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■ In my opinion

Let freedom ring

With less than a week to go before the Iraqi elections, insurgent violence will no doubt increase. Many Iraqi citizens will give in to the fear and stay home. Many people will die. And in the end, the legitimacy of the winners' victories will probably be tenuous at best.

Meanwhile, back in America — Pundit-ville, as I like to call it — critics of the elections will point to the chaos and say, "We told you so." These short-sighted feet-draggers argue Iraq isn't ready to hold elections until the country is more secure, which is ridiculous.

There's no right time to lose your virginity and there's no right time to hold your first elections as a free people. If you're going to do it, just do it — there's never going to be a time when it's easy. If we wait until Iraq is an oasis of democratic ideals before holding elections, the U.S.-appointed interim government will be in power forever.

Democracy is a journey, not a destination. For years, minorities and women couldn't vote in this country. Our idea of liberty was seriously screwed up. But we kept on holding elections.

As we addressed one problem, there was always another to take its place. To this day, our democracy is rife with problems. We've never had a perfect election in America. The path to freedom seems to be two steps forward, one step back.



GABE BRADLEY
THE WRITING ON THE WALL

In our own history, there have been those who said America wasn't ready for the steps it was taking — those who have retreated at the first sign of difficulty. By and large, history has forgotten their names.

History is shaped, for better or worse, by those who are willing to face struggle. If we truly believe that a democratic Iraq is worth having, then we have to accept the fact that it will not come cheap.

Of course, it's easy for me to say that as someone who will not have to directly pay the price for a free Iraq, just as it is easy for some to criticize the elections when their own right to vote is relatively secure. The real question is whether the Iraqi people want democracy — and that question will be answered on Sunday.

How many people will stand up to the violence, face the fear, and go to the polls? I don't know the answer to that question; no one does. But come Sunday, we'll know for sure how many Iraqis value their vote enough to risk death.

Democracy can't be forced. It must

live in the hearts of the people, or it will never take root. The Iraqis themselves will decide whether they are ready for democracy, and they will tell the world with their actions on Sunday. Just as surely as democracy cannot be forced, neither can it be stopped once it has taken root. If the Iraqis are ready for democracy, it'll show in the turnout, insurgency or no insurgency.

We will know whether democracy has taken hold in Iraq, but it will not be the absence of conflict that tells us — democracy is not a smooth process. Meaningful change is always accompanied by struggle of some kind.

As for me, I'll be back here in Pundit-ville, watching the news and hoping for success. There have already been some incredible changes in Iraq, and I dare to hope for more. People are getting access to education like never before. Outlets for free speech are sprouting up slowly but surely. And a guaranteed 25 percent of the members of Iraq's new parliament will be women (women make up only 14 percent of our national legislature).

Change has come to Iraq, and it seems to be sticking surprisingly well. Is it too much to hope that they can once again take control of their own destiny as free people ruled by popular sovereignty? Like I said, we'll see. In the meantime, let freedom ring.

gabebadley@dailyemerald.com

■ Editorial

Budget cut contradicts an ASUO contract

The ASUO Executive recommendation for the Emerald's budget, which the Programs Finance Committee eventually passed, represents the lowest student subscription rate in at least 20 years, when factoring for inflation.

To deserve such a historically low budget you might think the Emerald did something horribly wrong. Did our fundraising level fall off the map? Did the amount and quality of our coverage suddenly decline? Just the opposite is true. The Emerald's fundraising, in the form of advertising, is the highest it has been in years, covering almost 85 percent of our costs. And we are providing more original and professional content than ever, to a growing number of students, in the face of skyrocketing printing costs. In short, the Emerald has been doing more with less all year long.

So why are we being punished with more than \$8,000 in cuts (\$13,000 less than our request)? The ASUO believes the Emerald prints too many papers and is concerned that students are being charged for newspapers read by University faculty and members of the Eugene community.

According to a two-year-old readership survey, 81 percent of students read our paper at least once per week. Any freely distributed paper would be envious of this level of saturation. But readership is not the only measure of the Emerald's impact on this campus. Of those students that never read the Emerald, how many are in a student group that receives discounted advertising in our paper? How many have been featured in an Emerald story? How many have written a letter to the editor? How many have been informed about an issue or a story from a friend who read it in the Emerald?

Everyone on campus, whether they read the paper, is touched by the Emerald and the work of its dedicated student staff. That is why the bulk student subscription fee, which allows for distribution of the Emerald to the student body free of charge, has never been based on the number of copies read and distributed. In fact, in a contract signed last year by ASUO President Adam Petkun and ASUO Vice President Mena Ravassipour, it expressly states, "The parties agree that the payment amount ... is not related to the number of newspapers to be distributed ... in that it is not based on a cost per distributed paper figure."

In the past, attempts by the ASUO to impose such a formula have been met with skepticism and rejected by the PFC. This year, a far more incompetent PFC completely ignored past precedent and approved the Executive recommendation without bothering to discuss the issue.

Not only that, nobody on the PFC felt it was necessary to inspect how the Executive arrived at its recommendation figure. The only person at the table who understood the complex equation was Mike Martell, who conceived it. If the PFC had bothered to inspect the math, it would have discovered that it was nothing more than a series of inaccurate numbers cobbled together with arbitrary calculations to arrive at a meaningless total.

The Emerald would have refuted the numbers if we had been given our Executive recommendation before the meeting as originally promised. In a November e-mail to all student groups, Ravassipour wrote, "The executive recommendation will be completed 72 hours prior to your hearing."

The Emerald didn't receive notice 72 hours beforehand nor did we receive it 24 hours

INBOX

Many people still in the dark about pregnancy

In a letter to the editor ("Poetic genius: Anti-Bush advocates chant literary gold," ODE, Jan. 21), Melissa Tucker asks, "How many kids did you kill today, pro-abortion liberals?" With the exception of a rather strange friend of mine, I don't know anyone who is "pro-abortion." Abortion is an awful situation. But it's a fact that a lot of people end up there. That's why I'm "pro-choice."

There are obvious reasons for the need for an abortion: rape, incest and threat to the mother. Then there's misinformation. Yes, kids are being robbed under the abstinence-only movement, but then there are people who you'd think would know how to avoid getting pregnant who don't. I was surprised to find my own mother at age 48 didn't know antibiotics render birth control pills ineffective. Then I found out half of my friends didn't know either!

Or how bout this: You can get pregnant during your period. A lot of women don't know that either. Read the small print on your pill-pack: During the first week of pills use a back-up method. You'd think doctors would tell you these things but a lot don't.

In response to the "kill" quote, did you know that if a baby is born extremely premature and under a certain weight hospitals will not help it live? Hospitals choose a weight to determine life. As of now there is no scientific evidence that fetuses are "alive." The only thing that brings "kill" into the topic of abortion is

religion and morals, relative and personal things.

In an imperfect world where this is something people have to face, let them at least have a choice.

Sermin Yesilada
Senior

OSPIRG provides solutions for textbook woes

I bought my books this term and I was appalled; prices just keep going up, seemingly without reason. A recent report done by OSPIRG shows that publishers add "bells" and "whistles" to inflate the price of textbooks. These bundles come Saran-Wrapped with additional materials like CD-ROMs and workbooks, but more than 65 percent of the faculty surveyed say they "rarely" or "never" use these materials. Textbook publishers put new editions on the market frequently, usually with very few content changes, making the less expensive, used textbooks obsolete.

As a student of the University who relies on financial aid, reading this report made my blood boil, but there is a solution available for us students in the form of OSPIRG's Affordable Textbooks campaign. As I write this they are working to put direct economic pressure on the publishers, are making it impossible for the publishers to ignore students, and are working with the University Bookstore to set up alternatives for students to buy and sell their textbooks (visit www.uobookstore.com for

more information).

It is time for publishers to pay attention to us and stop ripping us off.

Lynette Hieber
Eugene

Protect McKenzie River forests from logging

As some of you know, the Forest Service currently has over a dozen mature and old growth timber sales planned in the McKenzie River watershed. These timber sales encompass over 2,000 acres of the most beautiful, pristine land found in Oregon. The McKenzie River not only provides Eugene with drinking water, but also offers amazing recreational opportunities.

The trails networking through this area provide world-class hiking and mountain biking. People come from all over the country to take advantage of the natural beauty found in Eugene's backyard. This influx of eco-tourists has helped diversify the economies along the McKenzie River by supporting guiding outfits, bed and breakfasts, and other local shops. The logging slated to take place along the river will degrade the natural beauty that is responsible for drawing so many people to the region. It is vital that we protect the last 10 percent of Oregon's old growth, our recreational areas and the economies along the river.

Logan Berner
Eugene

OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged, and should be sent to letters@dailyemerald.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.