

and dozens of letters to the editor to keep politicians accountable by publicly exposing their proposed or enacted anti-environmental policies. For this I was eventually ousted from my position in the Sierra Club.

In the past, investigative journalists kept politicians and government agencies accountable by exposing corrupt and destructive policies. Now it seems the people's most important check and balance, investigative journalism, has been abandoned, leaving it up to average citizens like myself to expose the systematic corruption in every branch of local, state and federal government.

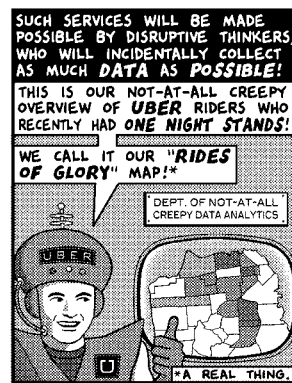
When a publication or any entity whose mission is to serve the people vacates its responsibilities of exposing corruption and destructive policies and endorses politicians solely based on party affiliation and not the soundness of policies they have enacted, it does our deteriorating democracy a great disservice.

Shannon Wilson
Eugene

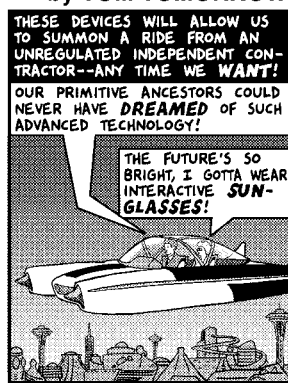
THE INSURANCE GAME

It's in the news that health care costs are increasing. First off, this is not news, since health insurance has been increasing the costs and lowering the benefits constantly over the last three decades. Secondly, it is not health care that concerns us in America

THIS MODERN WORLD



by TOM TOMORROW



— it is the cost of health insurance. Just because you or your employer can afford health insurance does not mean that you will be insured for the care you need.

The Affordable Care Act does little to contain cost increases and benefit reductions. The excise tax starting in 2018

only accelerates the problem. Companies adjust to lower the rising cost in two ways: 1) Pawn the increase off to the employee by making them pay more on the premium and/or raising the deductible and other out-of-pocket costs that the employee must pay; 2) Lower the benefits in the

plan including prescriptions, thereby containing cost increases.

Companies now are also taking a look at dropping spousal coverage, which will force spouses to seek coverage by themselves. Companies providing care are at a competitive disadvantage with European companies and companies providing no care.

Encouraging healthy behaviors is a good thing but not the answer. People in Europe and other countries with publicly provided health care live longer, have better outcomes, have lower infant mortality rates yet pay half or less for health care than Americans. Why? They either don't have insurance companies involved or the insurance companies are held to a strict low administrative fee, like 3 to 5 percent with established rates for every medical procedure.

It is time we catch up to the rest of the world and move to publicly funded universal health care. We have no need for greedy insurance companies between us and our medical providers.

For more information regarding this issue see hcao.org.

Lou Sinniger
Elmira

FAST-TRACK MONOPOLY

The Trans-Pacific Partnership and its "fast track" are not so much a free trade agreement as a giveaway to monster

VIEWPOINT BY ERIN MOBERG

Fair Contract Now

GLARING ISSUES ARISE IN GTF NEGOTIATIONS AT UO

As a doctoral candidate in the Department of Romance Languages at the UO, I have dedicated the past four years of my academic career to research and writing on Chicano theater and performance. Central to my dissertation project is the history of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, during which time farm workers in California organized and participated in the five-year Delano Grape Strike. This unprecedented strike culminated in the first major victory for the United Farm Workers, which remains an active labor union today.

For the past four years, I have been a member of the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF), a labor union representing over 1,500 graduate employees at the UO. In November 2013, the GTFF entered contract negotiations with the UO administration, as we do every two years. More than a year later, those negotiations are still ongoing, and we have been working under an expired contract since March 2014.

Last month, we voted overwhelmingly in favor of authorizing a strike if we are not offered an equitable contract that meets our needs as graduate employees. Our proposal includes two weeks each of paid medical and parental leave for every GTF each year, and a 5.5 percent increase to the minimum GTF salary.

The administration's proposal offers no paid leave and a 4-percent and 5-percent increase to the minimum salary over each of the next two years. If a fair proposal is not offered by Dec. 2, we will be forced to strike for the first time in the history of our almost 40-year-old union.

My active role in the union has afforded me first-hand experience with issues of workers' rights that drew me to my field of research in the first place. It has been an enlightening experience, in conflicting senses of the word. On one hand, I have discovered my passion for community organizing and leadership, and I have been inspired by the solidarity demonstrated on campus among GTFs, faculty and staff.

My most salient realization, however, has been the fact that labor unions like ours, and the workers they represent, continue to face many of the same challenges and obstacles experienced by newly unionized workers over 50 years ago.

Minimal paid leave and a wage increase that begins to close the gap between GTF salaries and the cost-of-living in Eugene are not radical proposals. Moreover, they would be financed by interest accrued on an account that contains a \$65 million surplus.

The UO is currently undertaking a \$2-billion fundraising effort and paid former president Michael Gottfredson a \$940,000 severance package upon his resignation last summer. To date, the UO has paid its

bargaining lawyer more than twice the estimated cost of paid leave for one year for all GTFs (\$52,000).

As I reflect on the past year, what stands out most is the fact that, as graduate employees, the odds were never in our favor. Throughout the bargaining process, we have fought to maintain benefits we won in previous bargaining cycles. We have fought to prevent the dismantling of our Health and Welfare Trust. We have fought against the intimidation of international GTFs by the administration. We have fought in the face of sexist and patronizing treatment of our lead negotiator by the UO's bargaining team. We have fought to be considered employees, rather than students, in the first place. We have fought to educate our members, our professors and our students as to what is at stake for the entire campus community: namely, the wellbeing of graduate employees, the quality of undergraduate education and the reputation of the university as a whole.

Even within the relatively privileged confines of academic institutions, there is still a very long way to go to shift power dynamics, minimize economic disparities and eradicate gender and sexual inequity, to name only the most glaring issues I have seen reflected in the bargaining process with the UO administration. In light of these realities, my decision to stand up and speak out in solidarity with my colleagues continues to be an easy one to make.

If we are forced to strike, I hope you'll join us on the picket lines — rain or shine! — and add your voice to the many already united in support of paid leave and a living wage for all GTFs.

Erin Moberg is a Ph.D. student and GTF in the Department of Romance Languages at the UO. She currently serves as acting president of the Romance Languages Graduate Student Association and as VP of political education for the GTFF. Contact her at political.education@gtff.net for more information, questions or to support the strike effort.