

Speaker of the House of Representatives discusses state budget and tax proposals with community residents at Portland Observer's Legislative Forum January 29th.

Genetic research ethics explored

by Brenda Braxton
University of Portland News Service

A panel discussion was held at the University of Portland on January 26th to examine the contributions and conflicts of genetic research in the 1980s. Panelists included faculty from the University's Biology, Philosophy, Theology, and Education departments.

Dr. Becky Houck, assistant professor of Biology, called human genetics a "twentieth century phenomenon and... the most rapidly changing branch of science." Diseases including herpes, tuberculosis, and some cancers have a genetic base, she said.

Karen Kovach, genetic counselor at the Crippled Children's Division, stated that the first goal of genetic engineering was to "prevent genetic disease." She said that there were thousands and thousands of genetic conditions and five to ten percent of the population has a genetic disease.

There are many good uses for genetic research. It is now possible to detect genetic defects in a fetus and perform surgery at a cellular level to correct the problem. In addition, Humulin, insulin derived from humans instead of animals, will appear on the market this year, said Dr. Seidler, assistant professor of Philosophy. A human growth hormone is being perfected in the research stage, also.

Along with the contributions of genetic research comes conflicts. Issues such as safety and ethicality have not been resolved.

According to Dr. Seidler, safety laws regulating genetic research have been relaxed since the early twenties. Eighty-five percent of the research conducted today is not obligated to adhere to these laws.

Industrial genetics, which conducts its research on a larger scale than that done at a private laboratory, has never been subject to safety laws, said Seidler. He pointed out that it is difficult to monitor leakage and dumping on a large

scale. Still he estimated that 150 companies have sprung into existence over the past few years. "These are the companies who are the biggest polluters already," he said. "There is such a rush to develop this new technology... and to me speed and safety are not compatible."

Both Dr. Seidler and Dr. Matthew Baasten, associate professor of Theology, touched on the ethicality of genetic engineering.

Dr. Seidler raised a question as to whether or not scientists are advanced enough to intervene in human evolution. Could their intervention lead to positive eugenics, the creation of perfect human beings? During the 1920s there was a positive eugenics movement in the United States. In 1928 three-fourths of colleges taught positive eugenics courses. Some felt that the "purity" of the American people was threatened by such factors as immigration, said Dr. Seidler. He also stated that during the 1930s Hitler contacted the United States in regards to positive eugenics.

If positive eugenics strives for the perfect human being, the fate of the less fortunate like those with genetics defects is dismal.

Dr. Baasten presented three common justifications for selective abortion. The first on is that these abortions are performed for the good of society. Resources are needed for the independent and healthy person and not for the dependent, defective ones. Secondly, a genetically defective person has little chance of being useful to society. Lastly, selective abortion is needed as an alternative for parents who feel that bringing a defective child into their home would not be in the best interest of their family.

If genetically defective individuals are not allowed to be born, what other types of individuals will be aborted so as not to burden society? Dr. Baasten was concerned with where the line would be drawn in such an instance.

Dr. Carol Sivage, Coordinator of Special Education at the University of Portland, discussed the cost of care for the handicapped.

Every child that attends a public school receives the basic school support of 1,200 per year (figures vary between school districts). Handicapped children receive up to \$6,000 per year. This amount covers special equipment, extra teaching staff, and transportation, said Dr. Sivage. These funds are raised through local property tax or state wide taxes.

Social Security also goes to aid the mentally retarded and disabled adults living in a group home. These individuals receive a Social Security Income (SSI) check of approximately \$300 per month. Rent, electricity, and spending money are paid by these checks, said, Dr. Sivage.

Utility bills

Where to go for help

by Robert Lothian

Help is available for low income people having trouble paying their heating and utility bills, and facing shut-offs.

Two programs—LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program), conducted through the Northeast Portland office of the Urban League, and Project Help, sponsored jointly by Pacific Power and Light Company and the Salvation Army—offer help with payment of heating and utility bills.

In addition, the Oregon Public Utility Commissioner's Office has a free fact sheet, "Consumer Rights and Responsibilities—Disconnection of Service," which explains legal rights of customers and ways to avoid shut-offs.

To qualify for LIEAP, income of applicants must fall within 125 percent of the "federal poverty level," which is \$5800/year for a single adult, according to Don Allen, energy projects coordinator for the Urban League.

In the case of an immediate need (running out of heating fuel, or a threatened shut-off, for instance), Allen said that a direct payment can be made to a fuel company or utility. When the need is less immediate, he said, cash grants are awarded to qualified applicants within 4 to 6 weeks of application.

LIEAP was made possible by the "windfall profits tax" imposed on oil companies by Congress in 1975, according to Allen. It was determined at that time that at least part of the money should go to low income persons "for relief from the high cost of energy," he said.

Over 4,000 Northeast residents were assisted by LIEAP in 1982, said Allen, and he expects "quite a bit more" in 1983.

In Project Help, Pacific Power and Light Company has offered \$100,000 in stockholder's funds to match tax deductible volunteer donations. Cash grants of up to \$125 are awarded to help with heating

costs only.

To qualify for Project Help, income of applicants must fall within 125-150 percent of the federal poverty level.

According to PP&L spokesperson Barbara Douglas, the purpose of the program is to assist the "new poor—the ones that have been good customers and suddenly find themselves faced with a crisis."

"We're trying to reach people who are just above the poverty line," said Sonia Fetherston of the Salvation Army. "It helps, but it's not mandatory," she said, "to be a senior citizen or handicapped."

Project Help was created out of concern by PP&L employees about the "terrible economic times" faced by customers in the company's six-state service area, which includes Oregon, Washington, northern California, and parts of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, said Douglas. Sonia Fetherston said the Salvation Army became interested because many people had been coming to the agency seeking energy assistance.

Douglas said that Project Help has received an "overwhelming response" in donations from PP&L employees, corporations and interested individuals. The original \$100,000 has been met already, she said, and the company is deciding now whether to increase its contribution.

Success of Project Help is an example of "people showing their goodness when times get tough," said Douglas.

According to the PUC publication, *Consumer Rights and Responsibilities—Disconnection of Utility Service*, customers having trouble making payments have the right to set up an installment plan where they pay ten percent of past due bills over a 10-month period.

Three written notices from the utility are required if disconnection is threatened—15 days before, three days before, and a third notice on the day scheduled for interruption of service. The utility must try and contact the customer in person on the day of shut-off, and explain options.

The publication states that "Services cannot be turned off on, or the day prior to, a holiday or weekend."

Also, "Your service cannot be disconnected if the physical health of a person in your household would be endangered without heat or power." The utility must receive a certificate from a health care professional in such cases.

The PUC fact sheet on utility customers' rights can be obtained by contacting John Clay, Oregon Public Utility Commission, Room 300, Labor and Industries Building, Salem, OR 97310 (Portland phone: 229-5700). Persons interested in LIEAP should go to the Urban League office, 5329 N.E. Union, 287-1506. Northeast Portland residents can apply for Project Help at the Salvation Army's Moore St. Community Center, 5430 N. Moore, 282-2571.

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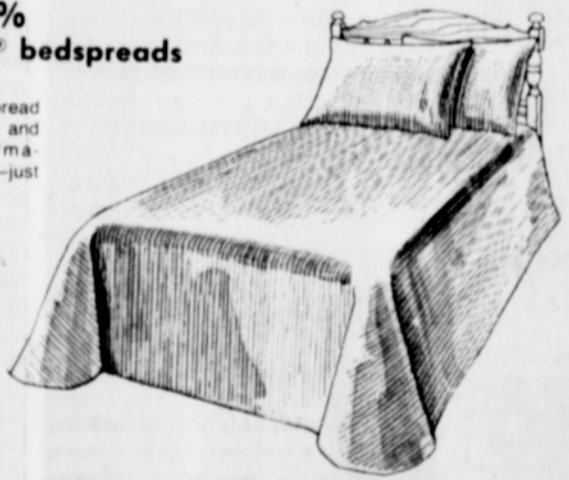
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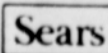
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