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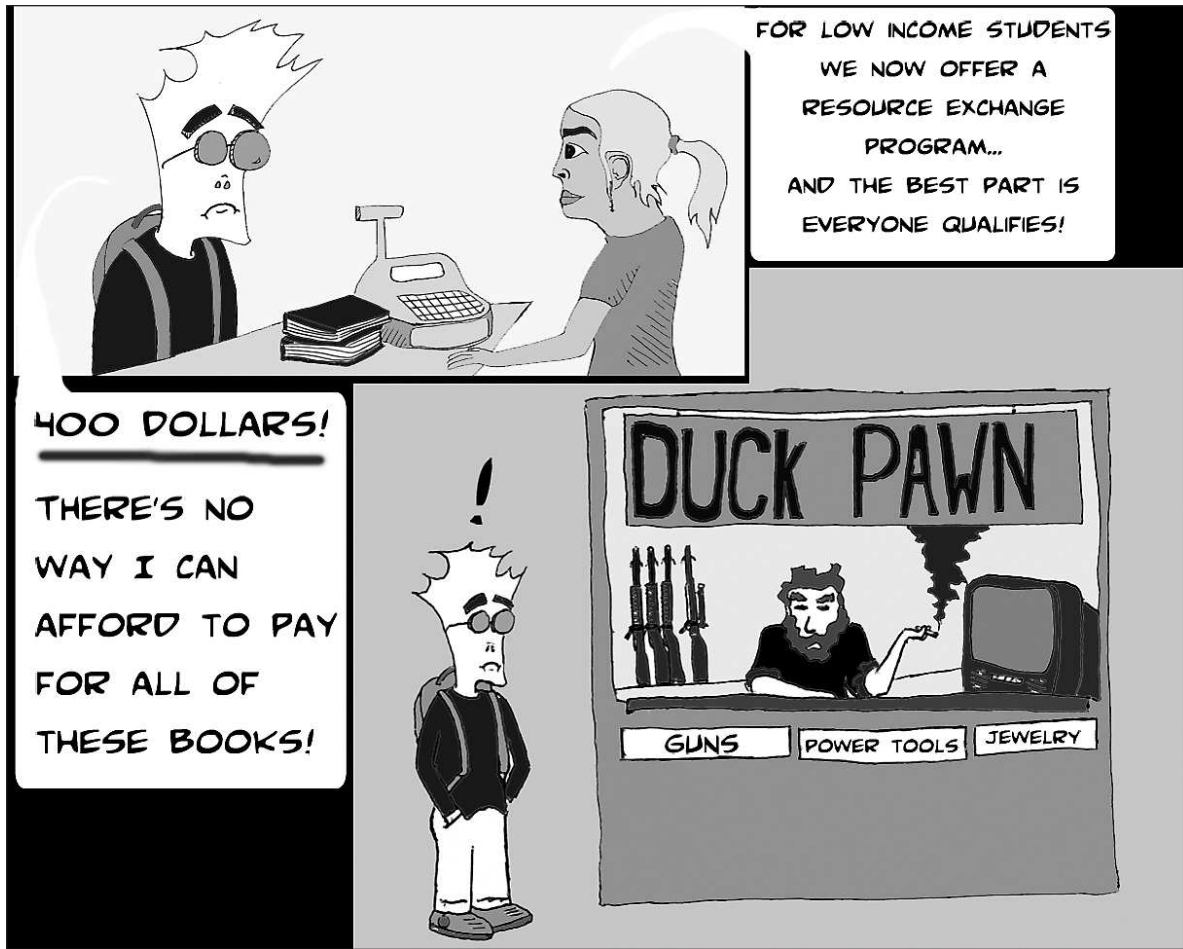
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The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co. Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Ore. The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices in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



AARON DUCHATEAU | ILLUSTRATOR

■ In my opinion

Bush's budget needs less BANG for the buck



AILEE SLATER
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

When it was drafted last year, President Bush's 2006 budget proposed to increase U.S. security, restrain spending and attempt to cut the federal deficit in half by 2009. Formidable goals, considering the current deficit of more than \$8 trillion dollars, unplanned expenditures thanks to hurricane season and the ever-growing number of baby boomers looking to take advantage of such federal services as Social Security and Medicare. In 2006, how will President Bush meet his national defense and financial restraint goals while continuing to offer his nation's citizens an appropriate level of anticipated, primarily domestic services?

A bit of number crunching reveals all the answers, or, at the very least, reveals Bush's pretense of a solution to a Republican administration hoping to cut taxes and restrain spending while sluggishly ending a war we started for reasons later deemed the result of ineptitude.

The first prominent figure under Bush's "Highlights of Program Increases and New Initiatives" is \$35 billion—otherwise known as the amount of money slated to be spent between now and 2011 on reorganizing all Army forces as well as increasing active Army combat brigades by 30 percent. In five years, the U.S. Army will occupy 30 percent more of the world — good news for weapons industries and global outsourcing opportunities.

The number 35 billion is so large it takes a minute to comprehend what it really means. There are 1,000 millions in a billion. That is akin to 1,000 \$1 million stacks of money. And \$1 million is a sizable stack of money.

Needless to say, 3,500 stacks of \$1 million is an even more sizable amount. If the federal government could do, say, a 20- rather than 30-percent increase of Army troops, the left over money would be astounding.

The federal government could still show its support for the military by re-

versing its decision to decrease the budget for the Department of Veterans. Instead of letting the Department's budget reach its lowest point since 2004, Bush could easily pony up the \$1 billion necessary to give the Department of Veterans a more reasonable amount of funding. Especially during a time of war, it is of the utmost necessity to remember that a country of PTSD veterans is toxic to national morale.

With part of the remaining, non-Army dollars, President Bush could better uphold his promise of placing education at the forefront of U.S. policy. One analysis of Bush's 2006 budget proposal points out that programs in education will, as a whole, lose \$1.3 billion in funding. This dip in financial support includes the reduction of scholarship programs, as well as menial funding for certain secondary education opportunities. If the education policies once stripped of their funding were to regain that \$1.3 billion, it would mean easier access to higher education for low-income students and a boost of support for secondary institutions serving underprivileged populations.

In Oregon the welfare program Temporary Assistance for Needy Families will be flat-funded in 2006, a financial loss of about \$4 million. Although TANF is a flawed welfare policy (the state spends most of its time figuring out how to get people off TANF, thanks to the fact that federal funding remains unchanged regardless of increases in caseload), reducing federal funds

means that welfare caseworkers will take on heavier client loads, less money will be available to assist poor citizens attempting to gain an education and the cycle of poverty will be once again passed on to future generations. If the federal government gave that \$4 million back to Oregon and another \$4 million to every other state for similar programs that experienced a funding cut, the total cost would be only \$200 million.

The 2006 Bush budget certainly needs to reallocate money, and not just from military to non-military spending: The president has directed TANF funds away from childcare and toward programs to promote healthy marriage, ignoring the fact that in most areas, more than 50 percent of welfare users are single mothers and many have children under the age of 5.

Ironically, after so much talk about helping small business, Bush cut job training and employment investment in Oregon by approximately \$4 million. Once again, for just \$200 million, every state in the nation could receive \$4 million for similar programs that offer assistance to low-income citizens attempting to train for an occupation.

For \$2.5 billion (less than 10 percent of the federal dollars slotted to increase and reorganize armed forces) the White House could continue funding veterans services at a steady level, put back the money that was cut from education programs and give every state in the nation a boost in welfare and employment resources. Considering the fact that the U.S. Army is trying to leave Iraq, it is mind boggling to think that five years down the road will bring little more than global encroachment by the United States. Just like the years before it, 2006 will be gone in the blink of an eye. Perhaps only then can the nation evaluate whether this year's federal funds have been wisely spent.

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■ Editorial

Building disrepair: an issue that cannot wait

The yellow tape surrounding bulging, water-damaged floors in the EMU's east wing should signal caution both to passing pedestrians and to state lawmakers: Building repairs, especially preventative maintenance, are not receiving adequate funding.

With a backlog of more than \$123 million in needed repairs ("Campus maintenance costs total \$123 million to date" ODE Dec. 5), maintenance needs from broken steam pipes to leaky roofs plague our buildings. Recent water damage to the EMU alone will cost an estimated \$75,000, and five or six other buildings may have suffered rain damage during the winter break.

Maintenance presents a dirty, costly problem, but it's a burden that nobody wants to pay for. Facilities Services, the department that oversees campus buildings and grounds, receives only about \$5 million each year from the University general fund to maintain about 5 million square feet of building space. The University also receives some money from the Oregon State Legislature through the Oregon University System, but that money is used for larger repair projects.

Hence, about \$9 to \$12 million in repairs on campus buildings is deferred each year. The EMU, Athletics Department facilities, University Housing and the Student Recreation Center are not included in that figure.

Further, donors would rather have a shiny new classroom complex named after them than be known for financing a new roof. New buildings often don't receive gifts to cover the costs of long-term maintenance.

When foul weather or other forces create the need for emergency repairs, students can be left to help foot the bill. Recent water damage will be lumped together and billed to the state's insurance entity, but the University will still need to pay a \$2,500 deductible. Student money will fund part of that bill.

Catching up on this maintenance backlog and performing more preventative repairs will be difficult as the Legislature continually fails to emphasize higher education. There are many demands for the state funding received by the University, and on paper, maintenance looks like an easy place to skimp.

But an ounce of prevention really is worth a pound of cure, and legislators should prioritize at least planning a way to pay-off deferred repairs. Donors should also consider maintenance of future building projects.

The logic behind prioritizing repairs is simple. For example, if you own a car, you don't wait until it breaks down to change the oil. Delaying maintenance only compounds inevitable future problems.

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