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■ In my opinion

Back off the Christmas controversy

Recently, research for one of my classes sent me to a place I had never been before: The realm of right-wing "news," otherwise known as the world of Bill O'Reilly.

My assignment for the class was to compare "The O'Reilly Factor" to "Real Time with Bill Maher" and consider why the two shows are appealing to young viewers. Having never seen "The O'Reilly Factor," I went in search of video clips, and boy did I find them. For more than an hour, I found myself glued to my computer screen learning about a war that Americans are waging, a war that I honestly didn't know existed — the "War on Christmas."

After a little bit of poking around, I found that for several back segments the show's topic has been this war on Christmas, anti-Christian bias and the diminishment of Christmas. In between his incessant rambling and screaming at guests, O'Reilly managed to raise a few interesting points.

Within these broadcasts, a lot of examples were given about how Christmas is being attacked both in government institutions and private companies. Private companies, more specifically private stores, let the decision of Christmas inclusion or exclusion be company policy. A privately owned store has every right to put up signs and decorations that say "Merry Christmas;" these stores are working to attract consumers, and that is precisely what they are doing by getting into the holiday spirit. If someone has a problem with Christmas decorations being displayed at a store, that person can simply shop elsewhere.

Now when you throw government institutions into the situation, it gets a little messier. Some argue that a Christmas tree outside of a public building is a clear sign of the mixing of church and state. Others argue that Christmas is a federal holiday and a national tradition, and there is no reason to bar it from government property. Both sides have many valid points and arguments and, when I listen to what they have to say, I often find



JESSICA DERLETH
FREEDOM RINGS WHERE OPINIONS CLASH

myself nodding along with both sides. As heated as people are about Christmas trees, otherwise known as holiday trees, in the public square, it is nothing compared to the debate about the holidays in public schools.

Should schools allow holiday decorations? Should schools hold holiday pageants? I think that if a school includes decorations and songs from various winter holidays there is no reason why the holiday season should be ignored. In fact, the holiday season is the perfect time to teach children about other cultures, to introduce them to other religions and other holidays. It really is an incredible learning opportunity to have so many cultures celebrating, in their own way, at the same time of year. Why not teach children about Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and other holidays? Why not take the time to teach them about other cultures?

All of this fighting over Christmas boils down to the fact that it is a Christian holiday, and not everyone in this country is Christian. But I say that Christmas is more than a Christian holiday. While on the surface Christmas, literally meaning "Mass of Christ," is purely Christian, it has many more elements. Looking at it closely, Christmas is a unique blend of pagan traditions, Christianity and good old American consumerism.

Long before the birth of Jesus, people were celebrating the winter season. Across Europe, people would celebrate the winter solstice and the end of the worst of winter weather. They would worship their own god and take advantage of the fact that the wine and beer made during the year was finally

fermented and ready for drinking.

In the early years of Christianity, the birth of Jesus was not celebrated; Easter was the main holiday. It was in the fourth century that church officials decided that the birth of Jesus should be celebrated. The day of his birth is not mentioned in the bible, though the presence of shepherds tending to their flocks suggests spring time. Many believe that celebrating on Dec. 25 is an effort to adopt the traditions of a pagan festival. This chosen date was effectively integrating Christian beliefs with the established celebration on Dec. 25 of Mithra, the god of the unconquerable sun. Aside from the date, many Christmas traditions come from different societies and different religions.

Christmas has become more than a Christian holiday; it is also a time to revel in the spirit of the season, spend time with the ones we love, and appreciate what we have. For many non-Christians, such as myself, the holiday may not be about the birth of Jesus, but it still means something. And, of course, the holidays are about consumerism.

This may not be a principle of the holidays that people harbor in their hearts, but it is definitely here; stores have had Christmas trees up since the Halloween spider webs came down. In the corporate world the holidays are about selling, and that is OK with me. We live in a capitalist country, and you have to expect companies to bank on the largest holiday and the biggest spending period.

Christmas is a great many things to many people and it is here to stay; so everyone, please stop fighting over Christmas. The country is not out to crush non-Christians. And the country is not out to repress Christianity. Let everyone celebrate in his or her own way and let government institutions join in the spirit with representations from all cultures. Lets all just have a Merry Christmas and a happy holiday season!

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INBOX

Alternative to forest bill allows old-growth logging

Oregon Rep. Greg Walden has introduced a bill into the House of Representatives, the Forest Emergency and Recovery Act, that would allow aggressive old-growth logging on our public lands within 60 days of a natural disturbance (i.e.: fire, drought, floods, windstorms or insects), bypassing any public involvement.

Let's set the record straight: Fires do not "destroy" forests, fires rejuvenate forests. Certain tree species, such as the Knobcone pine, actually require fire to burst its seed cones. Forest fires provide wildlife habitat in the form of dead standing trees, or snags, while downed trees eventually decompose to create fresh fertile soil. The Forest Service's own scientists claim the best thing to do after a fire is to allow the forest to recover on its own.

New Mexico Rep. Tom Udall has introduced an alternative to Walden's bill, which many environmentalists are calling a "common sense approach" to forest management. The bill calls for a number of projects that would experiment with different approaches to managing

the post-fire landscape. Compared to Walden's monstrosity, Udall's proposal seems almost reasonable (as would anything), but no matter how you look at it, Udall's bill still JUSTIFIES THE LOGGING OF OLD-GROWTH ON PUBLIC LANDS! With 95 percent of our native forests already cut, why should environmentalists — whose responsibility it is to speak for our voiceless forests — be the ones doing the compromising?

Please urge Senators Wyden and Smith to fight Rep. Walden's Forest Emergency and Recovery Act, as well as any other proposal that advocates for post-fire "salvage" logging on our public lands.

Josh Schlossberg
Eugene

Mayor and City Councilor deserve recognition

Mayor Kitty Piercy and City Councilor David Kelly need to be commended and supported for maintaining their integrity and values with their recent motion to remove the West Eugene Parkway (WEP) from the list of transportation projects.

Elected officials in our community have an ethical responsibility to other life forms and to future generations.

Planet Glassberg
Eugene

EPD should stop crime, not restrict skateboarders

Regarding "Travel via skateboard could elicit EPD ticket" (ODE, Nov. 11): I'm glad that the EPD has solved every murder and rape in Eugene, found every car and bike stolen from campus, and arrested every meth dealer. Otherwise it'd seem pretty silly to be spending time ticketing poor college kids for their choice of vehicle commuting to school.

Ryan Forsythe
University student

■ Editorial

Military funding aids research, not weapons

The University Senate did the right thing when it voted this week to hold public hearings regarding U.S. Department of Defense funding on campus. As a University, we are an institution of learning, exploration and investigation, so involving the community in a more in-depth conversation about one of the most hot-button topics of the current academic year is logical.

These public hearings have the power to illuminate a subject that is largely misunderstood by the general student population and to involve the research faculty in the debate. We firmly stand with those who wish to prevent the University from engaging in any unethical research, but we believe many of the allegations that have defined this controversy are misdirected.

We have found little evidence that sinister connections exist between the source of the research funding and its application.

DoD funding on this campus, while widespread, represents a drop in the bucket of our total research funding.

Currently, 19 DoD grants are being used in many departments, including psychology, economics and physics. These grants compose only about 1.8 percent of the University's total research budget of nearly \$84 million for the 2004-2005 fiscal year. With some fluctuations, DoD grants have accounted for about 5 percent of University research funding over the past 40 years ("Campus military research under fire" ODE Nov. 30, 2005).

This is an almost insignificant amount when compared to the vast pools of funds donated by other organizations with sunnier public images, like the National Science Foundation.

All this fear is based on the conception — we would argue a misconception — that military money is funding research that directly benefits the military, or that military funding makes the University complicit with military actions.

A small but vocal minority on campus has used this conception to argue that the University should not accept funds from the department.

The removal of military funding does not guarantee that University research won't be used for military applications. While it is possible that DoD-funded University research may be used in deadly applications, it is possible that any and all research done at the University might be used for unethical purposes. A University researcher's well-intentioned experiment could someday be used as the basis for a weapon of mass destruction, just as Marie Curie's experiments in radioactivity would be used half a century later as part of the basis for the atomic bomb.

Should we cancel all research? Nix every scientific experiment? Fire the Physics Department?

Such solutions are brash and unreasonable, as is fretting about DoD funding. If faculty and community members wish to protest the military actions of this county, they should direct their attention toward those in the federal government who make the choices about what we do with our military, not the researchers who help us better understand our world.

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