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■ In my opinion

Grassroots education

On Wednesday, in his State of the Union address, President Bush said his 2006 budget will eliminate more than 150 government programs because of either inefficiency or duplication of services.

"The principle here is clear," he said. "Taxpayer dollars must be spent wisely or not at all."

That's a good line. What boggles me is how he said it with a straight face right before transitioning into No Child Left Behind — talk about a waste of money.

George Bush was a powerhouse for education as governor of Texas. By requiring the use of phonics and tying school funding to performance, Texas raised its literacy rate, especially among minorities. Though it wasn't a perfect plan, it was a great step forward for education in the Lone Star State.

In 2000, when Bush wanted to take his education plan national, I was optimistic, though soon disappointed. Since no one trusts statistics anyway, I'll spare you the numbers and just suggest that the results for No Child Left Behind have been less than spectacular.

What works in Texas doesn't work in Detroit. And what works in Connecticut doesn't work in Oregon. Now, the problem is certainly more complicated than that, but that's my point: The problems with education are complex matters that vary from city to city, state to state and region to region. There's no cookie-cutter fix for the stupefaction of America. There's no magic federal formula for tackling these issues. Although I don't have the answers, I can assure



GABE BRADLEY
THE WRITING ON THE WALL

you they are not going to be found in a federal bureaucracy.

A radical, though perhaps wise, solution would be to do away not only with No Child Left Behind, but with the entire federal Department of Education. Imagine if the \$56 billion the federal government plans to spend on education next year was instead raised and spent locally, addressing local concerns and local priorities. It may not be as crazy as it sounds.

Former General Electric CEO Jack Welch has been celebrated as a guru of modern achievement. Taking the reigns of GE in the early '80s, Welch engineered a turnaround that prepared GE to compete with well-financed and highly effective firms from overseas. One of the keys in GE's strategy was to pull out of any market where GE was not either number one or number two.

Every year we spend more on education. But, as President Bush once asked: "Is our children learning?" Not really, especially compared to the rest of the industrialized world. American children speak only one language (and that only barely), can hardly do math and wouldn't know the difference between Montaigne, Machiavelli or a hole in their heads.

The federal government's quest to

educate our young people is fairing only slightly better than its war on drugs. We're not number one, we're not number two. Maybe it's time for Uncle Sam to get out of the education game.

And while we're on the subject of government waste, what's the deal with the Post Office? Every year it loses more and more money. Meanwhile, FedEx and UPS are raking it in hand over fist. In fact, the delivery market has proved so profitable that there is now a third company trying to get in on the action.

Back in the day when mail was delivered by horse over insecure terrain, it was probably best for the government to take responsibility for delivering the mail. But now that multiple organizations have proved they can turn a profit in the delivery business, wouldn't it make more sense to privatize the mail? That way companies like FedEx and UPS can do what they do best: deliver; and the government can do what it does best: regulate.

Of course, none of this will ever take place. One of the immutable laws of government is that it's easy to expand yet almost impossible to shrink. The best we can hope for is to restrain growth and limit waste.

On a more local, politically realistic level, we can stop expecting the federal government to educate our children. These are local issues that require local solutions. And though no one likes to hear it, we're probably going to have to open our wallets if education is something we really value.

gabeb Bradley@dailyemerald.com

■ Editorial

'Nuclear' tactic would wrongly end filibusters

Americans are either excitedly or nervously awaiting the day when President Bush will nominate his first U.S. Supreme Court justice and the monstrous congressional battle that will surely follow. The battle for the highest court in the land might be won or lost long before any justice on the Rehnquist Court steps down from their lifetime post.

Recent moves by conservatives suggest they are contemplating a bureaucratic dirty trick known as "the nuclear option" to dismantle the 200-year-old use of filibusters in the Senate. It currently takes 60 votes to end a filibuster (the GOP has 55 seats in the Senate), which forces a narrow majority to work with a narrow minority in certain important matters, like with judicial nominations. Senate Democrats have filibustered 10 Bush nominees and confirmed more than 200 to district and appellate courts due to concerns that they were ideologically extreme and unfit to be judges.

The GOP has not been able to muster the 60 votes it needs to end the filibuster on these nominees and force an up or down vote. Rather than find judges who are less extreme, some Republicans are pushing to change the rules so that a simple majority could end a filibuster. If this so-called "nuclear option" is successful, one of the only checks and balances to the power of the Republican Party, which controls both the White House and Congress, would disappear, as would our best chance of keeping a radical Christian right-winger off the Supreme Court.

Appointing one or two more justices in the mold of the insane Justice Scalia is the top priority of the Christian right and President Bush. Getting his ultra-conservative nominees onto the federal courts would pave the way to getting ultra-conservatives on the High Court. The repercussions of this would be felt for a lifetime.

The majority of Americans feel that Democrats should be allowed to filibuster judicial nominations, 48 percent to 39 percent, according to a Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll. But the question that really matters is: Does the GOP have the votes in the Senate to execute the nuclear option? It is difficult to say. According to Congressional Quarterly, two Republicans, Sen. Lincoln Chafee and Sen. John McCain, disagree with the rule change. Two other Republicans, Sen. Susan Collins and Sen. John Warner, have expressed strong reservations. Assuming they both break ranks, and assuming no Democrats do (which is a big assumption given the spineless Democratic Party), the fate of the nuclear option could rest on a single Republican vote.

That vote could be Oregon Sen. Gordon Smith. He has publicly stated that he is undecided about the issue. Please write the senator and let him know the majority of his constituents, just like the majority of Americans, want the filibuster rules left alone. If you do only one political act this year, this is the one. The fate of the Supreme Court and many of the laws we consider central to the American way of life are currently hanging in the balance.

■ Guest commentary

Feelings override funding process

A week ago today, a majority of the Programs Finance Committee voted to reject the Oregon Commentator's mission statement. As the ASUO and Student Senate presidents, we both write to express our disapproval of this decision and to convey our confidence that the checks and balances in place will ensure that all student groups are properly funded.

During last Wednesday's hearing, several members of the PFC used their votes to voice student disgust for recent articles published by the Commentator. While we too often disagree with the Commentator's editorial decisions, it is of the utmost importance that our personal feelings about a publication's content do not interfere with the funding process.

The PFC plays an important role on our campus: allocating your incidental fees to a wide array of student groups in an effort to enrich the college experience for us all.

The US Supreme Court's Southworth decision affirms this important supplement to our education while also introducing viewpoint-neutrality as an imperative protection for students with unpopular beliefs. Southworth requires that "in the interest of open discussion, (fee allocation) may not prefer some viewpoints to others."

In the case of the Oregon Commentator, PFC has rightly recognized the benefit student publications provide to our campus, and must not deny funding to this conservative

journal on the basis of its content. Should PFC manage the unanimous vote needed to defund the Commentator, we will work to prevent the proposal from moving through Student Senate, after which it would meet certain veto by the Executive.

The firmness of our response does not reflect a lack of regard for the students deeply concerned about the Commentator's subject matter. We hope instead to illustrate our resolve to conduct a fair incidental fee process, respectful of the Constitution's First Amendment.

In short, PFC must not decide to insulate us from speech we find distasteful and even vile. On the contrary, PFC should continue to empower students by allowing a forum in which we can debate issues any student finds meaningful. Ending discussion by defunding the Commentator may seem worthwhile at first glance, but is instead myopic. Social and political progress is much less likely in an environment where debate is stifled and ideas remain unchallenged.

The vigor of this dialogue is only possible on a campus where students control, and correctly administer, the incidental fees. Members of the PFC should preserve our right to speech and properly fund the Oregon Commentator.

Adam Petkun is ASUO president
and James George is Student Senate president

INBOX

Petition risks punishing innocent senators

As most of you are aware by now, a student is petitioning to recall the ASUO Executive and most of the student senators. The reasoning for him doing so revolves around the events of the ASUO retreat in the fall. Because of a few senators' and

non-senators' actions, innocent senators are being punished and could possibly lose their positions within ASUO. Group punishment for the incidents is fine to a point, but it is appalling when innocent senators are getting unduly punished to protect a few.

I ask those persons who engaged in drinking and smoking at the

retreat to come forward and disclose their involvement publicly. I will be honest that I knew drinking was more than likely going on at the retreat, but I refused to partake. I will do my part in the group punishment but I refuse to be further and unduly punished.

Kevin Day
Student Senator

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