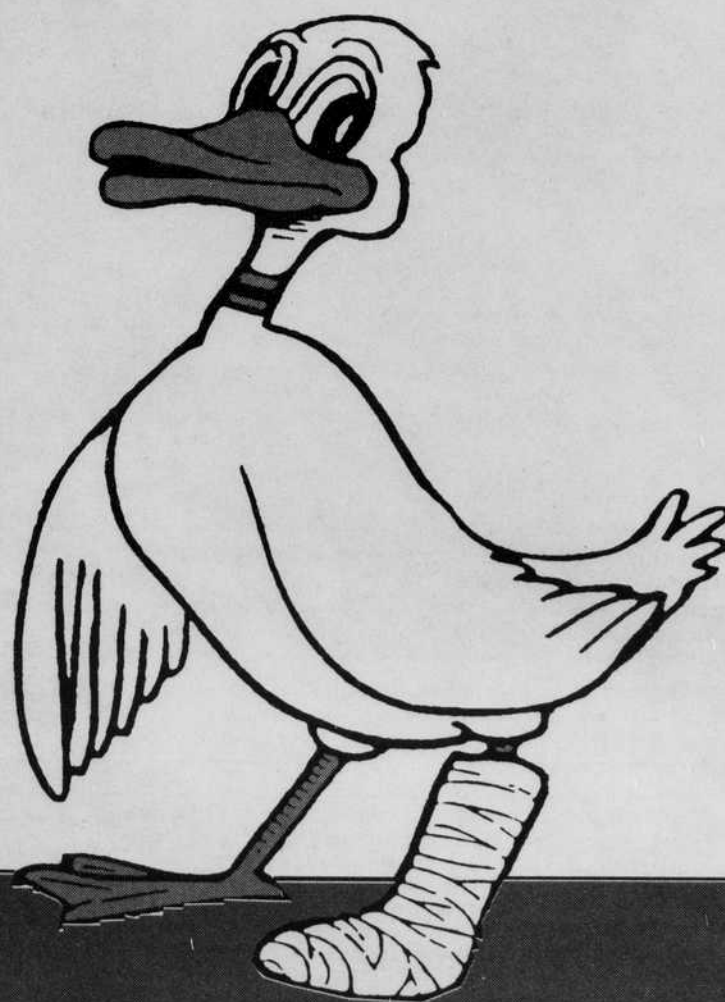
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