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In my opinion

TELLTALE PROBLEM IS TOO MUCH TALK

Former Eugene mayor Jim Torrey plans to run for State Senator in the 2006 election, and he wants to improve education. He wants to make higher education more affordable. He wants a strengthened education system to lead to a strengthened state economy. Sounds great, right?

Oh, but it is not that simple.

Torrey said that he is more concerned with elementary education than he is with higher education. Well, I would hope so; as important as higher education can be, it is more important that all children get a strong early education. Torrey even has a plan to improve education if more revenue is not generated: extend public schooling to 3- and 4-year-olds and make kindergarten full-day.

Idealistically, this is a great plan. But how on earth can this state afford that? Does Torrey not remember the budget cuts schools have taken? Teachers have been let go, class sizes have increased, activities have been cut, music programs have been reduced, sports are pay-to-play, academic competitions have been dropped, band is pay-to-play, etc. In the last couple of years, schools have taken an absolute beating. And the way to improve our education system is to bring hundreds of students into the system early?

I don't think so. To improve the school system we need to work on mending the existing problems. Sure the best way to improve schools would be to provide them with the money that is needed. Obviously this has not happened, and if those who are smarter than I am have yet to figure it out, there is no way that I can provide a simple solution.

In the face of these budget problems it does not seem like there is much that an individual can do to improve our schools. Lo and behold: devoted volunteers. Enough praise cannot be given for the countless parents and caring individuals that give their time to



JESSICA DERLETH
FREEDOM RINGS WHERE OPINIONS CLASH

improve schools. When things started to get rough, budget wise, at my high school, volunteers answered the call of duty. There were suddenly volunteers everywhere working in the copy room, classroom and office, as well as organizing textbooks and helping teachers. These volunteers took the initiative and made a real difference.

These volunteers have found a strange bedfellow in the form of Oregon's five largest private foundations. These foundations felt that the future of the state, the state economy and their own existence depended on today's children receiving a strong education. Torrey has the same view about the importance of education for a strong economy, only these foundations found a logical way to begin making an improvement: They turned to Oregonians (volunteers, school employees, students, citizens).

In 2004, these foundations started the Chalkboard Project. In the early stages of the project, community members conducted surveys and held meetings to figure out what Oregonians thought about their schools and how things could be improved. I had the opportunity to attend one of these meetings and it was fascinating. I first went to the meeting to find out whether there was a story in it for my high school paper; within minutes, deadlines and sources were the last things on my mind. A speaker from the Chalkboard Project gave an introduction and an explanation about

what they were trying to accomplish. And soon, everyone was encouraged to divide up into groups and talk about some of the general topics listed in a booklet that had been handed out. This meeting was fascinating; people were talking frankly about what is wrong with our schools and what they believe to be some possible solutions. By the end of the meeting, I walked away with dozens of thoughts about the school system, and the hosts of the meeting walked away carrying a box teeming with thoughts and suggestions.

And now, after processing what people all across Oregon have to say, the project has made 15 recommendations addressing concerns about the quality of schools. One of the main ideas? More parental involvement. In order to help get parents involved, the Chalkboard Project will give grants to 12 Oregon middle and high schools to create programs where parents can go online to monitor their children's attendance, homework and grades.

The main reason parents say they are unable to volunteer at their child's school is because of work. So, the project is seeking ways, such as tax credits or other incentives, to encourage employers to support parents taking time off to volunteer at their child's school; in fact, some businesses give employees paid time off to volunteer in schools.

Since the drastic budget cuts in schools, there has been a lot of talk about what can be done. There has been a lot of talk about how to fix the schools and talk about how to fund the schools.

There has been a lot of talk.

Luckily, foundations, parents, educators, students and citizens have finally decided that it is time for a little less talk and a lot more action.

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INBOX

Republican Party in need of new representative

In Tuesday's Inbox I found a commentary piece written by the Chairman of College Republicans here at the University of higher education in Oregon ("Cartoon misrepresents College Republicans," ODE Oct. 18). This letter of commentary is the fuel behind the concerns in my own letter.

In the likely event that students do not know, Anthony Warren is chairman of this hodgepodge committee called the College Republicans. Allow me to give him some much-needed publicity.

Trying to remain calm while reading the chairman's editorial, I realized that a pied piper of sorts was leading College Republicans at this university. Like a flute-playing man in spandex, Warren's misplaced neo-conservative views should be alarming to most people, especially Republicans whose views are being distorted by this man. The reason this is concerning is not because I wish to question the obviously impeccable character of the chairman (as he did to a fellow

scholar in critiquing cartoonist Aaron DuChateau); but conversely, I inquire, where is Warren's respect for the Yin and Yang of American politics? In his commentary, Mr. Warren blindly fires off verbal assaults at professor Chuck Hunt, liberals and a lowly comedic cartoonist. Most troubling however, the chairman exhibits a mentality that prohibits itself from seeing its own ignorance.

Mr. Warren: Why should DuChateau be ashamed of depicting a Republican as a drunk when in fact your leader (and leader of the free world) President George W. Bush has had so many encounters with alcohol that any sober man should gail at the thought of Republicans being vexed at a cartoon poking fun at such ridiculous mishaps? I'm sure no reminder is necessary of a certain DUI arrest in '76 or his daughters' public dabbling with alcoholic beverages.

Which brings me to my next point, chairman. This country enjoys a separation of church and state. I just want to make sure you realize there is a distinction when talking about Jesus and Bush. Are you a fascist chairman? I

ask because, like it or not, your passion for being in the school of hard-knock conservatives is pushing you to a right-wing realm you may not even be aware of. Next time you're massaging your beretta by the fireside, realize that the dank odor of fascism could be creeping in when your Republican Party starts blurring that line between Politics, God and America.

My point is, chairman, do not mock the people of Eugene by throwing a tizzy-fit at a cartoonist trying to entertain his target demographic. The arrogance you displayed by calling popularity to question in your commentary piece can easily be turned against you and the many social factions that inherently appoint friends to you. Remember, there is always a bigger fish in the pond. If I were you, I would apologize to Mr. DuChateau for your rude remarks, and realize that your "much needed" Republican voice could be better served in this community. Please feel free to contact me if you could use some pointers in this or any matter.

Pete Limbaugh
University Student

Editorial

Let's get our priorities in order before rec remodel

Proposed additions to the Student Recreation Center certainly sound luxurious. We wouldn't mind relaxing in a new spa, trying out expanded racquetball courts or having more space for aerobic training. And the current SRC becomes crowded during peak hours, as anyone who frequently attempts to play basketball likely knows.

But there is no way the University can afford a new Rec Center. With a price tag estimated at \$21.8 million, and a starting balance of zero, it looks like private donations will be needed.

While state and federal lawmakers fail to prioritize funding higher education, this institution is actually considering hitting up private donors for a new set of treadmills.

There are times we need private money despite being a public school. Yet this institution should concentrate on funding certain projects before it even thinks about tacking on any superfluous recreation facilities.

Faculty salaries

This University has a serious salary gap. In past years, average faculty salaries have lagged behind those of comparable institutions, and the gap has recently been exacerbated. A state employee salary freeze implemented between 2003 and 2005 has done serious damage. As a result, the school has a hard time recruiting and retaining quality instructors. Inadequate salaries also hinder our struggle to increase faculty diversity.

Housing on campus

The residence halls are old and cramped. The current system makes it harder for the University to renovate its old halls than to build new ones. Meanwhile, the University acquires property using housing money, then uses that property for non-housing purposes. Better residence halls will attract more students than a new SRC would.

Tuition

We appreciate the Oregon Opportunity Grant. But following several years of cuts to the state's need-based scholarship program, this "gift aid" is a mere drop in the bucket. Federal funding for scholarships and grants has bottomed out. Costs of tuition and necessities like books and housing continue to increase, and students aren't exactly made of money. Let's find ways to reduce tuition or supplement student aid.

EMU

We remember a time when the EMU, home for many University student groups, was moving forward on the "EMU Master Plan," a multi-million dollar face-lift on the aging building. That plan was indefinitely delayed because of budget woes, forcing improvements to be made slowly. The EMU should be a point of pride, and we should find funding to enhance it.

Basic necessities

Some parts of campus academic life that students at other schools take for granted, like 24-hour library hours all year, are a major struggle every year. Has anyone noticed how hard it is to park around here? Let's build a parking structure as soon as possible, not at some distant time when a new basketball arena is created. We can move the Department of Public Safety headquarters while we're at it. That way, maybe the building won't be overcrowded during an emergency.

We realize many of the problems we've listed require copious funding and complicated planning. But let's not spend our valuable time fantasizing about the SRC when there are more pressing financial needs on campus.

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