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COMMENTARY

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Measure 30's surcharge is progressive, fair

Be clear when you mark your ballot on Measure 30. A yes vote will provide temporary funding to sustain programs and services essential to our state's future prosperity. Approval of Measure 30 will ensure that the state's 2003-05 budget, passed by a bipartisan majority of the Oregon House and Senate, will protect education, public safety and social services from devastating cuts.

Since the state has the primary responsibility for funding public schools, the League of Women Voters believes that the state must provide sufficient funds to give each child an equal, adequate education. Business leaders across the state have indicated that the recruitment of new companies and the jobs they bring are being adversely affected by the condition of our schools and the uncertainty of school funding.

The league supports Measure 30's temporary income tax surcharge because it is progressive (those who earn less, pay less), compatible with federal law and is fair. Measure 30 is responsible because it avoids borrowing that mortgages Oregon's future prosperity. Oregonians have been misled by statements that additional cuts and additional borrowing at premium interest rates are better than temporary tax increases. Data from the failure of Measure 28 in January 2003 clearly indicates a crisis in the court system, human suffering from lack of housing and medications, shortened school years and crowded classrooms.

League members urge you to carefully weigh the benefits of Measure 30 as compared to the negative results of its failure. Vote yes on Ballot Measure 30.

Janet Calvert
 president

League of Women Voters of Lane County

Spending on sports center shoots through the roof

I guess the University of Wisconsin's new (1998) Kohl Center must be made of cheese. How else could this multi-purpose, \$76.4 million facility — which seats 17,142 for basketball, 14,000 for hockey and between 15,000 and 17,000 for concerts, and includes 2,200-square-foot state-of-the-art locker areas and the Nicholas-Johnson (practice) Pavilion and Plaza, located in the heart of campus — have been built?

The University wants to be ranked with the "big boys" and I think Madison is well within those desirable ranks. So, I ask, why does our arena have to cost the sky and the moon?

At the current projected cost of \$180 million, the price tag per seat for one of those 15,000 basketball-only seats is \$12,000. Yikes! Outlandish? You bet.

Christine Sundt
 visual resources curator
 Architecture & Allied Arts Library

Stories focus on Israel, but ignore conflict

Thank you for expanding the thoughts of University students with Steven Neuman's recent travelogue from Israel ("Visit to Israel reveals opposing images," Jan. 8; "Playing the tourist," Jan. 15). Any attempt at interesting students in the world outside their own city, state, or nation should be rewarded. These stories are particularly welcome if they address the human side of an issue, as Neuman's article did.

Unfortunately, Neuman glazed over any and all issues regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He exclaims his shock at how well the Israeli people handle the stress of attacks. Yet where are his descriptions of the daily life of Palestinians? How do the Palestinian people deal with roadblocks, curfews, extraordinary unemployment, a divided country, land theft, etc.?

Jared Paben's coverage of the recognition given Lach Litwer ("An international education," Jan. 16) suffers the same blind eye. He quotes Litwer, "There's nobody in Israel who hasn't lost a family member." How about that there isn't a family in Palestine who hasn't lost a family member, or had a family member illegally arrested? He shudders at the need for a security wall, yet where is the grief over Palestinians kept out of Green Line Israel, where the jobs are, or away from their homes? How about the tens of millions of Palestinians who are refugees from their homes?

Jeffrey Stout
 Eugene



Steve Baggs Illustration

Shooting down excuses

If you've read my column regularly, you'd probably recall from my Oct. 31 column that I love a good video game.

I like constructive, pacifistic games — I like building cities, maybe playing golf with an anthropomorphic dinosaur and solving puzzles. But I like violent games, too. I want to smash a supersonic race car into my opponents' machines, sending them spiraling into a smoldering mechanical wreck in the city streets below. I want to shoot big guns and wave pointy swords around, I long to throw bombs at fellow go-karters, I yearn to run through big castles and flatten goombas with steel-toed boots. I want to pander to my id and exercise my brain at the same time. But, I just want to do all of this in a virtual world.

"But Travis," censoring talking heads wail, "despite your dashing charm and quick wits, your appreciation of the simulation of violent acts, however ethically you behave in real life, promotes a desensitizing culture that tramples the universal perception of the sanctity of life."

Their responsibility-dissolving leftist counterparts are no better, charging that companies who produce violent games irrevocably compel naive consumers to emulate violent acts and conclude those companies must be held ethically and legally (and presumably solely) accountable for these acts.

Fortunately, even in a judicial system that's had considerable difficulty adjusting to the complicated implications of rapid technological development in the last decade, judges have generally found these absurd, disconnected claims of culpability by proxy to be just that.

U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock dismissed a suit filed by relatives of a teacher killed in the 1999 Columbine High School shootings. The claim purported several dangerous arguments: that game makers could have reasonably foreseen that their product would have caused violence; that video games should not be protected as free speech as other media are; and that

specific games are (presumably ethically) defective, in that the game taught players how to use an object — namely a gun — without accurately reflecting the complex responsibilities and consequences of using a weapon in real life.

And therein lies the catch: Arguments that reassign responsibility rely on the notion that a video game's players have enough difficulty distinguishing between fictional (and generally unrealistic) consequences in a fictitious world and actual consequences in the real world; that they believe reasonable actions in one parallel legitimate behavior in the other. This is, of course, entirely false for that majority of gamers who are old and sane enough to make these distinctions.

Unfortunately, some pundits disagree.



Travis Willse
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In a 2001 article in Maclean's, Simon Fraser University's Stephen Kline obliquely opines that "the industry is getting away with murder" — never mind that the National Institute on Media and the Family, which assesses media for responsible regulations, hailed the video game industry "more responsible than the other media industries."

Judge Danny Boggs sagely agreed, writing in a ruling from a three-judge panel of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that "We find that it is simply too far a leap from shooting characters on a video screen to shooting people in a classroom."

Boggs is right: Millions play violent video games; only a few commit violent crimes that could even loosely be linked to

those games. An NIMH study suggests video games that reward aggressive behavior stimulate aggressive thoughts immediately following play; similar studies suggest the same is true of other media. But for all but the psychopathic, a fine-tuned system of social and cultural inhibitions prevent aggressive thoughts from manifesting into aggressive, harmful behavior.

Moreover, claims of the gaming industry's responsibility for violent acts, in conjunction with these rightfully rejected legal claims, imply a deeper, more problematic assertion: That video game makers are not only culpable for others' acts (possibly result from an inability to distinguish between the real and the virtual) but that these companies are largely responsible for this schizophrenic disconnect in the first place.

Could the violently tragic events that have prompted protest about video game violence be rooted in deeper issues? According to the Federal Trade Commission, 85 percent of game purchases are mediated by parents. Could some parents be faulting in their responsibility to screen content for age appropriateness — even with the help of the Entertainment Software Rating Board's rating system? Or worse, could these parents simply be guilty of failing to cultivate an ability to distinguish fact from responsibility, and senses of responsibility and causation in their children, in the large majority of the time when those kids aren't playing games? Could it be that parents, overzealous activists and some politicians are looking for a scapegoat for a social ill, rather than a solution?

The most potent and relevant question in the debate about violence in video games, it seems to me, is not whether video games might catalyze violence, but whether society will allow people to dissolve themselves illegitimately of responsibility for their own actions.

Contact the editorial editor at traviswillse@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.