

Guest commentary

Oregon Commentator: Point/counterpoint

MORE INFORMATION

The Oregon Commentator PFC budget hearing will be Feb. 1 at 7:45 p.m. in the EMU Rogue Room.

It's about hate, not conservatism

I've been following the debate surrounding the Oregon Commentator, but I've been disappointed that the Emerald's reporting on this issue seems to focus on the question of conservative versus liberal speech without any discussion of the reasons proposed for taking action against them. What I see to be the main concerns surrounding the issue have nothing to do with conservatism, unless you believe that all conservatives are pro-rape and pro-genital mutilation.

I, personally, was targeted for attack in the Commentator on the basis of my gender identity. You might feel my perspective to then be biased, but no one else is representing this aspect of the story so I feel that I need to. I feel that my safety was put in jeopardy due to the Commentator's anti-trans hate speech.

In the September issue, besides an illegally reproduced copyrighted image of myself, I am falsely quoted saying, "I got sick of my penis oppressing me," followed by others quoted as saying, "I cut off Toby's penis" and "I shot a guy in the penis once, take that." The implication here being that trans people ought to be dealt with through the (violent) removal of their genitalia, and that to do so with a gun would somehow be better, perhaps more macho.

In the same issue, something I find just as disturbing, is the following violent fantasy that was detailed without any context or discussion of its significance. "I want to murder someone. I want to smash a chair on someone's head and bite their lips off. I want to beat someone to death as they scream for mercy. I want to break a bone in my hand while

breaking someone else's nose. Either that or I want to hate fuck some girl. But preferably both at once."

Now I'm fairly certain that the Commentator intended all of this as a joke. But even as a joke, this has serious implications. Violence against women and violence against trans people are serious problems. The Commentator outed me when I was not out to my coworkers. It printed my name and picture and subtly suggested the violent removal of my genitals; even as a joke, anyone who might commit anti-trans violence now knows my name, how to identify me on the street and has encouragement that what I am doing somehow merits violent punishment.

The issue is not whether groups on campus are allowed to make hate speech, but whether the campus is going to sponsor hate speech with roughly \$15,000 a year. Especially when it is that \$15,000 that gives its words the power to hurt the campus on a much larger level. When the Commentator suggests violently removing the genitals of a trans person, all trans people on campus are affected. When it suggests a depiction of violent rape to be "some of the sexiest material ever to grace the page" (in the November issue, referencing the violent fantasy excerpted above) all women on campus are affected. And that has a direct impact on this campus.

It is also very significant to explore why I was targeted. The Commentator's own online blog reveals that as soon as its staff members learned of my gender identity, on July 28, they became confused and accusatory. They found my gender to be "worthy of running-joke status" because it is "amazingly pretentious and silly," on Oct. 11. Their explicitly-stated

purpose of continued harassment was to get me to "realize how ridiculous it [my gender] sounds," engaging in a plan: "Sort of an 'if you don't pick we'll pick - for you [sic] and you won't like it' strategy."

The Commentator is not presenting any policy issues, campus issues, or even my capacity as a student senator. In fact, even though it claims I am fair game because as a student senator I am a "public figure," it doesn't even mention I'm a senator until later issues. This is not a conservative perspective. It is only targeting me because it sees my personal gender identity as illegitimate and has decided to try to put enough of a stigma on me to force me to recant my gender identity and go back into the closet. I certainly believe that this consistent and strategized intimidation, ridicule and insult constitutes a hostile environment and a violation of OAR 571-003-0025(1)(d), which obligates the University to take action. I also point to the University of Oregon Affirmation of Community Standards and the Equal Opportunity Statement as further necessitating a response.

I speak mostly of my own case because I can only speak for myself. But I know of many other students hurt by the hostile environment the Commentator creates. I personally would like to see a conservative paper on our campus. But in my opinion, the Commentator's focus has shifted from conservatism to hate. And after talking with several administrators, all of them have pointed to de-funding the Commentator through the PFC as the only way campus can respond. And if that's the case, it would certainly be better than no response at all.

Toby Hill-Meyer is a student senator

Commentator endorses free speech, not violence

Almost every year, unsubstantiated charges of hate-mongering are leveled against the University's only conservative publication, the Oregon Commentator. But unlike years past, this year's groundless charges threaten the existence of the publication.

Student senator Toby Hill-Meyer has made the charges that the Oregon Commentator "creates an unsafe environment" in a grievance filed with the ASUO. According to various versions of his grievance against us, we have either reported on or attempted to bring about the mutilation of his genitals. These are serious charges, made by a not-very-serious person. His principal source is an obviously fictitious quote in the Commentator attributed to former ASUO President Maddy Melton, reading: "I cut off Toby's penis." We would be the first to admit that the quote was in poor taste, especially when detached from its context. It's not exactly Swift, but neither is it a call to arms.

In December, the PFC rejected the Commentator's mission statement on illegal content grounds. When confronted about their decision, Persis Pohowalla and Mason Quiroz - chair and co-chair of PFC respectively - refused to elucidate the PFC's decision, leading our publication to believe that senator Hill-Meyer had a surreptitious hand in the decision. Now that he has gone public after acting petulantly behind the scenes, it's time for us to respond.

Hill-Meyer's sexuality (as opposed to gender identity) has never been mentioned in our publication;

we don't consider it relevant, and we did not "out" him. What we have addressed is his dogmatic insistence that by unilaterally declaring himself to be of a nebulously defined new gender, with its own set of pronouns, he immediately attains the status of an oppressed minority - a minority of one. Taken in conjunction with his status as a public figure and his sanctimoniousness, this is material that is rife with satirical possibilities. It is akin to a mean parody of identity politics, and to call Hill-Meyer on it is not "hate speech."

Outside of Hill-Meyer's imagination, we have not threatened him in any way. Needless to say, we do not, and have never, endorsed violence against any member of the campus community. Senator Hill-Meyer is engaging in hyperbole. Further, the charges leveled against the Commentator come just short of calling our members bigoted toward the LGBTQ community. Nothing could be further from the truth. As far as I know, we are the only conservative student publication in the nation to wholeheartedly support gay marriage.

So here's our offer, made publicly and in the spirit of a free press: Toby, if you're that angry, we'll give you a page to run in our long-running Another Perspective slot. You would receive 500 - 700 words in every issue, unedited. Say what you like, as long as it's legal.

As an unstipended student group, we can't offer you remuneration, but we can offer you a voice. That's what we're here for, after all.

Tyler Graf is editor in chief of the Oregon Commentator



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*For more information call 346-4113 or stop by the Rec Sports Office, 102 Esslinger Hall.

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