

# Building Democracy

Consensus informs better decisions

**O**ccupy Wall Street is a movement to equality. Worldwide, facets of Occupy make a variety of demands, but, fundamentally, the movement represents the classic human striving for equality.

Occupy's founding grievance decries the corrupt relationship between citizens with money and citizens elected as politicians. It has always been true: Money talks. So, it is not surprising that our elected officials create laws that favor the ultra-rich. In our present system, money is necessary to fund campaigns and the mass media that make or break a candidate.

Although millions of Americans have lost their jobs, their homes, and their health in a first-world country, there has been limited response by our elected officials to protect the real risk-takers of our economy, the working lower and middle class.

In this country, groups who fought for equal rights for women and racial minorities were once smeared as radical and dangerous. Today, the Occupy movement is smeared as a volatile group of have-nots insisting on monetary handouts. However, equality need not mean that we all drive luxury cars and own three houses each. Equality is the impulse of every citizen to treat each other fairly and with dignity. We continue in the footsteps of our predecessors, as a country and as the human race, to realize democracy.

The Occupy movement has proved significant in America's current system, while it has also quietly planted the seed of a different one. It is called consensus, and it is practiced by Occupy as a form of self-government. Made famous by the Quakers, consensus is designed to invigorate initiative and responsibility through the empowerment of the individual.

There are no leaders or elected representatives in the Occupy structure. Instead, decisions are made by motivated persons and committees, or, by the main governing body of the movement, the General Assembly (GA). The GA is run by a myriad of trained facilitators who act in service to the group, inclusive of anybody who wants to participate. There, anybody can make a proposal, which is an action suggested for the entire group. Proposals are decided on by everyone.

The GA is the body that finds solutions for issues that affect the movement. For approval of those solutions, consensus must be reached. According to the website of the Alpha Institute, a local training and mediation organization for consensus, "the essence of consensus decision-making is the recognition that all members of a group are equal in their ability to bring a piece of the truth to the decision process." Therefore, majority does not rule. In reality, every individual present must agree with the proposal for it to pass.

Here in the Eugene area, consensus is used by Occupy as well as various intentional communities, such as Alpha Farm, the East Blair Housing Cooperative, Lost Valley, and the Community Village of the Oregon Country Fair. Only in a city as progressive as Eugene do you find so many people practicing the art. Here, folks act on a cultural norm to participate in the cultivation of not just their homes but their communities. Now take it further and imagine meeting with your neighbors to decide for yourselves if that new strip mall should be built or the coal trains be allowed to pass – instead of having to petition an official.

Individual empowerment comes with great responsibility and some find that our society has not prepared us with the skill set necessary to fluidly enact self-government. Disputes can arise, proposals blocked for personal reasons, or the process drawn out too long. Still, the human race begs for freedom. It must be forged.

The path to self-actualization is a path of discovery. We are like dancers learning to collaborate in harmony to make a work of art unfathomable without the contribution of each dancer. We are like young knights in training, learning to wield the weight of a sword. We are idealists, envisioning a society in which power is not based on monetary wealth, but on the integrity you earn from your community.

The redistribution of power is often confused with the redistribution of money because money, in many ways, is power. Yet, most people in the Occupy movement are not asking for special entitlements. They are asking for democracy. If 99 percent of the country's population had as much power in making decisions as the wealthy do, we would be living in a different country.

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## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### URBAN AGRICULTURE

Each generation leaves an architectural layer atop the old. We can read the cultural narrative of peoples in foundations and sherds, in tillage and midden heaps.

Eugene, like every city, is swooping into the 21st, hopefully with the majestic grace of a, er, duck.

One Eugenean architectural experience which pleases my particular sense of 21stness has got to be that garden down by the U.S. Courthouse. To stroll amongst the strong green crops bathed in reflected gleamings off that mirry mesa of an edifice; to raise a bemused eye from a frond to the Fed; is somehow sensorially gratifying. That garden is architectural genius of the highest order.

Now, if only we could graze goats on the lawn for the amusement of the ziggurati who in the Courthouse work.

David H. Tyson  
Eugene

### BORN TO RUN

Welcome U.S. daughters and sons,  
It is time to throw, jump and RUN!  
Sorry 'bout the lack of sun,  
Hear the crack of the gun.  
The faster you go the sooner it's done.  
It all happens so fast,  
only a laser knows who won.  
Thanks for your dedication,  
you are second to none  
While here, by all means  
pay homage to "Pre,"  
Oregon's favorite son.  
Give it your all, leave it on the track  
and please have some fun!  
Know, no matter the results,  
we are proud of you.

Tim Boyden  
Eugene

### WHY OBJECT TO EMX?

I'm really confused why so many businesses are against the EmX. Have any of them used the LTD bus system for a day to try and get around town? The city bus system is terrible! The EmX is so much easier to ride, reliable, and you can get places on time. Taking the EmX into UO

takes me 10 minutes. Going from work to school using the city bus takes me an hour and a half. Having to wait 30 minutes to an hour to get somewhere via the city bus system makes it impossible to plan your day. Why would they be against people getting around town easier? If anything it makes their businesses more accessible.

I see signs saying something about EmX taking a lane — well if more people could get places efficiently then they won't need to drive and we won't need so many lanes. If I could take the EmX to West 11th I'd prefer it over driving with all the construction. Those against the EmX need to use the bus system for a week and they will grow to love the EmX and its efficiency.

Robin Payne  
Eugene

### IN DEFENSE OF GREENHILL

I am writing in response to the letter written by Kelly Coulter in the June 21 issue. Ms. Coulter's claim that Greenhill Humane Society "has killed animals" for treatable conditions in the last month is completely false and, to be honest, offensive.

I am a volunteer in the surgical suite at Greenhill and have been since last year. I have never seen an animal euthanized. The medical staff practices with integrity and diligence to treat each and every animal and their medical needs. This thorough and compassionate care enables these animals to continue on to safe, long, happy lives. They utilize every resource available to improve the lives of their patients, traditional and alternative.

Any animal that passes through Greenhill's doors is treated with kindness, respect, and love. The people who work and volunteer at Greenhill are compassionate and ethical and are doing this work simply for the love of animals. These are good people doing good work. To suggest otherwise is incorrect and to make allegations that have no basis is ignorant. Lane County is lucky to have Greenhill stepping in and all the animals, pets or strays, can look forward to protection, healing, and care.

Anne Harris  
Eugene