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Hiding the civil rights card



DAVID JAGERNAUTH
CRITICAL MASS

Apart from a couple of sound bites during the presidential debates, both candidates have worked hard to remain silent on the issue of civil rights. For the few of us in America who judge our presidents based on their civil rights record, I have good news and bad news.

The bad news: The bipartisan U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, in an act of extreme partisanship, has decided to wait until after the presidential election to discuss the Bush Administration's horrific civil rights record.

The good news: They released online a 180-page staff draft of their report, entitled "Redefining Rights in America," and it is absolutely devastating.

The best news: Unlike the commissioners, I have no qualms about discussing their findings this close to Nov. 2. Call me crazy, but I think the people should know their president's policies before they vote for him.

The commission reports that "President Bush has neither exhibited leadership on pressing civil rights issues, nor taken

actions that matched his words."

When accounting for inflation, the six major governmental civil rights programs have lost spending power under Bush's watch. He refuses to meet with civil rights leaders and to attend their events. He rarely uses his public platform to talk to the American people about civil rights issues, and when he does, it is usually part of an official duty, like commenting on a historically significant date.

Bush has tried to eliminate programs that are important to poor minority communities, like HOPE VI. He requested a \$1 billion decrease in low income housing for 2005, according to the report. Bush has also attempted to end important programs for women, like the Department of Labor's Equal Pay Matters Initiative and Title IX enforcement.

The report calls the president's commitment to Native Americans "inadequate" and says that such a lack of commitment "ensures that their education, housing and law enforcement conditions

remain substandard."

None of the administration's rhetoric has been backed up by actions. The stated objectives to increase federal grants to black colleges and increase minority homeownership are worthy goals, but Bush does not have a plan on how to achieve them. Bush has demanded no accountability to ensure that civil rights objectives are met or that laws are enforced. Why? Because he just doesn't care.

The only thing remotely positive in the report is that the President's Cabinet and judicial appointments have been relatively diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and gender, a commendable feat. However, as the report points out, minority status does not necessarily equate to an expertise with, or

commitment to, civil rights. In fact, the persons of color that occupy positions within the Bush administration are uniquely hostile to civil rights.

This form of racial cynicism is rampant among Republicans. People of color are paraded in front of the media to criticize civil rights programs and champion programs that would hurt communities of color in order to deflect accusations of racial prejudice away from the party.

The ultimate goal is to control the context of the debate, to take an issue that is racial in nature and redefine it as an issue solely about philosophic or political differences. If they succeed, we won't talk about, for example, the racial implications of the No Child Left Behind Act, because Rod Paige is Secretary of Education.

It is the same reason they put Condoleezza Rice in front of the cameras to parrot the administration's view on slave reparations. A few newspapers, afraid that the public wouldn't get the point, took the absurd step of describing Rice as "an African-American" in their

articles, without attributing race to anybody else, even other blacks. Subtle.

This "colorblinding" technique is popular even among white liberals who are more comfortable talking about economic issues than racial ones.

Bush further dilutes the civil rights discussion by painting things that have nothing to do with civil rights — like his faith-based initiative — with the civil rights brush. As the report points out, the only way Bush's faith-based initiative has anything to do with civil rights is in a negative context because it condones religious discrimination in hiring.

Perhaps the most damning critique from the Commission on Civil Rights involves Bush's apathy toward those who were illegally disenfranchised during the 2000 election. "As a result of the President's inaction," the report states, "little will change before the 2004 election."

Why isn't John Kerry screaming this from the rooftops?

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INBOX

Costly Measure 37 threatens Oregonians' quality of life

Lurking on a controversial November ballot is another attempt to increase state expenses and hurt the quality of life for Oregon residents. If approved, Measure 37 would require the state of Oregon to "pay owners, or forego enforcement when certain land restrictions reduce property value."

Provisions in the United States and Oregon constitutions already safeguard citizens from unfair governmental "taking" of private land without just compensation. Measure 37 goes far beyond these constitutional rights. It forces taxpayers to compensate landowners if any land use decision has restricted the use of property purchased by the owner, their parents and even their grandparents.

Measure 37 will be extremely costly to Oregon taxpayers. According to the secretary of state, Measure 37 will cost taxpayers up to \$344 million per year in new paperwork and red tape alone. According to the state treasurer, the final costs for payment of claims to landowners "cannot be determined." Measure 37 provides no funding mechanism and the only way to pay for these costs would be through cuts in local services or increased taxes.

Measure 37 is poorly written. The measure provides no guidance on its implementation, and it will lead to lawsuits, uncertainty and increased costs. The retroactive clauses are impossible to calculate and are unfair to the public. The courts threw out a similar idea in 2000. Voters need to do the same in November.

Join the broad-based, bipartisan opposition to Measure 37. Farm bureaus from across the state, including Lane County, oppose the measure because it will increase taxes and remove protections for prized farmland. Conservation groups oppose Measure 37 because it will increase

sprawl and decrease our quality of life.

Small businesses and business owners oppose Measure 37 because it will increase bureaucracy and lawsuits and make it even more difficult to obtain basic things like building permits. More bureaucracy and red tape made it harder to do business in Oregon. Neighborhood associations oppose Measure 37 because it would undermine protections against the effects of harmful development and would provide no compensation for reduced property values resulting from development. Would you want a used car lot or a fast-food chain next door to your home?

So, who is in support of Measure 37? Large corporate landowners who stand to gain millions. In researching campaign finance reports, 1000 Friends of Oregon found that eight corporate landowners gave 72 percent, or \$540,000, to support the measure. Corporate special interests should not benefit at taxpayer expense.

This fall, vote "No on 37" to safeguard land use planning in Oregon and preserve the quality of life that Oregonians enjoy.

Jonathan Evans
Graduate student

Measure 35 will restore balance to health care system

In her guest commentary ("Keep health negligence reward decisions in juries' hands," ODE, Oct. 13), Kathy Brooks appeals to emotion over reason and may therefore succeed in perpetuating an inaccurate understanding of the scope and purpose of ballot Measure 35.

Measure 35 will not restrict the rights of injured patients to sue their doctors, nor will it prevent them from receiving adequate economic and medical care compensation, nor will it even stop juries untrained in medical science from assessing blame. Instead, this measure would merely reinstate a previous \$500,000 cap on non-economic damages. This cap was only repealed by the Oregon State Supreme Court in 1999, so it was in fact intact at the time Ms. Brooks' baby was injured.

As the daughter of a physician and an aspiring future physician myself, I urge voters not to view Measure 35 as a battle between doctors and lawyers or between insurance companies and patients. The prevention of frivolous lawsuits and curbing of costly malpractice premiums are public health issues that influence patients' access to lifesaving services. Health-care providers who support Measure 35 are not trying to escape consequences for their mistakes; rather, they seek to restore some balance in our health care system whereby patients maintain access to high-quality health care and doctors don't have to practice defensive medicine in constant fear of frivolous lawsuits.

I am sorry that Ms. Brooks did not receive appropriate medical care during her delivery. It is a tragedy when a doctor irreparably injures a patient, and that patient should certainly receive adequate medical and economic compensation. Unfortunately, some injuries are so severe that no amount of money can repair them. Suing for tens of millions of dollars in these cases only bankrupts doctors and their families while driving up the cost of malpractice insurance and the cost of health care for other patients.

While frivolous or enormously costly lawsuits are not the only reasons for the escalating cost of malpractice insurance, they foster an untenably stressful environment for the majority of diligent, hardworking doctors. The previous cap on non-economic damages helped to stabilize and lower the cost of doctors' insurance premiums. Since repeal of the cap, at least 125 providers have ceased delivering babies. Currently there are no neurosurgeons practicing along the coast or in Eastern Oregon.

If we want to ensure continued high-quality health care, we must re-establish a balance between support for victims of medical malpractice and competent, conscientious doctors.

Emily Jeffrey
Eugene

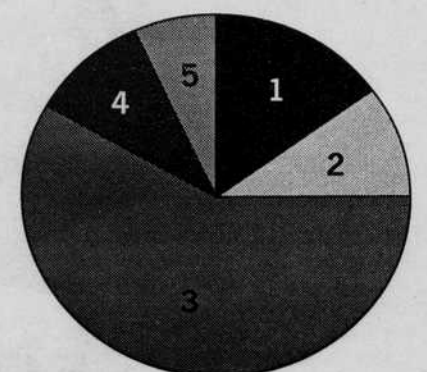
Measure 35 a 'slick campaign' of insurance companies

Insurance companies want us to think that doctors are leaving Oregon to avoid paying high medical malpractice premiums. However, I just read about a study by Public Citizen showing that the number of doctors in Oregon is actually increasing. Measure 35 will not help doctors; instead, it will limit our right by changing the constitution. Voters should not be swayed by the insurance industry's slick campaign.

Please join me in voting "NO" on 35!

Helene Montgomery
Eugene

ONLINE POLL



THIS WEEK'S RESULTS

Do you support Oregon Measure 36, which would amend the state constitution to redefine marriage as between a man and a woman?

1. Yes, marriage should be between a man and a woman — 14.9 percent
2. Yes, but gays and lesbians should be offered civil unions that would give them some benefits — 9.9 percent
3. No, gay couples should be allowed to marry and to secure similar rights as other couples — 58.4 percent
4. No, I don't think we should make amendments to the state constitution — 9.9 percent
5. Marriage should be abolished for everyone

Total out of 101 votes.

Look for next week's poll question in Monday's issue.

OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged, and should be sent to letters@dailymerald.com or submitted at the Oregon Daily Emerald office, EMU Suite 300. Electronic submissions are preferred. Letters are limited to 250 words, and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submissions should include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style. Guest submissions are published at the discretion of the Emerald.