

Friday, February 20, 2004

Donate time, not just money

In response to Aimee Rudin ("Panhandling Predicament," ODE, Feb. 11), I applaud you on recognizing the growing problem of homelessness in Eugene. It's an issue that many people in this town try to ignore. We all have been panhandled on the streets of Eugene and some of us do make the decision to give away change that we have.

GUEST COMMENTARY

I understand the argument that giving away money only facilitates drug and alcohol abuse. However, it is a fallacy to assume that every person who is asking for change is planning on spending it on drugs. Though because some do, it probably is a better option to give away food when you can. Yet you shouldn't stop doing so because of one bad experience. I volunteer at a homeless center here in Eugene and have also tried to give away food to people that spare change me. I have never had any homeless person turn down a gift of food. If it did happen, I would just assume that that person didn't need the food and I would keep it for someone who did. Likewise, by saying that you "can't do anything about any of these problems," you fall into the belief system of many people in our society.

It sounds like you genuinely want to help the cause of homelessness in our city. If you're concerned about giving away your change or your food why don't you volunteer your time? There are numerous organizations in Eugene, such as Looking Glass and White Bird, that help aid the homeless population.

If you truly "want to do something" but have "run out of ideas," why not consider giving away your time? It won't cost you anything and you will help the plight of the homeless significantly.

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Illinois' mascot name intolerable

In 2002 a resolution was drafted, and later signed by over 240 students, 25 law professors and the outgoing (Dean Strickland) and incoming (Dean Kirkpatrick) law school deans, calling for the University of Oregon to refrain from contracting sporting events featuring teams that used Native American imagery without tribal affiliation and oversight. The two NCAA teams with tribal affiliation and oversight are the Florida Seminoles and the Utah Utes. The University of Oregon has intermittently scheduled games with the Utah Utes, and this was permissible under the constraints proposed by the resolution.

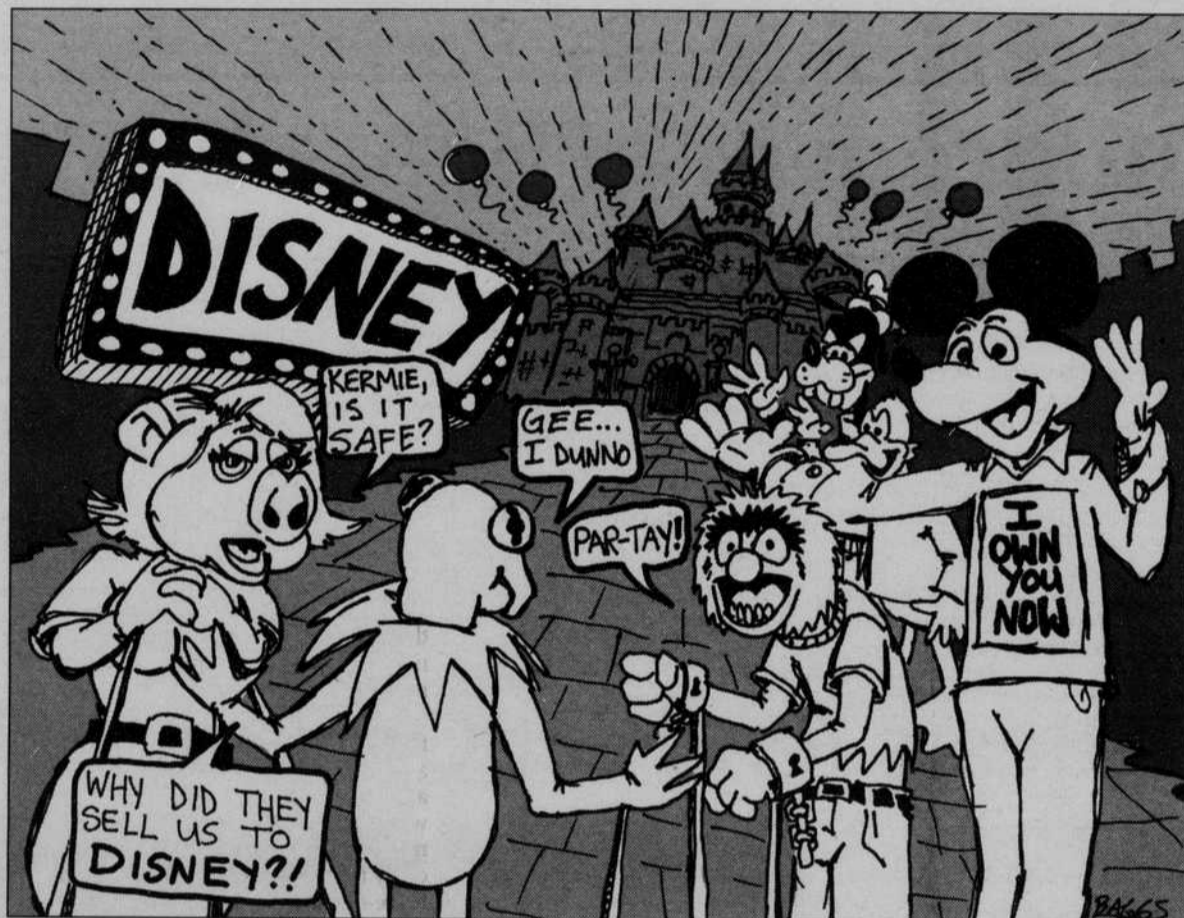
GUEST COMMENTARY

The resolution was presented (summer of 2002) in a private meeting with myself, Debra Merkin (from the journalism department) and President Frohnmayer. In this private meeting, President Frohnmayer (a member of the NCAA panel reviewing the use of Native American imagery in the NCAA) promised that the panel would be meeting that summer to resolve the issue at the NCAA policy level, and that the University of Oregon would honor the resolution's ban on scheduling teams not affiliated with tribes.

Not only has the NCAA panel pushed debate on the issue into 2005, it has just been announced that the University of Oregon basketball team will play the University of Illinois "Fighting Illini" the next two seasons, including participation in the University's annual Papé Jam held in Portland. As many of us know, the University of Illinois' mascot (Chief Illiniwek) is one of the most controversial and contentious representations of Native Americans in American sports. President Frohnmayer's tolerance of this scheduling is a complete affront to the spirit of the resolution, the University of Oregon's minority communities, and the University's stated commitment to honor diversity.

Please join me in encouraging people from around the country to express their anger at President Frohnmayer and the University of Oregon athletic department's disrespect and dismissal of the resolution, and the will of minority and sympathetic members of the University's community at large.

Frank Silva studies law.



Steve Baggs Illustrator

CROSSING THE RACIAL LINE

One of Roger Williams University's 4,087 students might have an easier time paying for school this year. In what some pundits hail as an important stimulus for discussion about affirmative action and what others reject as racist "white pride," the Rhode Island school's College Republicans chapter gave student senator Adam Noska a \$250 scholarship available only to white students.

In most respects, the inaugural grant — which drew 17 applicants — wasn't so different from other scholarships. Applicants were required to submit an essay and post a strong academic record. The money line: The essay's topic is "why you are proud of your white heritage." (The application bluntly asks, too, for a recent picture to "confirm whiteness," and tactlessly states "evidence of bleaching will disqualify applicants.")

Out of context, creating and offering this scholarship, simply put, is wrong. Restricting funding for a social institution as essential as higher education to a specific group based on race or gender or sexual orientation or anything unconnected with academic performance is the worst sort of socially and governmentally sanctioned discrimination. It's as bad as the University of Michigan's extinct practice of giving "underrepresented minority" applicants a sizable chunk of bonus points, unfairly boosting their chances of admission (a custom Michigan dropped after the Supreme Court junked it last year). While certain biases toward some minority students are constitutionally tenable, they have been ruled so in the context of increasing "diversity" on campuses. Discriminatory scholarships, though, can't fairly make the same claim: To deny opportunities to people for which they are otherwise qualified based on characteristics unrelated to those opportunities violates all sorts of political doctrines. Proponents of such scholarships weakly rely on often dubious

arguments that imply "net equality of opportunity" (however it's constructed) is more fundamental to fairness than equality in how a system treats people.

The scholarship has drawn fire from across the political spectrum.

Paul King — president of the University of Illinois' Anti-War, Anti-Racism group — told the News-Gazette (Champaign, Ill.), "(The Roger Williams University College Republicans) represent a racist mindset."



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The Rhode Island's state Republican Party distanced itself from the club, too. Citing "racist overtones," state party Chairwoman Patricia Morgan blasted the group: "We have zero tolerance for racism in the Republican Party. I'm really appalled by the way they brought this up."

The club itself, though, is no ship of fools: The group is explicitly parodying minority scholarships, President Jason Mattera explained. More importantly, he knows the club is violating its own political tenets, and knowing the rules is the first step in breaking them effectively.

"We think that if you want to treat someone according to character and how well they achieve academically, then skin color shouldn't really be an option," Mattera said.

Mattera, who is incidentally of Puerto Rican descent, is a recipient of a \$5,000 scholarship open only to minorities. But Noska implicitly dissolved the superficial

problem of Mattera's potential hypocrisy: When receiving his check, the Weymouth, Mass., native explained, "I may not be in favor of a scholarship, but if I qualify for it, you can bet your bottom dollar I'll apply."

What's most telling about the present debacle, though, is not that the affirmative action debate is very much alive, and evidently maturing, too, nor is it that campus conservative groups are politically active — that such a simple form of protest took so long to materialize can probably fairly be chalked up to the ubiquitous spook of political correctness. It's not even that some who criticize the College Republicans chapter are willing to resort to arguments absurd to the point of rhetorical irrelevance (protesters held signs of the Republican Party's elephant symbol emblazoned with the Confederate flag and even swastikas).

What's most important is how our society responds to issues like this and what that means. That offering a scholarship to a particular ethnic group — a common practice at this level of abstraction — has drawn so much public and media attention, not to mention serious criticism, is a reminder of one of the many kinds of racial discrimination in this country. (Admittedly, this very column makes that claim something of a self-fulfilling prophecy.)

But regardless of political philosophy, everyone should agree with at least one of Mattera's assertions. When asked by the press at the scholarship presentation whether his group had succeeded in conveying its message, he observed, "Look at all the media here. Affirmative action is now being debated."

And unearthing important debate from the quicksand of political correctness is good for everyone's intellectual integrity.

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