



BRET FÜRTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST™

■ Editorial

Oregonians have history of rebelling against Feds

When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the federal government could prosecute medical marijuana users, those citizens who rely on cannabis to live a normal life became a little nervous. Elderly cancer patients could face serious consequences for the possession of what is, by the laws of their state, a perfectly legal medicine.

Fortunately for many marijuana users, they live in Oregon. After the Supreme Court's attempt to override the decisions of individual states, the Oregon State Department of Human Services consulted our State Attorney General and determined that the medical marijuana program should continue to run as normal. For thousands of cancer patients, AIDS victims, and other users who rely on the medicinal value of the cannabis plant, Oregon's gung-ho attitude means that the lives of these patients can continue to run as normal. Clichéd though it may be, the truth remains that without Oregon's insistence on medical marijuana programs, sick grandmothers would be forced to buy their medicine in unsafe, possibly illegal environments. The federal government should remember, as Oregon obviously has, that making medical marijuana illegal has little effect on drug dealers and harms those with real, medical needs.

Although the federal government still has the right to seize and prosecute those medical marijuana users, Oregon is taking a huge step in the right direction by running this state by the will of the people rather than the ill-thought out approach of our national officials.

The medical marijuana situation is not the first time our state has taken a rebellious and important stand. Oregon legalized physician-assisted suicide, and has continued that tradition despite the undercutting of John Ashcroft. After being approved by voters three times, the Death with Dignity Act remains strong thanks to citizens and politicians alike who refuse to let their voices be silenced by an overzealous attorney general. Issues related to health policy have historically been delegated to the states, and Oregon did not hesitate to remind the Bush Administration of this fact.

Multnomah County handed out marriage licenses to gay couples during a time of national unrest over the meaning of marriage. As with medical marijuana and the Death with Dignity Act, our state once again made its individual views known to the nation. Although those marriage licenses were eventually revoked (as per the new statewide opinion that marriage was a union between man and woman), it was at the time exciting to see Oregon take a bold, individual stand.

In another act of defiance, Portland was the first city in the country to pull out of the FBI-led anti-terrorism effort in April. Instead, the FBI agent in charge of Oregon, Robert Jordan, aimed to provide all of Portland's officers with anti-terrorism training.

Oregon might be a humble representative of the Pacific Northwest, but it is a brave one. Oregonians should be proud of their state's ability and willingness to fight.

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■ Guest commentary

Creationism evolves wrong way

Christian fundamentalists have often been accused of wanting to radically alter the laws and institutions of the United States. Actually, it is usually the other way around; most of the time those fundamentalists only try to prevent America's laws and institutions from being radically altered. For instance, fundamentalists may insist on the preservation of Christmas symbols and celebrations.

However, there is one area in which many Christian fundamentalists do indeed want to impose radical change: the teaching of Biblical creationism vs. evolution in public schools.

After losing favor since 1925 because of Tennessee v. John Scopes, the creationist movement is beginning to once again make serious inroads. For example, IMAX theaters in several southern cities are refusing to show "Volcanoes of the Deep Sea" for fear of offending patrons, because the film makes a reference to evolution. In Dover, Pa., school administrators earlier this year ordered biology teachers to declare in class that "Darwin's theory... is a theory, not a fact. Gaps in the theory exist for which there is no evidence." In an Atlanta suburb in 2002, stickers were placed on textbooks stating that "evolution is a theory, not a fact." In January, a judge ruled the stickers unconstitutional.

In 1999, the Kansas state board of education voted to remove most references to evolution from state education standards, a decision that was reversed two years later.

According to a CBS poll conducted last fall, two-thirds of Americans favor teaching creationism in public schools together with evolution and 37 percent

want to completely replace the teaching of evolution with creationism.

Saying that evolution is a theory is like saying that the earth revolving around the sun is a theory. Or that plate tectonics (continental drift) is a theory. Or that the idea of atoms making up our world is a theory. Just because such scientific elements are not apparent to the human eye doesn't mean they aren't factual.

Evolution is a fact. It simply happens that because it involves time periods spanning hundreds or thousands of generations, evolutionary change is often much too slow for humans to perceive.

In some cases, however, natural selection does occur quickly enough for us to perceive. Through mutations, new strains of antidote-resistant viruses are always emerging. The same holds true for pesticide-resistant insects. There is also the famous example of the peppered moth near Manchester, England. Starting out with light-colored wings, they were camouflaged as they rested on tree trunks of the same color. But, as industrial pollution made the trees dark, birds picked off the lighter-colored moths. Mutant moths born with black wings survived, reproduced, and multiplied.

Through observing a petri dish of bacteria, evolution can be witnessed in a matter of hours. Adding a certain antibiotic kills the majority of the bacteria, but some of the bacteria are immune and go on to mass-reproduce.

To take a human example, it is revealing that Nepalese Sherpas are generally much better at climbing Mt. Everest than anyone else. It is not just

because of skill, but because their bodies seem to have adapted genetically to the extreme environment, according to scientists. How did this adaptation take place? Not because God decided one day to give all Sherpas a better oxygen-processing capability than other populations, but because of natural selection: The people whose bodies could not process oxygen in a high-altitude environment failed to survive, and failed to reproduce.

Suppressing the teaching of evolution or presenting it as a controversial "theory" would be a huge step backward in education.

Meanwhile, proponents of a concept called intelligent design argue that it is difficult to imagine how certain complex phenomena could have been constructed gradually through evolution, and conclude that an intelligent being must have played a part.

If science cannot explain how certain biological components were constructed (a big if in itself), then that point could be made in class. It would be up to students to draw their own conclusions as to how such unexplainable things came about, just as it is up to them to draw their own conclusions as to what causes gravity. (Could it be God?)

I think we can all agree that questioning the study of evolution, and instead teaching that the world as we know it was created some 6,000 years ago, in six days, would certainly be foolhardy.

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