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■ Guest commentary

Imbeciles rule; leaders stay silent

"Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on or by imbeciles who really mean it." So said Mark Twain, who could have been discussing the troubling attempt to silence and punish the Oregon Commentator for speech a vocal minority finds offensive.

With respect to this latest sad chapter for intellectual freedom on college campuses, the actions of the administration (the smart people putting us on) and the student government (the other group mentioned by Twain) offer evidence that neither is accountable enough to be entrusted with an annual student government budget worth tens of millions of dollars.

The simple context: One former student senator of unknown gender, Toby Hill-Meyer, claims to have felt threatened by farcical words published in the Commentator and attributed to Robocop. I suppose we can all understand lying awake at night fearing the fictional enforcer, though it remains unclear to dispassionate observers how this Robo-phobia spiraled into an all-out war on the single most provocative political voice on campus.

This latest attack on the Commentator follows a natural pattern. In 1990 an earlier incarnation of the Programs Finance Committee attempted to defund the magazine for its unpopular content. In 2002 the PFC tried to force the Commentator to change its mission statement (accompanied by a bizarre editorial by the Emerald that supported the move), and this year a particularly driven and notably small-minded minority has again taken aim at the Commenta-

tor because it doesn't toe the liberal line. It happens like clockwork, because the never-changing beast of student government is populated by an ever-changing group of individuals who can't learn from past mistakes.

That PFC members were unable to understand their duties is not surprising. The personnel turnover in student government, driven by a continually changing student body, prevents crucial legal and administrative institutional memory. That's why they have educational retreats every year, such as the one held in October — the one in which student "leaders" wasted student money and have continued to remain unaccountable to the students.

Despite that, President Frohnmayer's administration is even worse. According to Hill-Meyer, he was encouraged by members of the administration this year to seek redress over his concerns by way of the PFC, a body charged with allocating student fees in a fashion that doesn't punish political points of view. That advice is inconsistent with both the unwritten policy of this administration not to overtly interfere in student politics, as well as being inconsistent with the very clearly stated First Amendment. Yet the president — never shy of lauding his own experience arguing before the Supreme Court — has remained supremely silent in an instance when leadership is needed.

It was notable that School of Journalism and Communication Dean Tim Gleason broke his traditional silence to warn of a government body trying to silence the press. But while the proximate funding problem for the Commentator likely will be corrected in the

near future, the ongoing problems of a politically biased and often corrupt student government remain.

Even as student government routinely attempts to silence a publication that receives a relatively meager amount of money for printing (none goes to the all-volunteer staff), millions of dollars have been laundered away from campus to OSPIRG. That organization ships boatloads of cash to Portland for volunteer streamwalks and a tidal wave of liberal lobbying interests. It is because the student fee funds this kind of unworthy goal that student leaders fight so hard to protect the institution, which now must be addressed at the state level.

At its core, the question at hand is simple: Should millions of student dollars be entrusted to a small cadre who are too immature to respect the rights of those with whom they disagree philosophically? Should that miniature fortune be entrusted to an administration that counsels violating the law and whose president is unwilling to stand up for what is right?

Millions of extorted student dollars should not be in the hands of smart people willing to play dumb while violations of the First Amendment run rampant, nor should it be in the hands of Twain's (and Oregon's) imbeciles. Experience tells us neither group will change, so the student fee process has to.

Bret Jacobson, an alumnus of the University, the Commentator, and the Emerald, lives and works in the Washington, D.C. area

■ Out loud

"We have groups saying, 'You've got to look at this,' but I don't know that we will." — University Vice President for Student Affairs **Anne Leavitt** on whether the administrative committee formed to determine whether some out-of-town and part-time University students are paying an unfair amount of incidental fees will recommend changes to next year's mandatory enrollment fee.

"We really try to build the bridge between academia and the real world." Oregon Natural Hazards Workgroup Director **André LeDuc** describing the group, a program of the University's Community Service Center. The group recently received a \$100,000 Disaster Resistant University Grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a project aimed at limiting the campus's risk of natural disaster.

"I wouldn't answer the marijuana questions. You know why? Because I don't want some little kid doing what I tried." — **George W. Bush**, prior to being elected president, during a private conversation with his former friend, the ironically named Doug Wead, who secretly taped his conversations with Bush and released the recordings this week.

"Most Californians believe it's inappropriate for violent convicts to enjoy overnight visits that may result in a pregnancy. It's bad social policy, and it is unfair to the taxpayers of California." — Republican Assemblyman **Chuck DeVore** discussing his bill, AB 212, which would end conjugal visits for violent felons.

"Yeah, conjugal visit sex. That is happening!" — **Jason Alexander** as George Costanza on the "Seinfeld" episode "The Postponement."

"We don't retract anything we do here because we never lie and make things up on this program." — **Rush Limbaugh** during his nationally syndicated radio program on Feb. 15.

"Nobody ever said there was. You guys just believed the myth out there that was — that was — that was promulgated. Nobody ever said there was." — **Rush Limbaugh** on Nov. 8 denying that the Bush administration ever suggested there was a connection between Iraq and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"If we're successful in Iraq ... we will have struck a major blow right at the heart of the base, if you will, the geographic base of the terrorists who have had us under assault now for many years, but most especially on 9/11." — **Dick Cheney** suggesting a connection between Iraq and Sept. 11, as he often did.

"The people of Oregon have approved Oregon's Death with Dignity Act not once, but twice, and the lower courts have upheld Oregon's law not once, but twice." — Oregon Gov. **Ted Kulongoski**, reacting to news that the U.S. Supreme Court will hear a challenge to the act when its 2005-06 term begins.

— From Associated Press and Oregon Daily Emerald news reports and radio transcripts from the Media Matters for America Web site

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OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

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INBOX

Students: Make your voices heard, prevent tuition hike

Attention all college students: It is time for us to work together. In the next few months, by voicing our concerns, we can fight to make higher education more of a human right and less of a commodity. Regardless of our differences, we can all identify as students — people who value education. Unfortunately, the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2006 includes the elimination of almost 50 educational programs, along with a misleading increase in the Pell Grant allocation as balancing the cuts. How is the proposal to increase the Pell Grant misleading? Well, it can negatively affect many students and put them in the hole even more than they were before.

One example of this is the elimination of the TRIO program, which is proposed in the budget. TRIO is a student support program that provides many resources for first-generation college students, low-income students and others. One of the services they provide is free tutoring. Now, if I were awarded an additional \$100 from a Pell Grant next year but did not have access to TRIO, I would have to pay for the services of tutor. A tutor costs at least \$10 an hour. If I were to incur the cost of a tutor once a week for 10 weeks each term ... well, you get the point.

This is only one of the services TRIO provides and only one of the nearly 50 education programs that could be eliminated by the President's budget proposal. As students we need to investigate this proposed budget and take action by demanding not only an increase in Pell Grant funding but also in

the Perkins loan, Federal Work Study and all other education programs. Write your senators!

Jordan Thierry
Eugene

Measure 37 claims threaten Oregonians' quality of life

It has started. Measure 37 claims have begun rolling in, and eight waivers have been granted in Yamhill and Jackson counties. County commissioners have approved the least problematic applications, but what's next?

Many Oregonians live here and love their state because of the quality of life. Our quality of life results in large part from Oregon's system of land use planning. Having grown up in a small coastal town near San Francisco, I have come to appreciate the benefits of intelligent and rigorous land use planning. Half Moon Bay is made up of farmers, ranchers and fishermen, as well as urbanites who value the sanctuary outside of the city. Area residents value the quality of life in the town and have presented only rare challenges to the town's land use laws. As a result, the town has retained its small-town charm and historic character.

Ten miles to the east, lack of land use planning has created a different landscape. Along Highway 101, single family homes, fast food restaurants, and industrial complexes mingle to create a jumble of development that stretches for miles. No one wants Oregon to resemble a California suburb.

The passage and potential abuse of Measure 37 presents this possibility. With every Measure 37 waiver, Oregon's quality of life is slowly eroded. The few large, corporate landowners

that funded Measure 37 should not be permitted to take our way of life away.

Erin Ganahl
School of Law

Student association lobbies for Higher Education Act

As a student at the University, I have the great privilege of being in school. Many students seeking further education do not have the same opportunity to advance either because of their economic or immigration status. The United States Students Association aims to break barriers that keep students all over the country from reaching higher education.

This year USSA is focused on reauthorizing the Higher Education Act, which funds need-based financial aid programs such as the Pell Grant. They are also directing their energy to the original Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act, which would extend in-state tuition to undocumented students. For the past few years, the University has sent a delegation of students to our nation's capitol to lobby Congress regarding higher education issues. Prior to visiting congressmen and congresswomen, thousands of postcards are collected with student signatures as one of USSA's tactics to persuade our elected officials to prioritize higher education.

As students who have the privilege to be here, we need to extend the opportunity for those who do not. Sign a postcard of support to let our representatives and senators know that students are ready and able to take action.

Jael Anker-Lagos
Eugene