ORI'S PLAN WORKS

The important work being done by the Oregon Research Institute results in no greenhouse gases and leaves no carbon footprint. There are no solid wastes produced. Nothing is being discharged into the river, and nothing is contributed to the local landfill. ORI brings tens of millions of dollars into the local economy annually. They have an impressive alternative transportation policy. ORI is a community leader in diversity. It is run democratically, which provides each employee with a voice in the organization's policies. Eugene is very fortunate to have such a great organization in its midst.

With typical efficiency, the institute has worked diligently to assure that the newly proposed building and surrounding areas are both environmentally sound and aesthetically pleasing. They have gone to great lengths to include diverse members of the community in the planning process. Despite these efforts, a couple of UO architecture instructors have decided to protest the project. By using their objections to the new building as a type of classroom assignment, they have encouraged a few dozen of their students to inundate the city of Eugene with letters of protest, creating the false impression of a significant local resistance. The protesters say that the space should be reserved for a green space park.

Look across the river from the site, and you see a huge riverside park, Alton Baker. It's very nice, and very large, considering the size of the town. On this side of the river, downstream from the site, is the even bigger and more beautiful Skinner Butte Park. Residents of either side of the river already have an enormous park at their disposal.

A good architect, presented with a proposed building, would strive for a complete, holistic view of the project. A good architect would view the site in terms of what is has been, what it currently is and what it is likely to be. This architect would imagine the project completed, and weigh the impact that it has on the surrounding spaces and the community. A good architect would consider the proposed work that is to be done in the building, and its impact, as well as the well being of the people working in the building.

It's a poor architect who looks at a project and selects a single, impractical, ill-conceived result and then excludes all other potential possibilities, regardless of their merit. It's disturbing to think that this type of architecture is being taught in our universities and more disturbing to see it inflicted on our community.

Bill Martin
Eugene

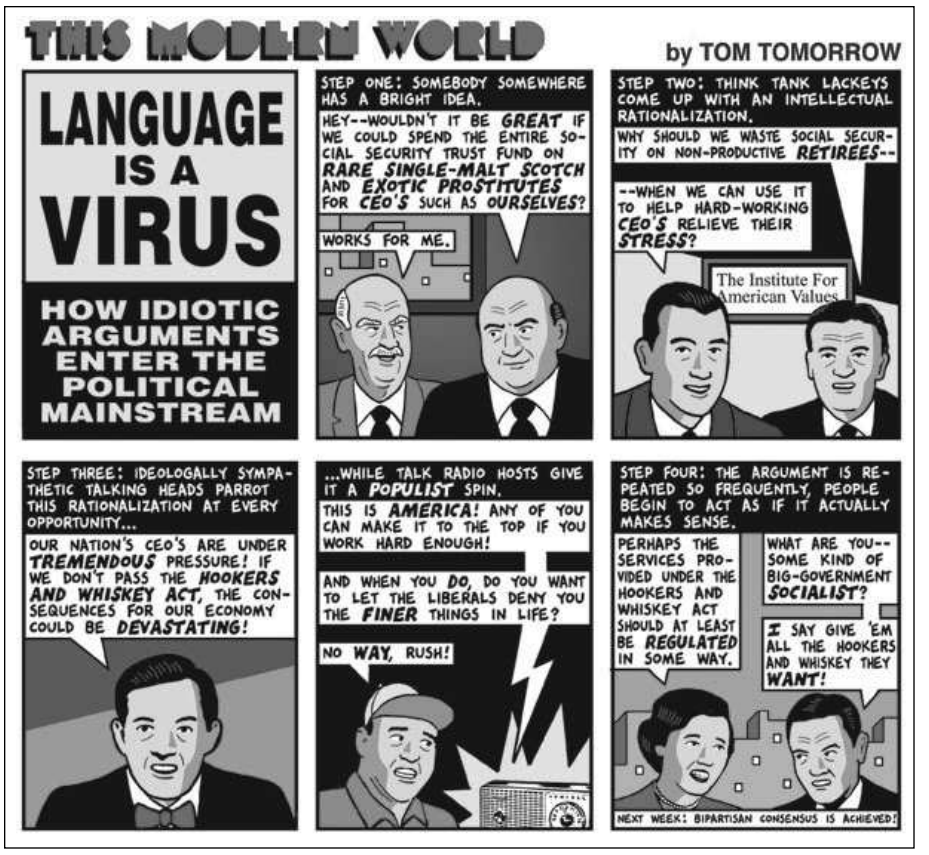
DISTORTIONS

EW's article (cover story, 1/14) on the UO's Riverfront Research Park's conditional use permit extension and ORI's planned development contained numerous distortions. Worse, you chose to publish an obsolete plan circulated by opponents rather than use a more accurate updated one provided to you.

ORI's green LEED-certified Silver/Gold planned project will be a major enhancement to the pole yard area. It will redevelop a former industrial site closed to the public for 70 years. A chain-link fence surrounds the neglected site now, with a broken asphalt path, homeless camps and public safety issues.

This redevelopment benefits the community by widening, lighting and landscaping the South Bank Bike Trail and dramatically improving the connecting path linking downtown to the Willamette River. The plan can accommodate the Alder Street bike connection to the river. Adding more people to the area will enhance safety and stimulate housing, retail and other services.

RRP buildings are 100 percent leased with 30 tenants, 430 employees and $25 million in payroll, making it one of the area's largest employers. Their innovation and entrepreneurship is diversifying the economy with jobs in neuroscience, medical devices, biotechnology, educational policy and optimization technology, among others. These companies and employees pay property and income taxes, and the RRP does not receive urban renewal funding.



ViewpoinT BY BARRY SOMMER

Stifling Repulsion

A Jew listens to learn

A few days have passed now since the circus stupidus at Agate Hall on Jan. 15. The time since then has been productively used to process what happened, my feelings and the future of Pacifica Forum (PF). As I am one man with one opinion and some might dismiss these words as just another attempt to explain away the hatred emanating from the participants of any PF get-together. This you may do willingly. Be aware that these observations come from a Jew, and a participant of PF.

Years ago, growing up in a Jewish house I was continuously exposed to all things ancestrally Jewish, including the Holocaust and Nazis. I learned to hate that time of history, the people, symbols and mindset. Until recently, the thought of being in the same room as an avowed National Socialist Movement (NSM) member, and one who freely gives the straight-arm salute, would not have been thinkable. My curiosity about that time of history coupled with my insatiable quest for knowledge was too much for me to ignore. A debate on the symbolism of the swastika between two diametrically opposed speakers should have been fodder for any buff of Germany, history and WWII. As a Jew, I wanted — needed to know more.

Being raised a Jew, I am keenly aware of the kinds of slurs and remarks directed towards us as a group. Still, I felt if I could know more, learn a little more on the way people like Jimmy Marr think and why they think the way they do, I would be a better person, able to more cogently speak on a subject close to me by virtue of birth. To understand the mind of those who claim to have your worst interests at heart is, if nothing else, a smart move. I had to stifle those decades-old feelings of repulsion and be the unbiased listener if I wanted to learn anything.

The debate turned out to be anything but. Free speech was supposed to be on display that night, but I felt as if it was 1938 Germany. The students and protesters, when they were in the midst of their foot-stomping, profanity-laced tirade, became for me a precursor to Kristallnacht, that infamous episode where Jewish businesses and their owners faced the wrath of Nazi prejudice and hatred. This meeting/debate was nothing more than a Nuremburg rally held on the UO campus.

I felt bad for the NSM presenter. He was treated the same way as Jews in Germany in 1938: shouted at, belittled, scorned. I wondered whether the protesters would put up with that behavior if the shoe were on the other foot. I would bet not. When he got up from the table, walked out of the room (not before saluting everyone) and never returned it was as if a small part of me died. Free speech faded away, replaced with pure, bigoted hatred, and I was very sad.

The remainder of the gathering went extremely badly as the protesters continued with their childish rants and boot-stomping chorus. Nothing that was said meant anything to the protesters; only their inner voices on intolerance and hate were attended to. The remaining debater, Billy Rojas, tried as best he could to explain and answer the shouting horde but in the end, unreason ruled the day. His right of free speech was stolen and smashed against the plinth of narrow-mindedness by those with no moral compass.

Some say I should have been among the protesters, raising my voice against hate speech. But asking me, a Jew, to protest against speech which is supposed to be insulting or offensive would be like asking a Mexican to protest against Taco Bell because they make up Spanish-sounding words for their food. Ridiculous! If I stifle speech which offends me, how will I understand and then counter that speech?

What compels me to suppress speech I don't like? Nothing does. No rationale can hold water for the taking away of anyone's right to free speech.

What exactly is hate speech? Are "fighting words" hate speech? Is stating an opinion on Israel, or Palestine, or Islam, or yellow cars hate speech? It is if one person says it is. If someone points a finger at me and says "He doesn't like Asians, I heard him say so!" it will be automatically assumed I have uttered "hate speech." When one man has the power to determine if someone has been insulted, and thusly deserving of recompense in the form of arrest, conviction and incarceration, we are back to 1938, and my stomach tightens once again.

As a Jew, I must support and defend the absolute right to free speech with no disclaimer. I cannot go down the past road where one group is shut down for the benefit of another. Yes, my ancestors' past is littered with examples of censorship and subjugation. That is fact. I will not visit the same shameful behavior on another. I will always stand for free speech for all or free speech for none. Now, who wants chicken soup?

Barry Sommer is a resident of Springfield, hosts Islam Today *on Community Television and has been a presenter at Pacifica Forum in the past.*