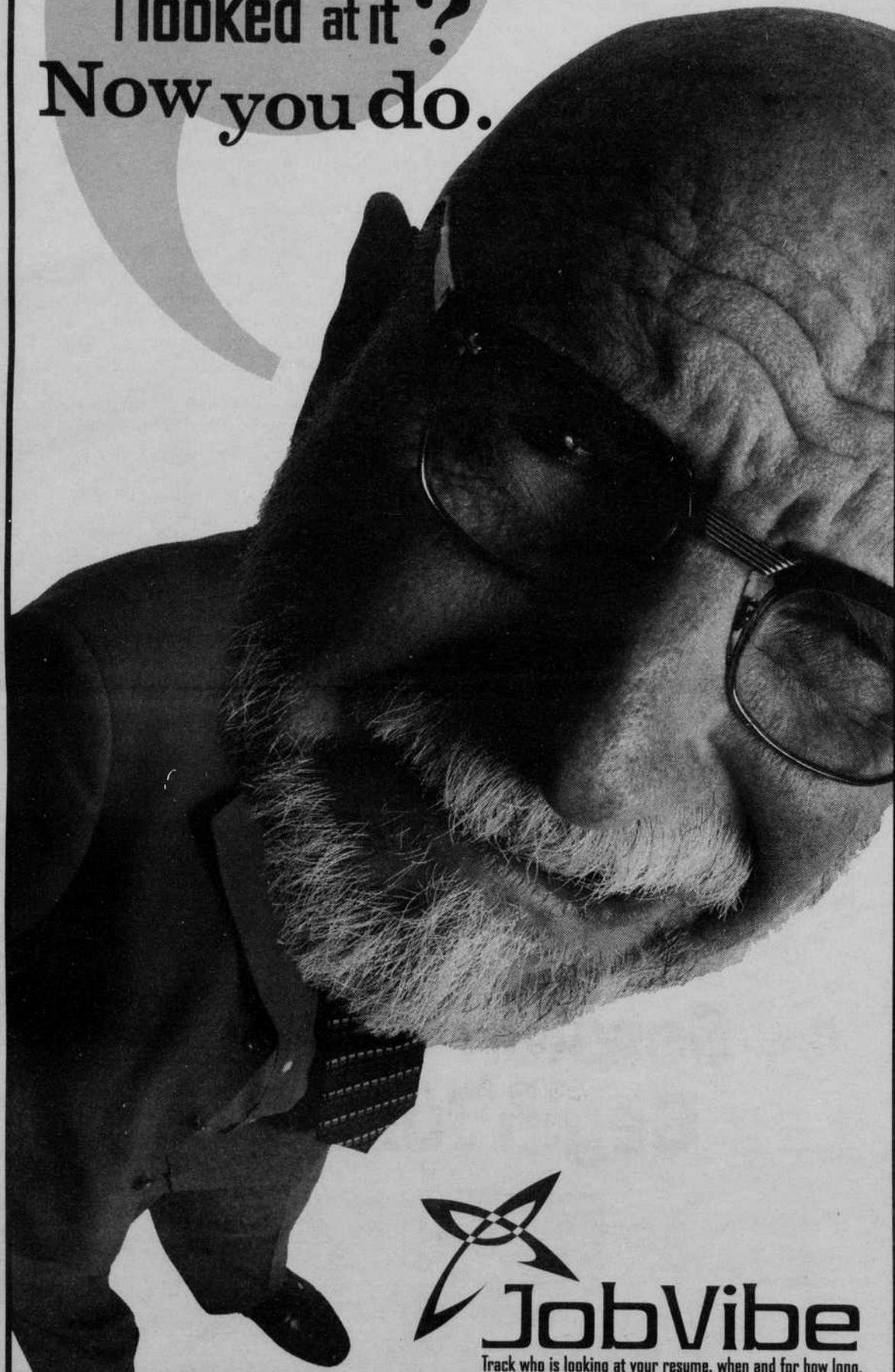


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TIMELINE OF OREGON'S DEATH WITH DIGNITY ACT

- November 1994 — Oregon voters pass the act, 51 percent to 49 percent.
 - October 1997 — Death With Dignity Act takes effect.
 - November 1997 — Oregon voters defeat Ballot Measure 51, an attempt to repeal the act, 60 percent to 40 percent.
 - 1998 — The Oregon Legislature proposes the Lethal Drug Abuse Prevention Act, which would have revoked prescribing licenses for physicians who dispense drugs to hasten death. The act is later pulled from debate.
 - November 2001 — U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft issues an edict ordering the Drug Enforcement Agency agents to investigate physicians who prescribe lethal medications.
 - April 2002 — U.S. District Judge Robert Jones issues an injunction on Ashcroft's directive.
 - May 2004 — 9th Circuit Court issues ruling against the directive.
 - Prescriptions for lethal doses of medication written statewide:
 - 2003 — 67
 - 2002 — 58
 - 2001 — 44
 - 2000 — 39
 - 1999 — 33
 - 1998 — 24
 - Terminal patients who died via physician assisted suicide:
 - 2003 — 42
 - 2002 — 38
 - 2001 — 21
 - 2000 — 27
 - 1999 — 27
 - 1998 — 16
- SOURCE: Oregon Department of Human Services

LAW

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"It's a very strong ruling and a clear rebuke of Attorney General John Ashcroft's attempt to overturn the will of Oregon voters," he said.

He said the decision will help legitimize assisted suicide in other areas.

"This decision, coupled with the excellent data from Oregon, means that I think we're closer to having a second state (allow assisted suicide) than we've ever been," he said. "This is clearly an example where the people are ahead of the politicians."

Swenson said the court battle for assisted suicide is not finished, although he is confident his cause "will prevail."

"We fully suspect they will appeal," he said.

He also said Congress may step in at any time to decide the issue.

"What's most important, especially for Oregonians to understand, is that this fight isn't over," he said. "We want Oregonians to be ever-vigilant."

Dr. Glenn Gordon of Eugene, a semi-retired general surgeon who has practiced for nearly 50 years, said assisted suicide has been "very successful." Gordon said he has witnessed many patients die of illnesses without the ability to end their own lives.

"I know that many of those patients would have liked to have this option," he said. "It became apparent to me that this was something that was desirable."

Gordon said the ruling will be a relief to physicians. He also said the ruling may help clear the way for assisted suicide in other states.

"We all feel better knowing that the will of the people has been recognized," he said. "Mr. Ashcroft is trying

to impose his own moral code on the rest of the country."

Kevin Neely, a spokesman for Myers, said the ruling will allow doctors to participate in assisted suicide without worrying about breaking federal law.

"The most fundamental aspect of the ruling is that it permits physicians and pharmacists to prescribe life-ending medication without fear of retribution from the federal government," he said.

Neely said the chances of an appeal by the Justice Department are "probably even-money."

"If they choose to appeal this, we'll continue to vigorously defend Oregon's law," he said.

He emphasized that the significance of the decision extends beyond assisted suicide.

"This issue is bigger than physician-assisted suicide," he said. "This victory sends a signal to the federal government that (regulating medical practice) has been, is and will be the responsibility of individual states."

However, some people have expressed opposition to assisted suicide.

Father Reginald Martin, associate pastor at the St. Thomas More Newman Center near the University, said he opposes assisted suicide.

"I think it's appalling," he said. "This is completely antithetical to everything doctors are supposed to do."

Martin said a federal law should prohibit assisted suicide, although he feels the idea of assisted suicide itself should not even be an issue.

"The whole notion just strikes me as nothing short of inhuman," he said.

Contact the city/state politics reporter at parkerhowell@dailyemerald.com.

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