Monologue

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Textbook laws need review

By Doug Vaughan
Editor in Chief

Often what one says and does are two totally different things. The Father of our Country, George Washington, made this point stand out clearly, but don't put it in an Oregon textbook.

Why? It's against the law. Section 337.260 of the Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) will back me up on that. It states, "No textbook shall be used in the schools which speaks slightingly of the founders of the republic or those who preserved the union or which belittles or undervalues their work." So he wasn't a hypocrite?

Washington owned slaves and in the same lifetime stressed the Massachusetts Constitution which states, "All men are born free and equal." Facts overthrow his image, but still it can't be taught.

An argument is the slaves were not "slaves." How should I say it? They were agricultural specialists who were imported to improve Washington's fields on a long-term contract. If that's a legitimate argument, call me a fool.

This Oregon statute is over 50 years old, and like most things 50 years old, it is outdated, excuse me mom and dad. The debate in the courts has been dragging on for the fifth year, but hopes to conclude this year.

Whether the statute will be overturned will not be known for a while. Textbook orderings, which occur every six years, will not wait. If the court hearings are not settled by the end of the year, all textbooks will have to comply with the laws.

Stevie Remington, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union in Portland says, "It is unrealistic to paint out founding fathers as saints. That's propaganda, not education." A point well made.

The Oregon Textbook Commission sets the crucial guidelines for the publishing companies, which includes Section 337.260. They are not to blame for the restrictions, it's the law.

ORS 337.260 is not altogether bad. It also sets guidelines that call for "respect for all people, regardless of race, creed, national origin, age, sex or handicap." To me this is common sense, but to others, maybe not.

The law does have an impact. If publishers do not comply with it, they don't sell their books to Oregon schools. Even though Oregon schools make up just 1.56 percent (23rd nationally) of the publishing companies' 1 billion dollar annual business, it does have a great impact. These companies sell their books nationwide. What Oregon wants, the rest of the nation gets.

Oregon is not the only state that has restrictions on textbooks. California prohibits pictures of junk food to promote nutrition. Texas stresses the discussion of creation in biology books. Witchcraft also plagues publishers.

Last year, in Alabama, a book used by nearly half of the school kids was banned. Not because of a touchy subject, but because of a reference to a Halloween witch costume.

A spelling book was also banned because a reference to the Equal Rights Amendment was made in a baseball story. The only problem was that ERA stood for the pitcher's Earned Run Average.

A textbook does not always exactly influence what a teacher teaches. Lectures usually stray off the book's course, and are filled basically with what the teacher thinks is important. So it is said that textbooks really do not have an impact on what the student is taught, yet people seem to make a fuss about them.

Some restrictions are needed for textbooks, but the truth should not be avoided. The way that ORS 337.260 stands now, Oregon students are not being taught the truth.

Star Wars System immoral act

By J. Dana Haynes
Arts Editor

In Ronald Reagan's State of the Union address last month, the president unveiled his support for an American space station, to be functional no later than 1992.

This move took many of us by surprise, since Mr. Reagan has never been synonymous with peaceful, progressive ideas. However, a closer look reveals a second side to the coin.

Along with his endorsement of NASA's space station, the President also authorized a new "low-level research effort" aimed at ironing out the wrinkles in what the press has dubbed the Star Wars System. Evidence suggests this, and not the manned station, is the true thrust of the current administration.

The Star Wars directive authorized the addition of between $250 and $300 million to research into space-based, anti-missile systems, the money to go into effect in fiscal 1985. In other words: lasers, particle-beams or hunter/killer satelites.

Since the battle of Masada, military men have sought the "high ground," that area which, through elevation, provides maximum defense and an optimum vantage point of the battlefield. The French siege towers in Lebanon and what is now Israel provided the high ground over France's disgruntled "tenants" and the dominance of the allied air forces in World War II proved the vulnerability of Hitler's Fortress Europa.

Now, space is the high ground and whichever side masters it first will have a clear and distinct advantage over the enemy. At least, that appears to be the opinion of the Reagan administration.

Mr. Reagan seems to believe that a space-based defense line, not arms negotiations, will end the threat of nuclear war for all time. The theory goes something like this: In the event of a Russian first strike, America's satelite system, whether particle beams or X-ray lasers, could obliterate the Soviet missiles in mid-air, somewhere over the Arctic (or, as hard-line Pentagon enthusiasts estimate, 90 percent of the missiles, meaning a paltry 300-400 would actually hit the U.S.)

Since we would then be virtually invulnerable, Russia would finally admit to our superiority and the arms race will be over.

This is obvious hogwash. Post-World War II history clearly shows that neither side will long tolerate an arms lead by the other side. If we pour millions—or more likely, billions—into space weaponry, then the Russians will also. If we develop "death ray" satelites, the USSR will counter with like weapons and hunter/killers. We, of course, would have to build Weapon X (take your pick of science fiction favorites) to counter this clear and obvious threat to democracy, to which the Russians would build offensive and defensive systems, which of course would be intolerable for us and prompt the development of new weapons.

Ad infinitum, ad nauseum.

Clearly, adding $300 million for research into this field is not prudent, not in these times of cosmic budget deficits. Research into ballistic missile defenses is already costing us $1.2 billion this year alone.

The only logical defense against nuclear war is ridding the planet of nuclear weapons. And the only obvious way to accomplish this is through peace talks. The Reagan administration, ever-aware of the election year, has said repeatedly it would like very much to resume talks, yet the deployment of Cruise missiles in Europe has made such talks highly improbable. Mr. Reagan knew that before they were deployed. Evidence suggests the current administration is talking a good game (to us, not the enemy) but is not all that anxious for communications with the Soviets.

Fans of the Star Wars System counter these arguments by saying the Soviets are already working on such futuristic weaponry, and if we don't develop similar systems, they will have the advantage.

In fact, according to a study conducted by American scientists, including Dr. Carl Sagan, there have been 40 distinct technological advances in weaponry since World War II and in 38 of these cases it was the US who upped the ante, not the USSR. Besides, Soviet space activities have been slip-shod and haphazard, despite the awesome amounts of money they have poured into the field.

Another, more esoteric, problem arises from the American research funds. Simply put: Do we, the United States of America want to go down in history as the first nation to bring war to space? To date, no one has ever killed or died in outer space. Are we ready to break this taboo by seeking a celestial high ground? If so, I suggest the move would be as morally indefensible as it would be militarily indefensible.