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The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co. Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Ore. The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices in Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union. The Emerald is private property. Unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

■ In my opinion

Praising PETKUN

As a space dedicated to commentary about (ostensibly) fresh viewpoints on relevant topics from the local to the international, this column's efforts at critical thinking have often been, well, critical.

Over the better part of two years, the subjects of my written disdain have included the Office of Trademark Management, the English measurement system, Democratic strategists, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Oregon State University, radical feminists, Ralph Nader, voting machine manufacturers, Abu Ghraib military guards, the University of Michigan, Sudanese janjaweed, fist-fighting priests, Michael Moore, the Electoral College, John Ashcroft, Tom DeLay, frivolous lawsuits, several members of the Programs Finance Committee, President Bush, the town of New London, and several brands of politically correct, "ideologically incestuous," and usually self-serving nonsense-rakers. Per the suggestion of one of my more devoted readers, I'm drafting this, my next-to-penultimate column, with a different tenor.

Freshmen, you won't remember, but your student government wasn't always this way. Sure, the PFC hearings have always been heated messes of arguments, grievances and hotly contested debates (though this marks the first year in my memory that has seen injunctions, suspensions or — my favorite — accusations of "sleeping with the devil" directed at some ASUO officials).

But before you were here, the Executive wasn't the collected and usually level-headed authority you know today. Last year, under President Maddy Melton and Vice President Eddy Morales, it was a muddle of gross



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conflicts of interest punctuated by dereliction of constitutional duties, incomplete campaign accounting, election scheduling blunders, a several thousand dollar deficit and (eventually dropped) charges of assault.

While nearly any Executive imaginable would be an improvement over last year's bumbler, ASUO President Adam Petkun and some other officials who have avoided scandal have mostly managed the office with an aplomb and sensibility deserving applause in its own right. They have become the first administration in my five years at the University characterized more by reason and progress than by self-induced controversy and, sometimes, severe ethical failures.

In a Senate meeting early in his term, Petkun pledged to be "very committed to making sure that the ASUO Executive office is fiscally responsible and is an example for the rest of the ASUO." And so they have seemed to be. With the arguable exception of money spent on a finance retreat, the Executive's record has been spotted with none of their predecessors' fiduciary blemishes.

The events surrounding that embattled retreat made for the administration's biggest blunder this year: Even though the conduct that evidently took place at the retreat calls into question the validity of

using student dollars there, the administration has defied fair inquiry and hidden its response to the incident behind a philosophically incoherent veil of "collective responsibility."

But I promised praise, so here: Petkun helped clean up the messes of last year's administration. While the Constitution Court's then-chief justice declared Melton unfit for duty after she failed to find law students to fill vacancies there, the incoming Executive managed to find candidates by early July — when law students aren't even in session.

When the hiring of an ASUO staff-person's husband sparked "concerns about the appearance of nepotism," Petkun stepped in and issued a hiring ban. The Executive also registered record numbers of voters in last fall's registration campaign and made good on its campaign promise to nix the "sketchy scheduling fee."

But Petkun's shiniest moment this year was his involvement in the tricky, contentious brouhaha about funding the Oregon Commentator. Where other administrations have faltered, Petkun remained true to the spirit of viewpoint neutrality, even citing and bringing copies of the Supreme Court's Southworth decision.

While every student government administration suffers problems — such is the territory of governing a complex, diverse community — student leaders' success is defined by how they respond to those challenges. And, more often than not, Petkun and several other ASUO officials have met those challenges with an evenhandedness that freshmen shouldn't take for granted.

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■ Editorial

Senators save Oregon from more Bush idiocy

President Bush has conceived of some pretty stupid plans over the years. His plan to fight poverty by spending federal money on marriage counseling immediately comes to mind.

Well, another gem from Bush's moronic mind mercifully went up in flames yesterday, blocked by senators from the Northwest, saving all of us hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars.

Bush's plan was to force the Bonneville Power Administration to increase its electricity prices to correspond to market rates. The change could have resulted in a 20 percent jump in electricity bills throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Conspiracy theorists will suggest this was President Bush's attempt at revenge against a region of the country that didn't vote for him in the last two elections. Whatever his motivation, the fact remains that his plan would have devastated our already shaky economy and barren job market and was vigorously opposed by members of both parties.

Thank you senators for standing up against the president and for the Northwest taxpayer.

A fox guarding the hen house

With more than 9.9 million victims of identity theft in the United States last year, according to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Americans are becoming extremely sensitive about their personal information. So it makes perfect sense that the Department of Homeland Security would create an advisory committee to help it navigate the ethically thorny and technologically complex world of privacy issues, especially given the department's plans to do background checks on everyone boarding a plane and entering the country, according to the Associated Press.

What makes less sense are some of the names included on the 20-member Data Privacy and Integrity Advisory Committee, which is overloaded with representatives from privacy-violating corporations and light on actual privacy advocates. For example, Cendant Corp. owns a company that turned over customer records without their knowledge; Science Applications International Corp. let thieves steal computers with loads of employees' personal information; and Claria Corp., installed pop-up ads on customer Web sites without their permission.

This oft-called "fox guarding the hen house" approach to advisory committees is a Bush administration favorite. It allows them to appear as if they care about the public's privacy concerns without really doing anything. They do the same thing with AIDS and a host of environmental and civil liberty issues.

This practice cuts to the heart of the Bush administration ethic: See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. The administration surrounds President Bush with yes men (from the press room to his Cabinet to the federal courts), switches the televisions in the White House to FOX News, holds unscripted press conferences once in a blue moon and attempts to silence all dissent.

The echo chamber of this White House is ringing more than ever, with the conservative press acting as a megaphone. And what is getting drowned out is any semblance of truth.

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.

■ Guest commentary

A question of diversity: 'How, then, shall we live?'

We are three white people who do not live on the receiving end of racism. Yet, in part because of our positions of leadership, but mostly because of the humanity we share with all, we feel a strong need to respond to racism and other forms of discrimination in our community when they come to light.

Deeply concerned with this pernicious wrong, we struggle personally and professionally knowing that we must all work together as friends, neighbors, fellow workers and members of our community to find a better, healing way.

More than a century ago, the great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy asked, "How, then, shall we live?" In doing so, he focused on how he should and must treat his fellow human beings.

In this same vein, each one of us must ask the same question: How shall I treat the woman I work with, the man who cuts my hair, the child in my classroom, the family in the restaurant? How shall I respond in thought and actions to the diversity, racial and otherwise, that comprises the world we live in?

At the University, the very basis of what we are as an educational institution cries out for diversity. We

must have that diversity, not only in ideas and intellectual offerings, but in people. We must have the breadth of experience that comes from a multitude of cultural experiences. We must have the richness offered by history and art, and the music and beliefs that expand our knowledge and our lives.

In our cities and our greater community, we are deeply concerned that there are some who feel we do not recognize acts of racism and do not consistently respond to reduce the incidence of such acts. Recent discussions regarding school achievement gaps, exodus of employees and racial profiling have brought to light some of the inequities lived and felt by men, women and children in our community. We strongly believe in finding ways to hear where we are failing and commit ourselves to improvement and action.

There is a pragmatic side to this discussion. As improving the climate for diversity and tolerance can enhance our regional and national reputation, it can also improve our ability to recruit and retain quality companies and employees, as well as the health and strength of our local economy. Toward this end, in a partnership of local school

districts, municipalities and utilities, we will sign a memorandum of understanding on March 4, reaffirming our commitment to the Diversity and Human Rights Consortium and its efforts to address human rights and diversity issues of mutual interest.

Lane County recently celebrated the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a life dedicated to overcoming hateful discrimination of all types. He understood, and communicated eloquently, the need to move beyond "just the way things are." If racism and intolerance are "just the way things are" here in our community, we must be willing to honestly examine ourselves and find ways to struggle toward something better, toward Dr. King's "mountain top."

"How, then, shall we live?" is a question we must answer. Acknowledging the difficulties that lie ahead, we pledge ourselves to move surely and meaningfully toward actions that will answer it for the betterment of all citizens in our community.

Dave Frohnmayer is president of the University, Sid Leiken is mayor of Springfield, and Kitty Piercy is mayor of Eugene