

Tuesday, August 5, 2003

EDITORIAL

Fraternity inferno illuminates need for better houses

As fire erupted on the third floor of the University's Theta Chi fraternity house Monday and spread to the second floor, students gathered on East 19th Avenue to watch the spectacle. Flames rose from the house and smoke filled the air. Dozens of firefighters arrived to fight the blaze.

It is an event to remember.

It's likely that many of the individuals who watched firefighters cut into the ceiling of the three-story house have parted on the premises. What's more likely, however, is that if this blaze occurred during the school year, someone would likely have been seriously injured. Instead of watching for the sake of watching, students instead would have been fearing for the well-being of friends and acquaintances.

Monday's fire should serve as a wake-up call to the University's administration, fraternities and sororities.

University President Dave Frohnmayer announced in 2002 a new requirement for fraternities and sororities to comply with new guidelines, including an alcohol ban. Another of the requirements is the installation of fire sprinkler systems by fall 2004.

While many fraternity and some sorority members decried the University's stance, it seems clear that a change is desperately needed. Unfortunately, these changes are going to come at quite a cost.

Monday's blaze reportedly began in a room where no one was living. If the cause of the fire is determined to be electrical, this will just go to show how poor the conditions of some of these fraternity and sorority houses are.

Theta Chi might be an extreme example, but many of these houses have been run into the ground over the years, and the building corporations that oversee the houses don't make necessary upgrades.

Clearly, these organizations aren't out to make sums of money, so upkeep on these million-dollar buildings can be troublesome. The costs of proper repairs and upgrades on buildings that are more than 50 years old could easily equal the overall property value.

Given these challenges, the future of fraternities and sororities on campus has to be at least somewhat questioned. Upgrades and repairs are obviously needed, and without them, students are in danger. The University has threatened to close down chapters that don't meet the school's endorsement standards; apparently there's some good in these measures.

Conversely, many chapters will not be able to afford these changes, and will be forced to shut down. The University will likely not help fund these important renovations, despite the fact that it is the establishment requiring them.

The University is also not shy about the need to provide more housing to its students, and it is probable that fraternity and sorority houses will become the University's newest properties in the coming years, right after these organizations are forced to shut down.

Whether the University, in turn, decides to keep the aging buildings for fraternities and sororities is still unknown. This much is clear, though: The University greek system, like its housing, is dangerously on the verge of falling apart.

The University community should be grateful that no one was injured in Monday's Theta Chi fire, and those concerned with the greek system's welfare should remember the event in the future. It's time to upgrade these facilities before someone gets hurt.

EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters @dailymerald.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.

Deregulation disaster

The Federal Communication Commission voted June 2 to roll back a number of rules regarding media ownership, thus making it possible for one corporation to own television stations that together reach 45 percent of U.S. households.

The rationale for the decision was that it is apparently in the public's interest for large corporations to own everything under the sun. A few people in the U.S. House of Representatives seemed to feel differently, however, as expressed in the 400-21 vote to stop the deregulation. Now it's up to the U.S. Senate to keep the old regulations in place.

But the vote is no reason for those interested in media diversity to stop worrying. The provision stopping the new media ownership rules was attached to a spending bill, one that provided funding for the State, Commerce and Justice departments. It was one of those broad bills that tend to gather extra provisions like warm flesh gathers leeches. Opponents of the FCC ruling took advantage of the bill — which would have passed anyway — and threw on a rider blocking the new FCC rules from taking effect. Most of the representatives who voted for the bill weren't expressing an opinion on media ownership, just passing a routine spending bill with some kinks to be worked out later.

Also, the FCC rider in the bill could simply be taken out in a House-Senate compromise, as Republican leaders have already pointed out. Even if the bill does make it through, it can always be vetoed by that worthy defender of public good, President Bush. And there are already talks of more extensive regulatory rollbacks, if that's any indication of the House vote's effectiveness.



Ryan Nyburg
Budget rack

All of this hoopla brings up a simple question: Why? What pressing need is there for media deregulation, and what purpose will it serve? FCC Chairman Michael Powell has stated the rollback will "benefit Americans by protecting localism, competition and diversity." I'm pretty sure that was the purpose of having the regulations there in the first place, but who am I

to argue with the FCC chairman?

It seems to me that allowing larger companies to gobble up smaller companies until all media output is controlled by two or three giants will not be beneficial to localism or competition. And if you want to talk about diversity, a few minutes watching network television ought to be enough to gauge how interested the media conglomerates are in expressing a wide range of opinions.

All the artifice about doing this in the interest of the average American is a rather bland and cynical front to Powell's real views on the issue. He never mentions the 71 closed-door

meetings the commissioners had with broadcast company officials, or that the commission had a grand total of one public meeting before voting on the new relaxed regulations. All of this is a matter of public record, and the Center for Public Integrity has a nice little report about the whole thing.



Peter Utsey for the Emerald

This is much like the time Powell didn't mention he had a vested interest — he was a member, but not the chairman, of the committee at the time — in seeing the FCC approve the AOL-Time Warner merger back in 2001; Powell is the son of the eminent retired General and Secretary of State Colin Powell, who was on AOL's Board of Directors.

Powell isn't just interested in making profit for others, however. In 1996 Congress created a fund to kick-start small communications firms, run by a board of officials from the Treasury Department, the Small Business Administration, the FCC and four members from the private sector. Powell holds the FCC seat, meaning he invests in

the same industry he regulates. There is no independent oversight of the board's investment decisions, and the fund is essentially a private organization, meaning it legally cannot have government officials sitting on its board. The kicker is that since it was founded, the board has spent \$7 million in executive salaries and other expenses while investing only \$9 million in upstart communications firms, according to the Center for Public Integrity.

This means a man who profits from the industry

being deregulated is spearheading its deregulation. This adds a nice criminal twist to the ruling.

If the FCC's relaxed rules go into place, it will allow a single company to own television stations reaching 45 percent of U.S. households, an increase of 10 percent from the old cap. It will also allow a single company to own both a newspaper and a broadcast station in single market. Moreover, a single company could own multiple television stations in a market with nine or more stations, such as a market about the size of Eugene-Springfield.

All of this will severely limit who has access to broadcasting. The number of voices on the airwaves will be that much smaller, and free speech will be that much more limited. Pleasant thought, eh?

Ryan Nyburg is a freelance reporter for the Emerald. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Students must get involved in Shared Governance Policy

The July 28 Eugene City Council vote to grant the University's Department of Public Safety the authority to issue citations was the last step in a University administration-guided process that made significant changes on our campus without student consultation. Whether or not this neglect of student input was intentional, the administration's exclusion of students in important campus policy formations and changes highlights the need for students to be included in the decisions

that affect our school.

One avenue in which students may demand a role in the decision-making process on campus is by making use of the Shared Governance Policy instituted by the Oregon University System this past April. The policy explicitly seeks to "encourage and facilitate student involvement in university decision-making." Current University procedures must be changed in order to fulfill the wishes of the OUS board and its policy of shared governance.

Based on the administration's recent actions, however, it is unlikely that necessary

changes will come from the top down; instead, students must involve themselves in the process of implementing the Shared Governance Policy. I encourage any and all interested students to stop by the ASUO office, or e-mail me at asuogov@gladstone.uoregon.edu, to learn more about shared governance and how one may become involved in the implementation of the policy.

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ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the previous week's poll results and the coming week's poll question. Visit www.dailymerald.com to vote.

Last week: Do you regularly donate blood?

Results: 49 total votes

No, needles hurt — 28.6 percent, or 14 votes

No, I am ineligible to donate — 26.5 percent, or 13 votes

Leave me alone! — 18.4 percent, or 9 votes

Yes, it's my duty as a citizen — 14.3 percent, or 7 votes

Yes, I like the cookies and juice — 12.2 percent, or 6 votes

This week: What's the worst movie of the summer?

Choices: "Gigli"; "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen"; "Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over"; "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle"; "Dumb and Dumberer: When Harry Met Lloyd"; Leave me alone!