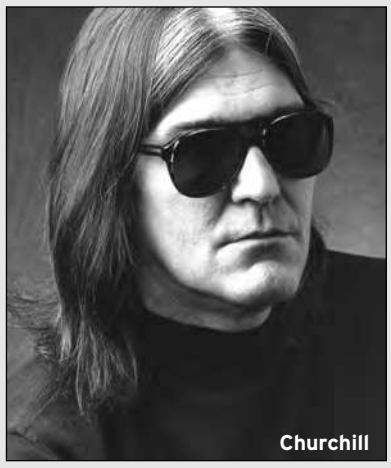
• CHOICES, the scrappy local group that's been in the ring with PeaceHealth for several years, has agreed to concessions on development of the new RiverBend hospital, and they got some licks in on the future of the existing PeaceHealth property downtown. Details are available at www.efn.org/~choices It's encouraging to see that citizens can stand up to a huge corporation in cahoots with city government, and force the tweaking of flawed plans. Kudos to Judge David Brewer for mediating kumbaya. But CHOICES could see where the fight was headed and wisely decided to cut its losses. So should we be celebrating? Hardly. It's a TKO. Thousands of hospital patients and their families, doctors and employees will now be forced to drive to the outskirts. The relocation will encourage sprawl, traffic congestion and air pollution. And Springfield's community-built hospital has been forced to tag-team with a for-profit corporation in order to survive, and is now making plans for an expensive move to Eugene. We will all pay for this boondoggle with even higher local health care costs over the next 20 years. PeaceHealth tells us their ringside Eugene donors are still carrying water for them, but we wonder.


Churchill

• University of Colorado professor Ward Churchill won't be speaking at the "Homeland 'In'Security" symposium March 31-April 1 at the UO Law School. He last spoke on campus several years ago at the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference, which is not technically an official UO event. In addition to his new national pariah status as a perceived "supporter of terrorists," he's received more than 100 death threats in recent weeks – making his speaking anywhere a security issue and a media circus. He was not on the original speakers list, and organizers say his appearance would detract from the focus of the conference: "Race, immigration and labor in post-Sept. 11 America." A lot is being read into the decision to uninvite Churchill, but accusing the Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics of restricting free speech doesn't jibe. The Morse Center has a long track record of bringing exceptional, outspoken academics to Eugene to advance our understanding of the major social and political issues of our time. As for Churchill, his contention that "if U.S. foreign policy results in massive death and destruction abroad, we cannot feign innocence when some of that destruction is returned" is hardly treason, as some are calling it. And he's joined by thousands of intellectuals (none in the White House) who share his views. But comparing the people who died in the Twin Towers to Nazis is more inflammatory than insightful. We hear rumors that Churchill is being invited to Eugene to speak independently of UO sponsorship. We hope he makes it. He will draw a huge crowd, and we'll be there to hear what he has to say. Meanwhile, his provocative 5,500-word essay can be found on our website, thanks to www.greenanarchy.org

• One of the chronic problems with setting up enterprise zones in Lane County is that state law defines all property tax rules. Oregon does not allow much flexibility in restrictions on enterprise zones. We cringe to think of emulating our neighbors to the south, but in California, cities can offer property tax breaks to encourage sustainable businesses. Let's get the state rules changed before we commit to expanding enterprise zones. Just blindly creating jobs is not enough.

• On a related note, City Councilor Betty Taylor reminds us that recruiting big industry to the county has unintended effects, such as drawing thousands of unemployed people here looking for work, thus burdening our social services, schools and public safety. And, as we learned in the recent Economic Forecast 2005 conference, Oregon's high unemployment rate is not due so much to our rotten economy but rather to the livability of our state. We attract people from all over and keep people here with our natural environment, our arts and culture, our relative tolerance for alternative lifestyles, and our stimulating intellectual and educational communities. We also excel in sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, according to folks who move here from Wyoming and North Dakota where jobs are plentiful, but people are not so open-minded. Welcome to Oregon. Bring a tent.

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