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■ In my opinion

## Cost cutting's hidden price

Thanksgiving weekend, Wal-Mart gleefully became one of the only big box retailers to surpass expected holiday sales.

Apparently, the recent documentary "Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price" didn't achieve its intended outcome. Wal-Mart sales are rapidly rising, and company executives are working hard to promote a friendly image. With Wal-Mart now poised to become more successful than ever, it seems that the nation is slowly forgetting the Wal-Mart hullabaloo of days gone by.

Luckily for everyone, some people haven't forsaken their fight against Wal-Mart. The document "Everyday Low Wages: The Hidden Price We All Pay for Wal-Mart" was created in February 2004, by Democratic staff from the U.S. House of Representatives. What it says ought to make every consumer wary of Wal-Mart.

The report explained that Wal-Mart has been repeatedly charged with violating workers' rights through such actions as firing workers who attempted to unionize. At one point, Wal-Mart even created "A Manager's Toolbox to Remaining Union Free."

If workers are threatened to abstain from unionizing, they lose out on the benefits and comfortable workplace experience they are due. When employees cannot band together in a union and demand fair treatment and wages, managers and executives hold all the power.

Not only do Wal-Mart workers receive an exceedingly low salary thanks to anti-unionizing efforts, some workers have been forced into labor off-the-clock. In one class-action lawsuit, it was revealed that employees were asked to work through their breaks and even after their shift had ended and their time card punched out. Overtime is not always paid as such, and some Wal-Mart managers have been accused of erasing hours from employees' time



AILEE SLATER  
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

cards. Wal-Mart stores often encourage a high turnover rate, so that long-time employees are replaced before they can receive much-deserved raises.

Although these instances of unfair labor practices occurred at individual Wal-Mart stores, the company still needs to be held accountable. Local store managers only cut corners with employee pay because of Wal-Mart's insistence that labor expenses are kept as low as possible.

Besides bottom-level wages and off-the-clock work, Wal-Mart stores keep labor costs down by failing to provide some of their poorest employees with health insurance. Employees who do receive health insurance often have to grapple with the cost of higher-than-average co-pays and deductibles, often forcing these workers to forgo the option of purchasing health insurance from the workplace altogether.

And who picks up the tab on workers who, by general standards, should be insured by their employer? Local taxpayers who give money to support public health care programs, which then benefit the workers who should have been covered by their employer in the first place. The money saved at Wal-Mart is hardly money earned, because the consumer is paying for Wal-Mart employees' health insurance.

When a Wal-Mart comes to town, smaller businesses are forced to close because they cannot compete with

Wal-Mart's prices. One reason small businesses can't compete is that those businesses do not engage in unethical price-cutting practices. When businesses that treat their employees well are forced to close, those employees can end up seeking jobs at Wal-Mart and experiencing all of the problems that go along with working for a cost-cutting corporation.

Wal-Mart's problems even span to the national level, when the company uses its business clout to demand extremely low prices on goods produced overseas. If companies in China, from whom Wal-Mart imports a large amount of products, are unable to turn a profit, those overseas businesses are forced to cut labor expenses. In its demand for the lowest prices possible, Wal-Mart is literally creating sweatshops.

As if looking out for the common good of humankind is not reason enough to avoid shopping at Wal-Mart, consider this: Many Wal-Mart products are actually priced higher than at other comparable retailers. The goal of Wal-Mart is to pull in customers with a few bargain deals, then hope that those shoppers pick up other items on their list that are not priced so low. If a consumer at Wal-Mart is not wise to the average price of, say, light bulbs, the customer ends up paying more than they should.

As the holiday shopping season gets bustling, remember that the low prices offered by Wal-Mart are not as low as they seem. By supporting the Wal-Mart company, you are causing financial losses to community taxpayers, supporting illegal labor practices, condoning sweatshops and, thanks to Wal-Mart pricing schemes, possibly paying above average retail for some products. Money is power, and Wal-Mart has shown time and time again that it is undeserving of such power.

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■ Editorial

## Facebook could invite more than your friends

Writing about alcohol-fueled endeavors on your blog or posting a photo of yourself peeing on public buildings on Facebook may seem like a private act. You might assume that only your friends have the time or initiative to look. We sense that many students often believe that information shared online through social networking will never get back to anyone who matters. Like a parent, a teacher or a future employer. Or the police.

But recent news stories in college papers, including one in today's Emerald, detail the dangers of putting incriminating information about yourself on Facebook or other personal sites. When posting information on sites, it's vital to remember that the Internet is open and available to all. Even when sites such as Facebook require registration to access your profile, there are always avenues for savvy investigators to discover information that you don't want advertised.

Potential employers are absolutely able to access Facebook profiles by obtaining a username and password from employees or prospective employees, especially when those employers are located on campus or visiting campus looking for student workers. If professionals in any job market view inappropriate profiles, some Facebookers may be destined to remain cluelessly unemployed.

Parents have likewise been known to discover similar facts about their underage students through various online blogging and networking tools.

And for anyone who doesn't like getting arrested, it's probably time to post less information about how often you break the law. Students nationwide have gotten into varying amounts of trouble over photos or groups involving alcohol consumption.

This month, students at an Emory residence center were told that they may face punishment from an Alcohol Conduct Council because of their group "Woodruff = Wasted."

Even more concerning is the use of Facebook by Pennsylvania State University Police to identify individuals who rushed the field after an Oct. 8 football game. Similarly, it's possible for the police to check Facebook for addresses where parties may occur. A public safety director at Georgia College & State University said early this month that Facebook has become a valuable, oft-used tool for determining parties that may become unruly. When students make a party public Facebook knowledge, law officials can easily get word of any wild, possibly underage get-together; this fact is especially important to remember when dorm parties are advertised on Facebook, as campus departments of safety are likely to be Facebook savvy.

Although Eugene police and the University's Student Judicial Affairs said they don't regularly use Facebook, it may only be a matter of time before they catch on to perusing this resource. Thus we suggest unjoining the "I was trashed in my Facebook pic" group, as well as "the cannabis club."

And don't forget: A picture is worth a thousand words. Drug paraphernalia or questionable surroundings in Facebook pictures offer police and parents ample opportunity to regulate illegal actions.

Unfortunately, the question is not whether students deserve a right to privacy in their online communications. The fact is that information posted on the Internet will almost certainly travel into the hands of someone unexpected. We suggest thinking twice before posting this weekend's party pictures on Facebook.

■ Guest commentary

## Military recruits should know the consequences of enlisting

Despite my Ph.D. and 20 years of practice in clinical psychology, I continue to be astonished by the self-blinding capacity of the right-wing mind. Gabe Bradley's recent commentary on our ROTC building demonstration last week ("You call this a protest?" ODE Nov. 22) was a sad example, reflecting an apparent appetite for theatrics over substance.

First, the protester with the "big, stupid-looking grin on his face" is an emeritus University psychology professor and Korean War veteran. "This fellow" — Hank Disney, who smiles easily — is an imperturbably good-natured man of proven intellect and passionate care for his country and his fellow citizen-soldiers who are dying and suffering needlessly in a falsely justified, illegal, recklessly destructive, counter-productive war.

We demonstrators, derided as "lame" for our modest numbers, were not the intended story. Our deliberately small and disciplined group was not staging a theater project. Our purpose was to attract media attention to facts and foreign press photographs of the Iraq War not provided to the American public by the American press. Ordinary Iraqis and

uniformed Americans dying daily without justification are the story, not seven people politely arrested for misdemeanor trespassing. If the U.S. media were doing their job, our efforts would be unnecessary.

Our purpose is precisely comparable to the civil rights movement, with a high-stakes moral issue of equal or greater gravity. Bradley needs to learn more about post-World War II American foreign policy, our half-century history of economic manipulation, covert terrorism (the School of the Americas), thinly rationalized military aggression (in Vietnam and Panama), and support of dictators who collude with our multinational corporations. These policies have planted and nourished the seeds of anti-American terrorism. Shrinking our economic dependency on the military-industrial complex and its need for a continuous state of hot or cold war should become an epic and historic struggle of at least equal importance to the civil rights movement (in which I participated during graduate school at Louisiana State University).

Bradley also derided the Vietnam demonstrations as "disgraceful displays." These displays accelerated the

ending of this disastrous war, also falsely justified. In addition to the 58,000 American dead in that debacle, 3.4 million Vietnamese were killed in a war we created and eventually lost with none of the dire domino consequences predicted by its instigators.

We only asked that potential military recruits be told the truth as we know it — a 90 percent likelihood of attack or ambush when serving in Iraq; a peer-reviewed, medical journal-published public health study indicating some 100,000 mostly civilian, mostly coalition-caused Iraqi deaths by August 2004; facts about combat-induced, often lifelong post-traumatic stress disorders; tripled worldwide terrorist incidents following our Iraq invasion; massive war profiteering and corruption ballooning our national debt; and 80 percent of Iraqis who want us out of their country.

We seek not to derogate our uniformed citizens but to spare them from unnecessary trauma, disability and death.

A former Vietnam-era Army psychologist, Jack Dresser is currently a behavioral scientist and regular columnist for the Springfield News.