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# COMMENTARY

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Thursday, April 15, 2004

## EDITORIAL

### Law students earn praise for pro bono contributions

Lawyers have long held (and have many times deserved) a sour reputation in Western culture as thieves, charlatans and deceivers — the stuff that earns one-way tickets to Malebolge, the Eighth Circle of Dante's Inferno.

Will Rogers once pithily witted, "Make crime pay. Become a lawyer."

University law students, though, are bucking those stereotypes in big ways. Some 70 law students deserve praise, in fact, for setting their books aside for a few hours to volunteer for 11 area nonprofit organizations on April 3.

On this Public Service Day, some students volunteered at Spencer Butte's Cascades Raptor Center, an animal hospital and nature center. Others painted walls at the Boys and Girls Club of Emerald Valley. Others still composted for the Northwest Youth Corps' organic garden.

These selfless undertakings, among others, are part of the new Oregon Law's Public Interest Public Service Program, and have earned law students well-earned appreciation.

"Having the law students here is a huge help," explained the Cascades Raptors Center's Laurin Coggins. "We have a volunteer staff organization, so we get a lot done when we have extra help."

Since PIPS' inception, the number of reported pro bono hours donated by University law students has laudably ballooned from 4,680 to 11,214. As a result, University students won Oregon's State Bar's Pro Bono Challenge for the third consecutive year. Those 11,214 hours, donated by 112 law students, make up 71.5 percent of the state total of 15,686 donated hours.

Take for example the tireless efforts of graduating law student Sarah Drescher, who recently received the law school's Outstanding Service Impact Award.

Drescher has spent most of her estimated 200 pro bono hours working with the American Civil Liberties Union to relieve overcrowding in the Jackson County Jail. Thanks in part to her efforts, the jail settled with the ACLU and agreed to get enough beds for all prisoners.

Its impact on the community, not to mention the sheer number of hours of community service donated by Drescher and her peers, certainly make PIPS one of the best University programs created in recent memory, and program leaders have their sights set higher.

"Ultimately, we want to act as a clearinghouse where all of the students can go through us for their community service needs," said Lauren Sommers, service program secretary and first-year law student.

If the lawyers of tomorrow are anything like the University's law student volunteers of today, stereotypes of lawyers as manipulative, greedy, self-interested criminals might be as passé as trial by battle.

## EDITORIAL POLICY

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Steve Baggs Illustration

## Permanent vacation

Allow me to paint you a picture: President Bush had been in office for six months when he decided to vacation for a month at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, the so-called Western White House. He left on Aug. 4, 2001.

It was unprecedented at the time. Newspapers across the country ran stories pointing out that the average American only gets 13 days of vacation time a year. Richard Nixon held the record for the longest presidential vacation (30 days) with Reagan a close second. Them Republicans love a vacation.

Today we have become so accustomed to seeing Bush on his ranch that we hardly notice it anymore. This Easter weekend, while Iraq was spiraling into chaos and the Sept. 11 commission was grilling National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, President Bush was vacationing on his ranch for the 33rd time since his inauguration.

Let's do the math together: According to CBS news, Bush has spent 233 days in Crawford; add to that his visits to Camp David and Kennebunkport and that equals 500 days, or more than 40 percent of his presidency. The administration calls them "working vacations." Who knew that president of the United States of America was a work-from-home profession? He is quite literally phoning it in.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that Bush's excessive vacationing caused Sept. 11. Sure, Bush admits that he wasn't sufficiently concerned about terrorism. And when you vacation two weeks a month, go to bed at 10 p.m. every night regardless of the state of the country and take naps during the day, according to The Guardian, it is hard to muster up concern about anything. But being asleep isn't the same as being asleep at the wheel.

It suffices to say that while terrorists were planning a devastating attack on American soil the leader of the free world was playing cowboys and Indians in Texas.

On day three of Bush's August 2001 vacation, he received the now-infamous Presidential Daily Briefing entitled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S." He

reads it (or rather has it read to him) and then goes back to ranching. Thanks to pressure from the Sept. 11 commission, the controversial briefing has now been declassified and made public. This memo is not the smoking gun conspiracy theorists hoped it would be. But it does reveal one important fact: Condoleezza Rice has clearly misrepresented the contents and spirit of the memo while under oath.



**David Jagernauth**  
Critical mass

Nine months after the terrorist attacks, she called a news conference in which she described the briefing as "an analytic report that talked about (bin Laden's) methods of operation, talked about what he had done historically."

She has repeated the claim that it was a "historical document" several times. And the first part of the memo is historical. But then the memo says, "(Bin Laden) prepares operations years in advance." In other words, all that historical stuff is important for stopping terrorism today.

The memo then switches to mostly present tense: "Al Qaida members — including some who are U.S. citizens — have resided in or traveled to the U.S. for years, and the group apparently maintains a support structure that could aid attacks."

This certainly doesn't jive with Rice's claim that there was "nothing about the threat of attack in the US" in the memo. That is what I like to call a lie. That is Rice committing the crime of perjury.

The memo also contains this juicy bit: "FBI information since that time indicates patterns of suspicious activity in this country consistent with preparations for

hijackings or other types of attacks, including recent surveillance of federal buildings in New York."

Surely that was enough to warrant concern. Apparently not. On March 22, Rice said, "Despite what some have suggested, we received no intelligence that terrorists were preparing to attack the homeland using airplanes as missiles, though some analysts speculated that terrorists might hijack airplanes to try to free U.S.-held terrorists."

I don't understand this excuse. Isn't the important piece of information the hijacking? Who cares what the terrorists planned to do once they hijacked the planes? How about stopping the hijacking in the first place?

Bush himself is now making excuses and trying to avoid responsibility. "I never saw any intelligence that indicated there was going to be an attack on America — at a time and a place," he said. You mean the terrorists didn't send you a copy of their itinerary? Well, no wonder we couldn't stop them.

This is exactly the kind of president that Paul O'Neill describes in his book: Bush is disengaged and is being dragged around from meeting to meeting like a pet on a leash. He is on a permanent mental vacation. Bush never thought to follow up on the memo or ask questions of the FBI. He didn't know enough to understand what he was being told. Why else would Bush and Cheney meet with the Sept. 11 commission together? Nobody else needed Cheney to chaperone them, why did our president?

Put simply, Bush is the exact opposite of a leader.

How many misrepresentations (i.e. lies) will it take before the American people finally muster up any sort of outrage? How many examples of presidential incompetence must we witness before somebody is held accountable? Bush does not deserve the dignity of being voted out of office. He deserves to be led out in handcuffs.

Contact the columnist at davidjagernauth@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.