

Pesky Ignorance

A view from the other half

I was deeply offended by J.K. Larkin's viewpoint "Pesky Immigrants" (5/25). But since I'm Mexican, and we're nothing but "roofers" and "tequila drinkers," it may prove difficult to come off sounding educated enough to have an informed opinion. But we Mexicans are "hard workers," so I'll give it a try.

Larkin's viewpoint lacked coherent arguments and an overall point. Worse yet, Larkin reinforced some of the worst, most damaging and negative stereotypes about Latinos/Hispanics: We are only good for manual labor; we keep General Motors afloat buying "1963 Chevrolet Bel Air low-riders"; we're uneducated, uncultured, we don't read the newspaper and we have no appreciation for the finer things in life such as pinot noir.

People like Larkin are one of the reasons that racism and discrimination still exist in this melting pot of a country. I found his statements arrogant, condescending and belittling, as well as simply ignorant.

In no way does his racist babble help Eugene or the U.S. progress toward a more accepting social and political system where diversity and human beings are respected and appreciated for the history and experience they bring to this country. Why is it OK to support Mexicans, if that's what he was trying to do, and put down the French? When trying to make a valid and believable point, it's usually best to avoid contradictions.

Maybe Larkin was attempting to identify with the plight of the Mexican people in describing his own family's cultural diversity. Oddly Larkin's ancestors are all of Western European origin.

In discussing the diversity of his descendents, made less white by his son's Laotian wife, he simply proved his lack of understanding of racial matters. "I'd be proud if the seventh generation Larkin were 1/2 Hispanic, 1/2 Laotian, etc." One cannot be half Hispanic. Hispanic is not a nationality or a race, but refers to Spanish-speaking people of Spanish or Latin American descent. So, for example, a person's racial origins can be part Chilean, Argentinean or Mexican. But you can't be half or a quarter Hispanic.

Then Larkin's argument gets really confusing. Is he suggesting that the U.S. should not only invade Baja, but use Mexicans to do all the fighting if they "start misbehaving"? Did he seriously have the nerve to write such an offensive statement implying that Americans own and control Mexican immigrants? Is he again trying to be funny?

If Larkin's intent was to use humor to address the immigration issues that are currently at the top of the U.S. political agenda, it didn't work. Even if "Pesky Immigrants" actually made sense, racism is not a joke, especially to the people who experience it. That some people think jokes and humor hinging on racist beliefs are funny is nothing more than a symptom of how deeply racism is still rooted in American culture. People who aren't racist don't find humor in racist jokes or satire. And racist humor only builds the walls between cultures higher.

Racism is a social disease. EW's decision to use precious space to promulgate the ideas presented by Larkin only reinforces and spreads racism, discrimination and intolerance, legitimizing it by the very act of printing it.

It's time. It's been time, for Mexicans to be seen as something other than low-rider car fanatics and unskilled laborers. It's time for the French to be seen as something other than wine and cheese aficionados. It's time for African-Americans to be seen as something other than athletes and criminals. It's time for Muslims to be seen as something other than terrorists. It's time for gays to be seen as something other than unnatural.

It's time for all of us to open our eyes and really see people, of all races, religions, orientations, etc., for who they really are. It's time that we stand up and stop allowing discriminatory beliefs to be reinforced.

Danica Zapata Stiles is the circulation manager for EW. She's Mexican, a college graduate and has never been a roofer, tequila drinker or low-rider car fanatic.



ready happened in 20 other states and make our state Legislature require at least 25 percent clean energy to come from wind and solar.

*Timothy States
Eugene*

DEPRESSING NEWSLETTER

I recently received in the mail Peter DeFazio's congressional newsletter. After reading it from cover to cover, I came away completely depressed. According to DeFazio, we might as well pack it in. What a discouraging piece of "literature." Isn't there anything positive going on in our country? And, if it is so bad, how about taking some responsibility for all of the things that are going "wrong." After all, he has been our congressman for the last 20 years.

And why is DeFazio being allowed to use this publication for campaign purposes? It was obviously presented in a way as to "campaign" on our tax dollars. While I am sure that it is not against the law, it is against the spirit of the law.

Mr. DeFazio, if things are as bad as you say they are, and you haven't been able to "fix the problems" in the last 20 years you have been in D.C., then maybe you are just incapable of making a positive change for Oregon.

*Gienie Assink
Springfield*

BUCKS FOR JUNKETS

Our commissioners have recently decided to spend \$250,000, and possibly more, of the county's budget for their current "educational advertising" promotion. We are beginning to see expensive newspaper ads, bus banners, and printed materials telling us how respectable Lane County government is. This campaign is an attempt to persuade the voters to fund the public safety measure and that we will somehow benefit from the proposed income tax.

Interestingly enough, at the same time, jobs are being cut in various county departments due to budget constraints — while those in management positions are being considered for pay raises. Does anyone else question the lack of logic here?

Add to this scenario the fact that one county department has used public funds to purchase rugs from an upscale downtown rug vendor for their public service area (which are apparently now in storage) and continues to send select managerial staff across the country at taxpayer expense to user-group conferences for information they personally do not use (aka junkets). Take a look at the proposed 2006-07 county budget document, page 47, to view the 213.93 percent and 23.93 percent increases in travel expenses for one department alone.

I'm all for public safety, but until our county government — and elected officials — choose to be fiscally responsible and accountable to the public with every cent of the money they are entrusted with, this is one voter who will continue to vote "no" for any additional tax — for any reason.

*Tamara Mahn
Springfield*



DENIAL & HYPOCRISY

Scare-tactic rhetoric regarding illegal immigration is unrepresentative of the facts and reality. Current policy is mired in denial and hypocrisy. Illegal immigrants are not entering our country to take advantage of our ever-decreasing social services or our non-existent national health care or our financially unstable public school systems. One in four agricultural jobs, one in seven construction jobs and one in six cleaning jobs is now being done by an undocumented worker. Each year, illegal immigrants pay an estimated \$6.4 million into Social Security, from which they will never benefit.

And as far as undocumented workers not paying taxes, that is not by choice. Take that issue up with their American employers who are complicit in luring illegal workers into this country.

Suddenly, this country is seriously considering rounding up an estimated 12 million undocumented workers for deportation. A country that prides itself on family values, yet we are going to rip apart millions of families — and do what with their children who are American citizens? Deport them also? Put them in foster care? Talk about overburdening our social services.

If the minimum wage had kept pace with the rise in executive salaries since 1990, America's poorest-paid workers would be making \$23.05 an hour instead of \$5.15. Why aren't we demanding that the minimum wage be raised and American businesses (the source of the problem) be prosecuted for illegal hiring practices?

*Linda Jiler
Eugene*

THE WAR AT HOME

"Mother," a simple small cedar box, had rested on our kitchen shelf for more than 30 years. Thirty years of living in innocent country bliss. My home, a joy to come home to after a hard day of work was always waiting, open and welcoming.

The meth addict who slinked into our home must have flashed a sick grin when he realized Mother contained more than small personal trinkets. Mother also contained our house keys, car keys, credit and bank cards. The chain saw from my shop and the binoculars from our coffee table were just icing on the twaker's heist.

A call to cancel the cards stopped the financial damage, but the emotional damage will last forever.

Coming home now to our locked country