

# COMMENTARY

Editor in Chief:  
 Michael J. Kleckner  
 Managing Editor:  
 Jessica Richelderfer  
 Editorial Page Assistant:  
 Salena De La Cruz

Thursday, April 24, 2003

## Editorial

### Food labeling ban would deny right to know

Measure 27, which would have required labeling of genetically engineered foods, was defeated by voters last fall. Now, however, the Oregon Legislature is taking the issue to an absurd level, and food labeling proponents, consumer advocates and states' rights activists should stand together and fight.

House Bill 2957, introduced in early March by Rep. Jeff Kropf, R-Sublimity, and passed by the House, would remove local governments' rights to require food labeling. It also would ban any state agency from requiring food labeling that is more stringent than the federal government's labels.

Essentially, HB 2957 is a pre-emptive strike against consumers' right to know what they're buying. No city or county has proposed food labeling laws, but Kropf and a sizable portion of the House want to be sure localities don't get uppity.

Neither Kropf nor any of the other 47 representatives have offered an explanation as to what, exactly, food producers are trying to hide. All Kropf has said is that his bill would prevent the "crazy quilt of patchwork laws" that would result from cities developing their own requirements.

But patchwork is exactly what local and state laws are. Anything not regulated specifically by the federal government becomes a "crazy quilt" of varying state laws. Then, anything not regulated specifically by state governments becomes another "crazy quilt" of local laws. That's how our system works.

It isn't odd that a Republican who owns a peppermint and pumpkin seed farm would want to stop "radical" local governments from passing laws that could be a burden to farmers. (He was likely targeting Eugene, where radical consumers believe they should be allowed to know what's in their food, and Portland, where radical consumers banned polystyrene food containers in 1990, helping to change fast-food packaging nationwide.)

What's strange is that the House saw fit to include the state government in this bill, as well. Essentially, Kropf is saying that in the interest of an orderly set of laws, the state gives up its rights to the federal government, and localities have their rights stolen entirely.

Why is no one making any noise about this? Other than an Associated Press dispatch and a short story in The Oregonian, everyone seems content to have blindfolds put over their eyes when they buy food. Kropf's move is anti-free market and anti-consumer, and it should be recognized as such.

Consumers should have as much information as possible about the products competing for their dollars, and then they can purchase the superior product and let the others fail.

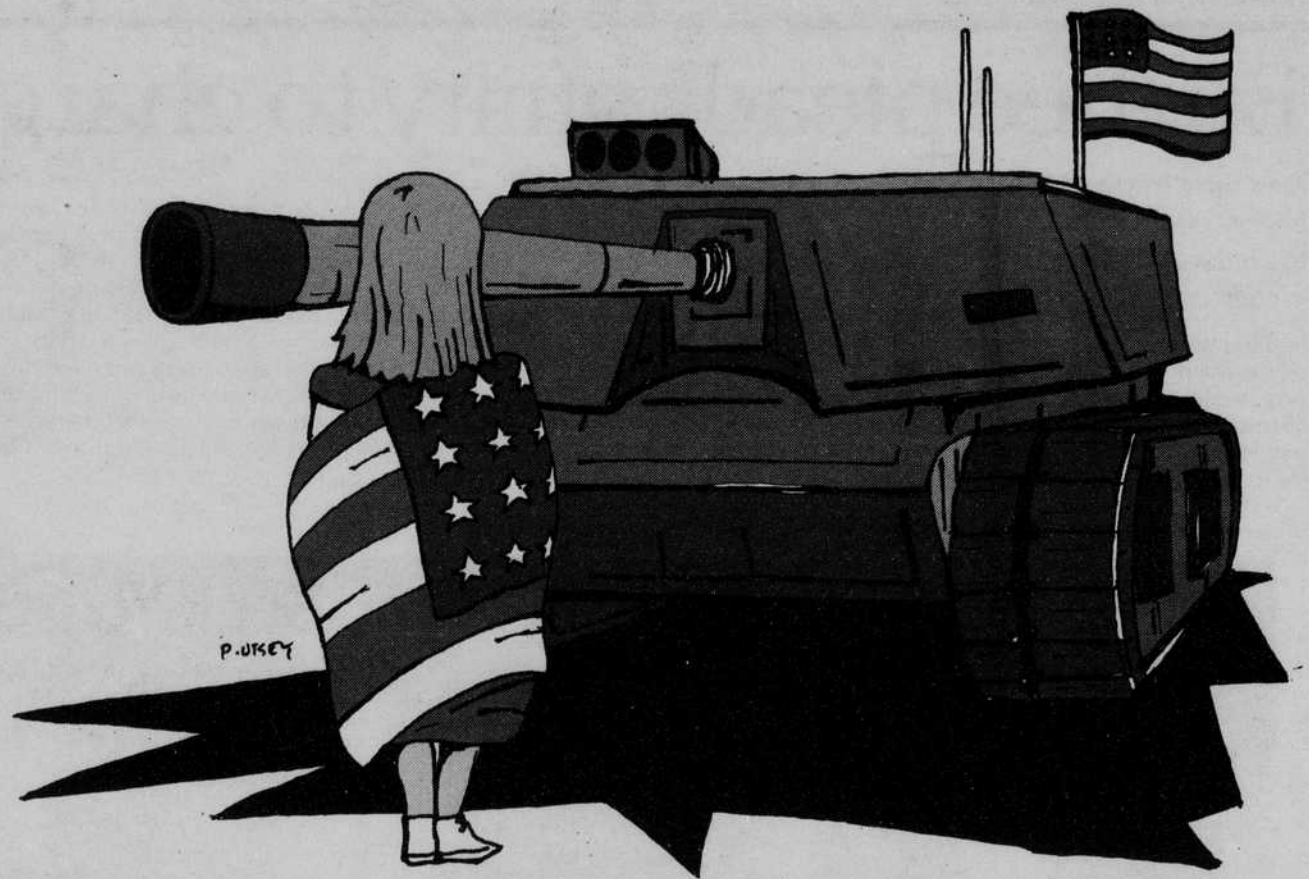
It's also interesting that a crackdown on labeling is occurring at the same time the federal government is preparing for increased labeling. New "country of origin" labeling laws will be mandatory by September 2004, requiring meats and produce to say where they come from.

We applaud the federal government; more information makes better consumers. However, Product Inform, a Kilkenny, Ireland-based company, is poised to be the first to market a new technology that delivers comprehensive food product information to handheld devices consumers can carry while shopping. Now that's free-market progress.

Currently, this bill is before the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, and Sen. Frank Shields, D-Portland, is the chairman. Contact Shields at (503) 986-1724. The University area is represented by Sen. Tony Corcoran, D-Cottage Grove, who also sits on this committee. Contact Corcoran at (503) 986-1724. Contact Kropf, the bill's sponsor, at (503) 986-1417.

### 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.



Peter Utsey Emerald

## Patriotic dissent

"My country, right or wrong' is a thing that no patriot would think of saying except in a desperate case. It is like saying 'My mother, drunk or sober.'" — G.K. Chesterton

I need a bumper sticker that says "I'm with Natalie." I suppose one that says "Tim is da man" would work almost as well. You see, I'm of the same ilk as Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks and Tim Robbins — actor, director, war protester. I think the war sucks, and I'm more than willing to say so.

According to strangers, friends and family members, I'm un-American. I find that a rather odd thing for them to say because, frankly, I consider myself to be extremely devoted to the principles this nation was founded upon. I suspect that our differing perspectives arise out of our definitions of what it means to be a good American.

Those who have challenged my status seem to believe that — at times of war or serious threats to national security — the most respectful thing you can do is stifle any dissenting views you may have until a more appropriate time. The problem is, I can't think of a more appropriate time.

Yes, we have soldiers overseas fighting and dying, and no one should ever be

asked to give their life for a specious reason. Therefore, the logic seems to go, I am not to criticize the reasons they're being asked to fight and die because they might begin to feel that their sacrifice is not appreciated.

Let me be very clear: I appreciate their sacrifice. I honor and respect those who have voluntarily given up their ability to exercise their own rights and assumed responsibility for protecting mine. I also believe that their sacrifices are being wasted and abused by the current administration. I think our nation's military men and women are being asked to fight for a cause that is immoral, illegal and completely unrelated to protecting our nation's security.

If I were to keep my opinions to myself, I would tacitly be condoning the needless sacrifice of our military men and women. That I will not do. Instead, I'd like to raise the rafters with my protest. Don't forget, the men and women in the military have taken an oath to follow orders. They depend on us, the American people, to make sure that the orders they follow are sane, moral and worthwhile. They don't have the luxury of questioning their orders. We do. To do less than that is to truly dishonor their sacrifice.

Don't misunderstand. I've no love for Hussein's regime, and I'm not sorry to see it fall. Neither was I sorry to see the Taliban toppled. Nevertheless, I do not

believe that we have the right to run about the world toppling leaders of sovereign nations simply because we don't like their internal policies. And, if you want to try to convince me that we're taking them out because they are a threat to our national safety, then you must first explain to me why we aren't directing our efforts toward other nations who pose a more clearly identifiable threat.

If I remember correctly, the terrorists of Sept. 11, 2001, were from Saudi Arabia. China certainly has weapons of mass destruction and a demonstrated disrespect for human rights. North Korea's posture has become increasingly aggressive toward the United States over the past few years, and we actually know they are developing nuclear weapons.

I often recall a bedtime story I heard as a child about a foolish and vain emperor who paraded around in his birthday suit, while he and all those around him were convinced he was royally garbed, until a small child — who didn't know better than to tell the truth — asked why the emperor had no clothes on.

Well, in my humble opinion, this administration is bare-assed naked. Bravo to Natalie, Tim and the others who aren't afraid to say so.

Contact the columnist at [jessicacolehodgkinson@dailyemerald.com](mailto:jessicacolehodgkinson@dailyemerald.com). Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

### Letter to the editor

#### Let's have another war

It is fascinating that people still can't agree about why the U.S.-Iraq war was fought. There was the military threat, but even the generals were disappointed in what turned out to be a cakewalk. Evidently, the sanctions and U.N. disarmament efforts were very effective.

There were the weapons of mass destruction, which were not used and cannot be found. Perhaps the Iraqis

lost them. These things do happen, especially in the heat of battle.

There was the link between Iraq and the World Trade Center attack, but only the goofballs who stocked up on duct tape and plastic believed that one. Today, the concern is Saddam Hussein's lifestyle, whose opulence exceeded that of many American CEOs.

In fact, President George W. Bush was wrong. War was neither necessary nor urgent. However, none of this matters to war supporters because we won. The Iraqis are free and are having

a fine time looting and destroying their cultural heritage. Plus, we have their oil. It is no coincidence that so many American flags fly from gas guzzling pickups and gigantic SUVs.

Evidently, this won't be enough. With six-guns still smoking, Cowboy Bush has turned his beady eyes on Syria and Iran, who, he says, are making chemical weapons. That war was fun, so let's have another!

Jim Remington  
 professor  
 physics