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The Portland Spectator serves the student body by providing fact-based and well-researched arguments alongside in-depth news coverage of issues important to the student community. We encourage and co-facilitate a diverse marketplace of ideas filled with thought-provoking discussions.

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### If You Didn’t Know...

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Keeping up-to-date on world news isn’t hard, but what’s going on that the news channel isn’t showing you?
With the cost of tuition rising more quickly than ever before, students are trying to fight back against loans and future debt. On February 21 ASPSU held the Public Education for Portland Rally in the Park Blocks at Portland State University. Students gathered around, protesting the cost of tuition with signs. The rally began with different speakers and a variation of the Pledge of Allegiance lead by transfer student from Portland Community College, Tiffany Dollar:

“I pledge allegiance to the flag, of the mighty state of Oregon. And to our colleges for which we stand, one student movement under shrinking budgets, with millions in debt and unemployment for us all when we graduate.”

With staff and faculty members also supporting the students in their movement to lower the cost of tuition, David Rogers, executive director of Partnership for Safety and Justice, encourages students to continue what they are doing. “You have a really hard job ahead of you and now you have to stop this. You all need to be talking to legislators. Tell them you know where the money can come from,” says Rogers.

With professors seeing their pay shrink and not having enough money for a decent lifestyle, many have left the state to make a better living. This causes class sizes to grow, which in turn results in less individual attention given to students and a more negative experience overall. During the rally, PSU staff members and professors spoke of how the current trends must stop in order for the Oregon education system to remain competitive. “We need to let knowledge serve the city. This is our community. This is our voice and we have to let the people who make the decisions know especially in Salem if we don’t start funding higher education at a sustainable level and stop using students as ATM machines then there is going to be a great sucking sound in the state of Oregon,” says Randy Blazack, sociology professor at PSU.

With its tuition having doubled in the last ten years, and having seen a 16 percent increase in the last year alone, PSU has the lowest income level in comparison to all the other universities in Oregon. Students that are graduating at this university are not only graduating with a degree but also with the highest amount of debt among Oregon universities. “That’s why we are here today—we are rallying in support of higher education funding. We know how important education is for our society and we need that funding back to invest in our future,” says ASPSU president Adam Rahmlow.

Other speakers who announced their journeys or their personal history of education. Students had the chance to hear many different perspectives, which encouraged them to ask more questions to increase their knowledge of the complicated issue. The three main goals that ASPSU set—and met—for the event were: to demonstrate to lawmakers in Salem the magnitude of the issue; to build a movement towards lower tuition with students in power; and to create outlets for students to help other students and become more engaged. “The event was really successful and the message was carried out well on our part. We made the front page of The Oregonian and state legislators saw us on different sources of media. The campus community is all very inspiring,” said Rahmlow.

“We need to let knowledge serve the city. This is our community. This is our voice and we have to let the people who make the decisions know especially in Salem if we don’t start funding higher education at a sustainable level and stop using students as ATM machines then there is going to be a great sucking sound in the state of Oregon.”

- Randy Blazack

The students participating in the rally migrated to the Smith Ballroom after the inspiring words of several speakers in the Park Blocks, and continued the event with other speakers who announced their journeys or their personal history of education.
On February 18, Portland State University’s Psychology Honor Society, also known as Psi Chi, hosted a one day conference in the Multicultural Center that discussed ways of promoting social justice through hip hop, with the intention of informing the audience of the true meaning of the hip hop genre.

The main focus of the conference was the documentary “Moving to the Beat,” which was presented all over Portland State in an effort to bring the culture of hip hop into classrooms. “The language of hip hop allows young people to speak about things they can’t [otherwise] speak about,” says Jan Haaken, producer of Moving to the Beat and psychology professor at PSU.

Hip hop tends to carry negative stereotypes, such as the dreadful youth movement that undermines the morality of youth, and these stereotypes cause people to not take the genre seriously. However, Haaken has a different outlook. “People need a cultural enrichment and we use this to reach young people, so you have a hip hop message,” she says.

Hip hop has an appealing one-two beat that can connect listeners to non-violent messages in the songs. “Putting down the gun and picking up the mic. Young people are young and outraged and this can make a difference by speaking in a nonviolent way,” says Haaken.

Portland State student Jennifer Wallin-Ruschman, who was also one of the speakers representing the curriculum, is writing her thesis on “Moving to the Beat.” “I am really excited to be presenting today. We have been working on this for three years,” she says.

Taking the documentary and presenting it to different classrooms, Wallin-Ruschman realized there was a large amount of feedback coming from students. “Education is so alienating for so many groups of youth and it doesn’t deal with their real life experiences. So by bringing hip hop into the classroom, we hope they can get around that, and provide them with an avenue,” says Wallin-Ruschman.

The documentary focused on the African hip hop culture as well, showing the concern of different African immigrants and allowing the audience to understand their struggles. “Students had a really strong reaction to the representation of Africa and to see that Africa resembled America more than they thought it would,” says Wallin-Ruschman.

Several speakers shared their outlook and compared older hip hop to current day hip hop. Co-director of “Moving to the Beat” and African migrant Abdul Fofanah shared his viewpoint on hip hop. “Hip hop is brutally honest; it gets right in your face and exposes something that [African immigrants] don’t want to talk about. It is social injustice. The rest of the world needs to see what they are going through,” he says.

However, speakers noted their disappointment with the lyrics of modern-day hip hop, which are much less deep and meaningful than those of older generations. “Hip hop current day is not the same as how it used to be when we first arrived to America. Current day messages are not the same which makes me really disappointed with what I see because it loses its focus,” says Fofanah.

With head-nodding responses, Fofanah’s stylist Eric Chambliss adds, “With hip hop you have your own identity. It’s not about flashy cars and women. Now people are talking about anything,” he says.

Besides having less meaningful lyrics, modern hip hop tends to make more liberal use of the freedom of speech; decades ago, hip hop very rarely used any type of vulgar language, whereas that is the norm in today’s music. “The ‘N’ word was never used in old hip hop; they never even used cuss words in their whole album,” says Chambliss.

However, there are some artists in the present day that still carry the true meaning of hip hop. “Jay-Z, for example—he tells us about his life and where he came from,” says Chambliss.

Chambliss also listed out former hip hop artists that have made history with their lyrics: Mos Def, Ice Cube, Mr. Mike, Scarface, the list goes on. “I think everybody has hip hop in them. Everyone,” she says.
EACH MONTH, THE SPECTATOR WILL BE HIGHLIGHTING AND GRADING ASPSU’S ACTIONS, CULMINATING IN A FINAL GRADE AT THE END OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR. AFTER ALL, WE ARE IN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING, AND THERE ISN’T A PASS/NO PASS OPTION FOR ASPSU.

Jacob Stein

Student Outreach: A-

With the pep rally full in bloom this month, it would be hard to argue that ASPSU is not at least trying to connect with students. This has been an area where ASPSU has commonly come up short (not to mention most other student groups when hosting events), but this time ASPSU did an admirable job; the rally boasted high attendance, filling the park blocks with over two hundred students at one point. Though this was only a fraction of the turnout that ASPSU originally planned for, it is still an engaging event about a subject that matters to students. ASPSU has declared they recognize the rise in tuition costs and want to do something about it, and this rally was a testament to that. From having President Wiewel speak at the panel discussion to pounding the pavement in advertisement, from classes to the streets to social networks, ASPSU has certainly proved their determination to involve this community in topics that affect every student. Adam Rahmow claims that they contacted every student electronically to tell them about the rally, stating, “social media is the phrase of the day.”

Staff Retention: B

Although new senators are upon us, the executive staff of ASPSU has remained stable this past month, since the initial drop-outs at the beginning of this term. Now that ASPSU elections are coming up, it will be important for this team to prove themselves as memorable, familiar candidates, if they are to stay in office. With the pep rally over, this will be ASPSU’s new priority-goal. This is either good or bad, depending on how you feel about them and their views, but regardless they are still putting in effort to making themselves known and staying a part of our community. They want to show the students that they have the power to change things at this school but they can only do that if the students know who they are, and continue to know and grow accustomed to them and their methods.

Campaign Goals: A-

Aside from campaigning for the next election, ASPSU will be focusing on the Tuition Review Committee. This is to figure out recommendations for more affordable campus university tuition rates, with a panel discussing what the necessary course of action to stop raising tuition is, even if that means slowing services elsewhere. ASPSU will also stay involved in the Portland Education Committee, which coordinated to bring the pep rally of this month across the entire state of Oregon, to many college campuses, and not just PSU. The PEC is currently attempting to get sustainable funding and become more organized, in order to help keep the student bodies of all its incorporated schools stronger and together. However, only time will tell if ASPSU can do their part as far as student outreach with these continuing issues is concerned. It is still up for debate whether they can keep the attention and the spotlight on these topics, especially when elections are just around the corner.
Sometimes there’s nothing that sounds more refreshing than a cold beer, particularly when you’re grabbing a bite to eat from a food cart on your way home from work. It may seem like it would be impossible to enforce liquor laws around food carts and in public areas, which would explain why there has been so much deliberation in deciding whether or not food carts will be allowed to have annual liquor licenses. However, food carts can already have temporary liquor licenses, and there already exist regulations for the temporary license.

Captured by Porches has been brewing since 2002 and their Division Street Location, known as the D Street Noshery, has been purchasing a temporary liquor license on a weekly basis, year round, since November 2010. Dylan Goldsmith, founder of Captured by Porches, thinks that being able to get an annual license would be great for business. “The annual license would allow us to be open every day and make it profitable to be open every day,” he says. The D Street Noshery is open four days a week for limited hours due to current costs.

The current license costs $50 a day for up to seven days at a time, whereas the cost of an annual full on-premise, commercial license is only $400. For a company like Captured by Porches, which, according to Goldsmith, pays $7,500 for temporary licenses each year, having to pay a simple $400 a year would make for huge savings.

“The state attorney general already told the [Oregon Liquor Control Commission] that food carts may not be treated differently than any other business, because no such designation exists in the law,” explains Goldsmith. So, why aren’t food carts already allowed to get an annual liquor license if there is legally no distinction? Since food carts are already allowed to purchase temporary liquor licenses, the state attorney general will have to determine how to apply the same privileges. However, before allowing food carts to purchase an annual liquor license, the state attorney general will have to determine how to enforce liquor laws around public areas. Also, the legal equivalence would mean that all laws written to enforce liquor laws around food carts would also affect any other businesses that are already allowed to purchase annual licenses.

There is also a recognizable difference between pods of food carts and food carts on the sidewalk. Many food cart pods are on private property, which would need close monitoring, but this means that only one person in charge of the liquor license at a time. A potential solution includes fencing off designated drinking areas with these pods. The situation is different for the banks of food carts on the sidewalk since they are not already in a relatively enclosed space. With a bank of food carts, it would be much more difficult to keep pedestrians from passing their beer to minors.

The issue of food and annual cart liquor license raises fear in many that public drunkenness will run rampant throughout Portland. Though it certainly is an understandable fear, if food carts receive the option of getting annual liquor licenses, not every food cart will jump on board. Portland officials are worried that we would first outline a clear set of rules for the food carts to run by when serving alcohol, there will be many issues. This should be expected though, since serving alcohol is a serious matter, especially in a public place. This does not mean that Portland officials don’t ever want food carts to be able to sell alcohol; it just means that they want a clear set of laws in place to govern sales before they are allowed.

On February 8, 2012, the Portland City Council adopted Resolution Number 18605, which identifies a range of public safety concerns regarding liquor licensing of food carts and food pods. According to the resolution, “the City of Portland has on-going concerns regarding issues related to liquor sales and consumption, such as disorderly behavior, noise, and alcohol related crime, in the area around the proposed food cart licensed site.” One worry that is also brought up is that “the OLCC does not have adequate resources to monitor and enforce the approximate 2,800 currently issued liquor licenses within the City of Portland, let alone an additional possibility of overseeing 700 mobile locations.”

Though the Portland City Council is currently in opposition to food carts being able to have annual liquor licenses, they are not completely opposed to the idea of carts selling alcohol. The hope is that adequate laws and regulations will be written up first and that there will be some kind of enforcement set up in order to monitor the food carts. The end point seems to be that eventually the food carts will be allowed to purchase annual liquor licenses, but first the Oregon Liquor Control Commission and the state attorney general will have to make sure that they know exactly how they will monitor and control liquor sales from the food carts.

Food carts and liquor

FOOD CARTS FIGHT FOR THEIR RIGHT TO PURCHASE ANNUAL LIQUOR LICENSES, BUT THE OLCC HAS SOME CONCERNS

Gavin McCardle

With a name like Adventure Galley, it’s no wonder the local band is already starting to rise through the ranks of popularity. And not just in Portland; the indie rock band is gathering attention in the UK, and even has some hits in France and Germany.

“When it comes down to it, our manager can bring in as many AR reps as he wants and make as many phone calls as he can, but really it’s just about people and bands catching on and liking our sound,” explains Forrest Grenfell, synthesizer and keyboard player in Adventure Galley and student at Portland State University. He’s speaking of the band’s recent spike in popularity, starting with an exclusive release of three new tracks via EARMILK.com, a blog with headquarters in both New York and Los Angeles.

The tracks, titled “Addict,” “Weekend Lovers,” and “Marooned,” quickly leaked and spread to other sites, including Indie Shuffle and the Hype Machine, where they soon made their way to the top twenty list compiled of all popular music. Eventually “Addict” reached number six, while Weekend Lovers peaked at eight.

“We’ve been getting a lot of UK blog press,” Grenfell comments. “UK audiences are known for catching on to the artists we’re compared to a lot.” Among these artists are Arcade Fire, The Killers, Franz Ferdinand, and Arctic Monkeys. “We’ve been influenced by a lot of British music.”

Their current album is titled “Anywhere That’s Wild” and features their three immensely popular tracks. Though the album also contains many new tracks yet unheard by most of their audience, any die-hard Adventure Galley fan can tell you that songs such as “Addict” are staples of the band. After a short tease of a few of the songs, “Anywhere That’s Wild” seems to be an indie party anthem, a high tempo blast full of instrumental thrills and incredible rhythm changes, all atop vocals reminiscent of The Clash or deeper MOG. In fact, when asked what their overall sound is, Forrest Grenfell replied, “Kind of like if The Clash got really into synthesizer and just wanted to party.”

Adventure Galley has been playing with its current lineup for a year and a half now, though they had been playing with the same name for years before. The band started in Eugene, singer David Mills and Aaron Johnson having known each other since childhood; the group suddenly came running; it’s up to the band to make good on the audience holds for them. One day perhaps not too far off, Adventure Galley could be touring the world, and PSU could claim that one of their members attended this school.

Artist Profile:
Adventure Galley

THIS ENERGETIC, WORLD-RENOVED INDIE ROCK SENSATION HAS MOVED TO PORTLAND, READY TO PARTY

Jacob Stein

Song writing for “Anywhere That’s Wild” began last summer, with the recording starting in the beginning of March and lasting six weeks. The album was recorded at Kingsize Sound Labs in Los Angeles, with famed Celso Estrarra as the engineer and Dave Trumfio taking the role of executive producer. Trumfio has also worked with Wilco, Islands, and OK Go, as well as having engineered Mars Volta productions and contrib-
Wax on, wax off
A PORTLAND STATE STUDENT’S SKI AND SNOWBOARD WAX INNOVATION GROWS INTO A THRIVING LOCAL BUSINESS
Max Bordman

Similar to the way in which Daniel Larusso trained for the tournament in The Karate Kid, David LaValley is building his Portland based ski and snowboard wax company to new levels of success with the unostentatiousness of Miyagi himself. In an industry that is as unforgiving to new comers as the slopes are to beginners, LaValley has established his business as one of the most successful ski/snowboard startup companies in the area.

BoardSidedown Wax is a small Portland-based ski and snowboard wax company owned and operated by Portland State University student David LaValley. Almost six-feet tall with a Sinatra-esque complexion and combed-over, wavy blond hair, 19-year-old LaValley is quick with a smile and emits an aura of modesty despite his success as an entrepreneur. Currently a sophomore at PSU, LaValley started the company in 2009 as part of a project at Gladstone High School in the suburbs outside of Portland. “Basically we had to do a senior project to graduate, and me and two of my friends decided to start BoardSidedown Wax as a ski and snowboard wax company,” explains LaValley. The high school group of three got initial inspiration for the project from the father of one of LaValley’s friends in the trio. “His dad started a wax company back in the 80s and it basically died off,” LaValley recounts. “He gave us the idea more or less.”

After initial research and testing in 2009, LaValley and his two friends completed the business plan for BSDW and had a feasible product by 2010. The product they came up with was a wax that could be used as both a rub-on and hot wax for skis and snowboards, in addition to having a temperature variance that ranges from 70 degrees to negative 20.

Whether it be snowboarding or skiing, the application of wax to the bottom of whatever is being ridden is crucial in maintaining traction on the slopes. Wax types fall into two areas of classification on the most basic level: application methods and temperature variance.

Generally speaking, wax can be applied one of two ways: using an iron in what is called a hot wax, a process that can take up to 2 hours depending on the expertise of the rider; and rubbing on the wax, which makes up what it lacks in quality with the swiftness by which it can be applied.

Temperature variance governs the conditions under which the wax can and should be used. Traditionally, companies produce different types of wax for different temperatures of snow: one stick of wax for warm weather and one for cold, and possibly more for temperatures in between. In order to be prepared for any condition, riders would need to carry multiple sticks of wax.

When it comes to LaValley’s approach to wax, less is more. BSDW makes different waxes for skis and snowboards, but the variation stops there. Beyond the differentiation between sports, BoardSidedown Wax’s temperature variance, in addition to its dual application of hot and rub-on wax, effectively gives riders one stick to handle any condition.

“There might be some other small wax company out there that I can’t find, but all the local ones and the larger wax companies, none of them have a wax where you can use it all year around,” LaValley explains. “And by all year round [I mean] in the summer where it’s 70 degrees to when it’s 10 degrees not or 20 below.” The innovations alone speak for themselves when it comes to the rising success of BoardSidedown Wax, but David’s marketing skills are also a factor in the company’s success. BSDW currently sells approximately 3,000 units in a single ski and snowboard season. For a company that bases its production in a garage in Southeast Portland, those numbers are huge. Currently operating mostly from the web, BSDW is being used in the United States, Canada, Europe, and South America, and rapidly expanding.

“I haven’t found a company where you can do everything with one stick of wax, that’s what sets us apart,” says LaValley. The company continues to grow as it reaches more and more demographics in the industry. It is currently developing a skateboard wax to be released this summer, and surf wax is just beyond the horizon. Breaking into the winter sports industry may be difficult, but BoardSidedown Wax and its innovative thinking towards an otherwise simple principal have made it an example for any would-be entrepreneurs with similar aspirations in the Portland area.

RIGHT: DAVID LAVALLEY
PHOTO BY MICAH CRUVER

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In the city it’s hard to have a good time on a student’s budget. Luckily, very month, the Spectator finds events for students who want to eat, drink, and be merry without going broke.

Max Bordman

Kelly’s Olympian:
March 17 @ 9 p.m., Free
Bands: Grandparents, The We Shared Milk, Talkative

Kelly’s Olympian is in its 102nd year of operation, making it Portland’s third oldest bar and restaurant, but don’t let its age or collection of vintage cars and motorcycles fool you—Kelly’s Olympian still knows how to have a good time. This month on the 17th, Grandparents, The We Shared Milk, and Talkative are all scheduled to perform. And the best part? It’s free!

If you were unfortunate enough to have missed their show on February 23 at Food for Thought Cafe, be sure to check out Grandparents at Kelly’s. The local Portland band produces a catchy alternative, psychedelic rock sound that, if February 23’s performance was any indication, makes for a great show.

As if icing on the cake is necessary, The We Shared Milk and Talkative are also playing in the line up. If you have yet to bear witness to the talent of these groups making waves in the local rock scene, then you’re in for a treat. The We Shared Milk captivates audiences with catchy, upbeat guitar riffs layered neatly with the trio’s distant vocals over deeply rhythmic funk-inspired bass lines and unimpaired drum lines, while Talkative features a heavy grunge-inspired psychedelic rock that has come to set the bar for psychedelic rock in Portland.

With a lineup of local heavy hitters, what sounds good in digital form only gets better live, so be sure to stop by on the 17th at Kelly’s Olympian for what is sure to be a marvelous exposition of local up-and-coming indie music talent.

St. Patrick’s Day at the Sand Trap:
March 17 All Day, Music @ 6 p.m., Free
McMenamins Sand Trap, 1157 N Marion Ave.

It wouldn’t be fair if only people of legal drinking age could have fun on St. Patty’s Day, so all of you youthful folk, be sure to check out the Sand Trap on the 17th this month. Orchestrated by McMenamins, the celebration this year is not only open to all ages, but also (the best part) free! The all-day event will kick off as early as the Advil kicks in on Saturday morning; music will begin at 6 p.m., featuring Whistlin’ Rufus, a traditional but versatile bluegrass band. Irish Reubens and MacSleyne Irish Stew will be served as nourishment, along with Irish coffees and McMenamins Irish Stout on tap, so feel free to bring along those older people you know.

Massive Damage 2012:
March 23 @ 9 p.m., $5 at the door
Bands: X-Kid, Sinoy Blaze, Mr. Twist, Yak Nasty, Ice The Light, Dougie, SpyVee, Yung Mil, Supa Nova, S. James, Horizun, M3licious
Ella St. Social Club, 714 SW 20th Place

For those more inclined towards Portland’s rap scene, this month on the 23rd, Ella St. Social Club will be hosting Massive Damage 2012. Hosted by Randy Stewart, the show will feature 12 different rap acts from around the Northwest with DJ Zeta Barber as in-house DJ. For those of the 21 and older crowd that enjoy the bombastic vibes of northwest hip hop and R&B, or for those who haven’t yet experienced it, be sure to check out the Ella St. Social Club on the 23rd for a memorable night of northwest rap.

A Tribute to Zelda:
March 9 – April 21, Free
Land Gallery, 3925 N. Mississippi Ave.

As is usual, we’ve saved the best for last. The Legend of Zelda: A Triforce Tribute opened on the 9th at Land Gallery this month. This exhibition features a diverse range of art that pays tribute to all things Zelda. The Triforce Tribute displays works from approximately 31 different artists paying homage to the game series on a wide range of mediums. Showcasing everything from mosaics of Link to wooden replica swords to abstract art, if you have heard of the Zelda franchise, this art show is for you. The show will be open until April 21, and it’s completely free. For more information, check out the show’s website: triforcetribute.landpdx.com
The end of drug prohibition

DRUG POLICY HAS TAKEN ITS TOLL ON UNCLE SAM'S WALLET, AND THE ONLY SOLUTION IS ITS COMPLETE REMOVAL

Sasha Chedygov

Oregon has always been considered a progressive state, especially when it comes to drug policy. It was the first state to decriminalize possession of small quantities of marijuana, and one of the first to legalize the use of the drug medically. Now, signatures are being gathered for the Oregon Cannabis Tax Act, a bill that would completely legalize the possession and cultivation of marijuana, in hopes of putting it onto the ballot for the upcoming voting period. While legalizing marijuana would be a step in the right direction, it’s not enough. The core issue here has nothing to do with marijuana specifically, but rather the overall drug policy of the United States: Too many resources are being used on the enforcement of drug laws, resources that could otherwise be doing something much more useful.

The U.S. government seems to think that drug use is a giant, national problem that needs to be addressed through brute force, as is apparent by the $15 billion that was spent on the “War on Drugs” in 2010 alone, and the billions more that are spent combating drug use every year. Of course, this philosophy is not without reason; the United States has proportionally more cocaine users than any other country in the world, and the number of annual drug-related deaths has recently surpassed traffic accidents at around 40,000.

None of this is to be taken lightly; hard drug use is indeed a serious problem in the United States. About one-third of all crimes in the nation are in some way drug-related, and an estimated 800 innocent people are killed or injured every year in drive-by shootings due to drug-related gang violence. In a 2004 survey, about 18 percent of federal inmates admitted to killed or injured every year in drive-by shootings due to drug-related gang violence. In a 2004 survey, about 18 percent of federal inmates admitted to

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, the amount of illicit drug users in the nation has increased proportionally by more than 10 percent between 2004 and 2010, yet funding for the “War on Drugs” has increased by almost 50 percent during that time period. At a 20 percent return on investment, this model is an inefficient and unsustainable way to combat the nation’s drug problem. On the other hand, legalizing drugs would save the U.S. government and its taxpayers huge sums of money.

A 2010 study by the Cato Institute revealed that the United States spends about $41.3 billion annually—out of taxpayers’ pockets—on the enforcement of drug policy, all of which would be saved through legalization. On top of that, if drugs were to be taxed in the same way alcohol and tobacco are, the government could earn an additional $46.7 billion in annual revenue, summing up to a total gain of $88 billion per year—not a number to scoff at.

Besides its dent in the federal budget, drug policy is also taking a toll on the U.S. prison system. The majority of state and federal prisons are over their intended capacity, with most state prisons about 10 percent over capacity, and some federal prisons up to 14 percent over. In 2010, about 21 percent of state prisoners and half of federal inmates did time for drug-related crimes. Even if only half of these people were to be released, the problem of prison overcrowding will have been instantly solved. However, even $88 billion and the promise of less crowded prisons is not worth the health and safety of millions of Americans. Opponents of legalization argue that, with currently illicit drugs freely available on the market, addiction rates will skyrocket and the nation will be even worse off. Fortunately, we have a real-life case study to refer to.

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In the year 2000, Portugal suffered from the largest drug problem in Europe. Drug-related deaths were on a steady rise, and the nation had the highest number of “hard drugs” users and drug-related deaths in all of Europe, proportionally. On July 1, 2001, the Portuguese government implemented a nationwide law that decriminalized all drug use. The law replaced criminal punishment for drug use with the offer of treatment, and funneled any savings on law enforcement into the nation’s rehabilitation and drug treatment facilities.

The law turned out to be a huge success. Since it was enacted, drug use has fallen by about one third in younger age groups, and the number of users who have been treated has more than doubled, at no increased cost to the government or taxpayers.

Of course, legalization has been tried in other countries, and in every other case, it was a disaster. However, what Portugal did correctly, and what other nations failed to do, is simultaneously increase funding for drug treatment. Thanks to the money saved by the law, Portugal’s rehabilitation clinics now employ some of the world’s best doctors and psychologists to treat drug addiction. The United States could learn from its European friends and spend more money on federal drug treatment programs, instead of wasting it foolishly on drug policy enforcement.
As anyone who recently follows politics probably knows, each election cycle creates a new public enemy for both Democrats and Republicans to villainize. In 2004, President Bush went after Social Security in an attempt to privatize it, while John Kerry emphasized his war hero status to create an alternative to the Iraq War. In 2008, Bush himself was the villain, and John McCain failed to create an image that was any different from him, and was thus eviscerated by Barack Obama. This year, President Obama is trying to energize his base by pretending to play hard ball with Wall Street, though it is more likely he will simply make a sweetheart deal in the coming weeks with big bankers in hopes they will invest in employment and create an economic boom. Meanwhile, Republicans have been swinging wildly at anything even remotely representing the “big government” they so despise—despite acting as government officials for most of their careers—and the one organization that no presidential candidate has backed off of so far is the Environmental Protection Agency.

Touted by former presidential candidates Michelle Bachmann and Rick Perry as a major “job killing organization” in America, current candidates Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich, and Rick Santorum have not backed off of the rhetoric that simply isn’t true. From 1980 to 2008, the same period for which environmental regulations expanded greatly, U.S. GDP rose 124 percent per capita for inflation. As former Reuters writer Gregg Easterbrook notes, this was a period of mostly massive growth in terms of job creation, employment, and overall economic stability, so if the EPA really destroys as many jobs as Republican candidates would suggest, the economy certainly didn’t notice it much.

Perhaps more important are the social benefits that correlate with EPA standards that Republicans are trying to dissolve; over the same period of time that GDP rose 124 percent, air pollution has lowered 57 percent, according to EPA statistics, and releases of toxic compounds have fallen by a massive 74 percent. According to the Air Quality Management District, Los Angeles has gone seven consecutive years without a “Staige one” smog alert when during the 70s the city averaged over 100 stage one alerts per year.

But if Republicans are guilty of stupidity for suggesting the EPA is a job killer when data says otherwise, Democrats are guilty of hypocrisy by using it as a partisan political tool. If not for Senate bickering in 2002, Ron Paul, abolishing government agencies for the sake of economic gain is paramount to his political existence, and while he doesn’t necessarily hold a favorable opinion of the EPA, he doesn’t list the agency as one of the five government departments that would be axed if he became president. When the foremost economic paragon in the presidential race does not consider the variation organization so many are trying to abolish as a threat, one has to wonder why there is so much EPA hate. It cannot be considered “wasted money,” considering the pro-social-benefits—everyone likes their air and water clean, and had the agency not been created in 1970 in the first place (by Richard Nixon, a Republican), many large cities today might be uninhabitable.

If the issue is purely dollars and cents, the $8.3 billion it costs to run the organization is a pittance in comparison to many other government organizations. In fact, their annual operating budget is less than 12 percent of what the U.S. Army is requesting in additional funds alone for overseas contingency affairs. While the environment is trending positively, however, American civil liberties have been under attack since the early 70s, and there are two government agencies, along with several pieces of legislation, chiefly responsible for this: The Drug Enforcement Agency, and The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives.

The operating budgets of both agencies are less than half of the EPA, but the effects are much farther reaching. America has the highest prison population for any over any other country—about 20 percent higher than Rwanda, the next runner-up, with 100,000 prisoners per citizen. Surely, America cannot have 20 percent more criminals than any other country. Considering the DEA is responsible for nearly 90 percent of all arrests per year, and marijuana seizures were at their highest in the history of the agency in 2010 (over 700,000), it would be safe to conclude that the agency exists purely due to malum prohibitum laws that adversely affect otherwise good citizens.

The Netherlands, a country that has a soft policy on marijuana, stands in the lower 40th percentile on the list of incarcerated citizens as a percentage of population. Worse, the DEA seems to flourish on this site. Their website, however, not all arrests are made in the U.S., as the DEA is also responsible for drug trafficking outside the country. What do we have the CIA for, if this is the case? The FBI exists to combat terrorism and real crime in the United States, and CIA is responsible for most overseas operations—many of which involve drug trafficking in some form anyway—so what exactly is the purpose of the DEA and ATF other than to police people for engaging in activity that, if not for archaic laws, does not harm anyone anyway? Erasing both agencies from existence would be a huge step toward regaining lost civil liberties for Americans and put funding back into state and local agencies that are in dire need.

America needs clean air and clean water. America does not need agencies that exist due to laws that should be erased just as quickly as the prohibitions they enforce.

Ron J. Rambo Jr.

Student debt: The real issue

While students rallied for lower tuition and less debt burden in the Park Blocks outside Portland State University in late February, they may have been fighting the wrong battle, according to at least one financial aid department representative.

“If you take into consideration that state and federal funding has lowered over the years, the tuition increase is there to make up for that, and if there was a greater student voice in politics this might not have occurred,” said Heather Mattioli, Assistant Director of Loan Services at PSU.

“They should be fighting more for low interest loans, instead of this Occupy Student Debt-style initiative.”

National student debt is set to eclipse $1 trillion in the near future, and the default rate for students carrying debt has risen to 8.8 percent—the highest since 1977. If students are unable to obtain no-interest loans, what are the other possibilities?

President Obama has offered a solution: Expand Pell Grants to extraordinarily large levels, akin to Medicare and Social Security,” according to his plan to make college affordable for everybody. Wisconsin Representative Paul Ryan has stated that his concerns with this plan is costs, and that the plan would make taxes and borrowing higher for everyone, creating more debt for the youth. He suggests that Obama is creating savings where there are none by using sleight of hand with his budget, and creating an entitlement-sized pool of money that will balloon student burden debt.

While the U.S. Department of Education budget sits at about $70 billion as of 2010, when including bailout funding, the budget exceeds $120 billion. Charles Murray, author of the book “Real Education,” suggests that Obama has it backward—too many people are going to college, creating an undervalued Bachelors’ Degree. In economic terms, the market is over-saturated.

“You have to start out with the understanding that the B.A. is the work of the devil,” Murray said in a video interview with Reason Magazine. “Think about this for a minute: Tell me what a B.A. means. If you come to me and tell me you want a job and you have a degree in sociology?”

Murray makes a face and shrugs, telling viewers exactly what such a degree means to him.

Mattioli believes, however, there has been no over saturation and that skills are valuable and raise overall quality of life in both monetary terms and health benefits.

“We’re talking about four extra years of life, over a million dollars more earned in a lifetime, and potentially tons more in health benefits with a college degree,” Mattioli said. “The problem really starts to occur when students default on their loans, and when the federal government sells those defaulted loans to private companies who drive up interest rates. This all happens because people select the wrong loan repay- ment schedule, take out more money than they need, and don’t take the time to educate themselves on borrowing. Students need to make plans to see counselors before they graduate so we can help them stay on track—not just when they need the aid.”

Over 50 percent of the student population takes over six years to graduate. According to Murray, this is part of the problem.

“Only a small percentage of the 18-year-old population is smart enough to deal with genuine college level material,” Murray said. “People hate to have you say that, but certainly 50 years ago it was taken for granted. In lots of ways, the best way for us to provide young people with the education they want and will take advantage of is to require them to pay for it.”

Murray believes that increased government funding is a way to “lure” Kids into going to college when they may not really want to. And according to many economists, pumping more money into federal aid programs will artificially boost demand, leading to higher costs—another point that Mattioli doesn’t believe.

“If you look at the 1940s and 50s when indebtedness comes into play, there weren’t many people in college,” said Mattioli. “It wasn’t necessarily that college was cheaper, it was that wealthier, more entitled kids were going to school because the less well-off had little access to the financial capability. It wasn’t a large slice of the economic population.”

Regardless, unless students begin to fight the right battle—in one form or another—tuition costs will continue to rise, and the burden of excessive debt will rear its money-grubbing face for generations to come.
Next step: population zero

OVERPOPULATION AND HIGH CONSUMPTION LEVELS ARE UNSUSTAINABLE FOR CIVILIZATION

Ron J. Rambo Jr.

Over the course of 100 years, the United States—along with the rest of the world—went from being a country of conservation and thrifty resource usage to a country of abundant growth. This is due, in part, to the growth of industry and the rise of capitalism as the economic broadsides of the globe. Recently though, the United States has turned into a civilization of excess, and the rest of the world is starting to catch up.

In 1999, the population of Earth hit six billion. Just 13 years later, it eclipsed the seven billion mark. People’s lives are longer on average, quality of life has increased, and global economic growth has continued. But the facts are startling: The Earth has the resources to reasonably sustain 5 billion people, yet we are consuming the resources of 1.5 Earths, according to United Nations demographics. Some economists are predicting a global economic crash in 2012 that would drop the population back to a sustainable 5 billion people—but only after a series of terrifying events and the deaths of many. This could be far worse, but there are elements of truth. Gas prices have tripled over the last decade, food prices have spiked, extreme weather events have displaced populations, and water is expected to be the next serious threat as aquifers are depleted—all impacts of increased demand and dwindling supply.

According to World Overpopulation Awareness statistics, humanity’s demand for resources first exceeded supply in 1981, so it’s not like this information should be surprising to anyone. In fact, six years ago the National Geographic suggested that by 2008, seafood may be entirely gone. Author Paul Gilding has stated that he believes climate change is perhaps the largest piece of the puzzle of what is yet to come. “It’s time to stop worrying about climate change,” Gilding said in an interview with Market Watch. “Instead, we need to brace for impact.”

There are hints that Americans are starting to get the idea. The U.S. saw the lowest population growth rate for 2010-11 since the Great Depression, according to the Census Bureau. But according to the report, it is not a good thing that population growth has begun to curve downward.

“While some might welcome slowed population growth, it is nonetheless a worrisome trend for a few reasons,” read the report. “First, the ability of the United States to maintain high and rising standards of living will depend in part on keeping a large share of its population in the workforce. That in turn requires growth to replenish our younger, working-age ranks. Second, those younger workers are crucial for the nation’s ability to provide needed support for a growing older population. Third, population growth itself is a reflection of our society’s optimism about current and future opportunities.”

The lack of optimism about future opportunities has affected procreation as well. According to a vital statistics report published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, live birth rates recorded from 2008-09 showed numbers were down. “The decline in births between 2008 and 2009 (117,029) is the largest absolute decrease since 1971-72,” said the report. “The birth rate for women aged 20-24 reached a record low falling 7 per cent in 2009. This decline marked the largest decrease in this group since 1973.” A preliminary report released in November 2011 said live births have decreased by another 5 per cent between 2009 and 2010.

However, assistant professor of anthropology at Portland State University Jeremy Spoon said that a decline in population growth does not solve the problem with dwindling natural resources. “It’s like apples and oranges,” he countered. “Our resources are not necessarily tied to the population, and as long as we have not dealt with our consumption rate, nothing will change. Our everyday use of natural resources still matters.”

So what can be done to help curve what might already be too late to change? According to a study from the Germany World Population Fund, one third of the population growth in the world is the result of unwanted or accidental pregnancies. Restrictions on access to contraceptives in most of the world is perhaps the largest obstacle that must be hurdled, but never will be unless religion stops thinking backwards and starts thinking forwards immediately. Regardless of the pro-life or pro-choice status of many U.S. voters, an additional 81.63 in taxes per voter per year would provide contraception to 11.7 million more couples who seek it.

And clearly this isn’t just a U.S. problem. Many underdeveloped nations are growing at uncontrolled rates as well. China has taken steps towards restricting child birth rates, but India—the world’s largest country in regards to population—has done very little. By 2050, Ethiopia’s population will triple at its current growth rate from 91 million to 278 million, according to the Census. These numbers are simply unsustainable. The push for sustainability must begin right now, and the United States must lead the way, or seafood may not be the only thing gone by 2046.

Technology in our generation

MODERN DAY TECHNOLOGY MAKES THE WORLD SPIN, BUT IS THE SPEED OF INNOVATION REALLY A GOOD THING?

Ramon Capies

“The jetson’s” and “Back to the Future” are only a few examples of the long-coming technological revolution. The world is in a technological stage early enough that the memories dating before advanced technology are still floating about. Many people today cannot imagine living without a cell phone and a computer of some sort, and many more need to have a minimum of three electronics per person per household—usually a cell phone, laptop, tablet, MP3 player, and/or camera.

When talking to students on campus, 99% of the polled said they had a cell phone, 87% said they had a smartphone, and the common response was, “I couldn’t live without it.” Every day the world works a little bit faster than it did the day before, and technology is the driving force behind it—from the popular smart texting apps that guess the words being typed to the newest operating systems. The speed of communication is increasing so quickly it leaves us wondering if we will always be able to keep up. Smartphones and tablets have opened up a new avenue of business and socialization; they have turned street corners into offices, parking lots into hangouts with friends, and airport layovers into movie theaters—the possibilities are endless. On the less attractive side, the barrier between work and play is disseminating before society’s eyes. Answering a work email or reviewing projects while on vacation, and catching up with a friend while in class are but examples of the new schedules that Western society lives by.

The constant connectivity has also resulted in a spike in sleeping disorders, especially for young adults in the United States. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “[a]n estimated 50 to 70 million US adults have sleep or wakefulness disorder.” Technology is getting faster, smaller, and more efficient, while applications are being designed to make multi-tasking easier. The iPhone, for instance, has an entire section of applications for “productivity,” which includes organizers that allow you to synchronize up to four different calendars, make any kind of list imaginable, and be reminded of everything a person might need or want to be reminded of.

Another example is the LG Double Play, a phone that has two touch screens that make it possible to work on two different projects at once. Smartphones are also becoming more human; the ever-popular “Siri” turns the iPhone into a smarter robot, and allows you to talk back to you. iPhone users across the globe are trying to have conversations with their software.

Technology has improved many lives and many fields. It has made medical advances, it has created and eliminated jobs, it has connected cultures, and given a voice to everyone. There may come a time, however, when technology surpasses the speed at which people can use it. Society has become so reliant on technology that without it people admit to being “unable to function.” Whether the future holds living in space with small spaceships and an overwhelming amount of silver home decor—or time machines with aluminum clothes—has yet to be seen.
Greed is not good, apparently:
Upper class individuals are more overconfident and likely to engage in unethical and reckless behavior, a recent study by the University of California, Berkeley said. Attaining a higher social class, either by birth or through achievement, had a “causal relationship to unethical decision-making and behavior,” according to the study. Individuals from an elevated social rank were more likely to display self-centered behavior than those from middle or lower class backgrounds, and were less effective at identifying the emotions of others. Paul Piff, one of the conductors of the study, suggested that the findings agreed with the ideas of many philosophers, such as Jesus, Aristotle, and Plato, that greed is at the root of unethical behavior, as those from wealthier backgrounds were found to be more likely to lie and cheat during negotiations. This behavior, the researchers said, was likely partially to blame for the financial industry collapse in 2008. The study was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

PETA worse than Michael Vick:
According to a 2010 report by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 4,569 pets were received by PETA that year, and 3,630 were euthanized. In 2011, out of 2,790 pets PETA received that year, 1,965 were euthanized. According to an ad that aired during the Oscars in late February, only one percent of the United States Humane Society’s publicly raised funding goes to local pet shelters. The ad was aired by a Humanewatch.org, a website run by public relations executive and lobbyist Richard Berman. Another website owned by Berman’s Center for Consumer Freedom stated that over 95 percent of the animals PETA holds in its Virginia headquarters are killed by the group. The numbers for the two previous years aren’t quite as high as Berman suggests—almost 85 percent are euthanized—but mostly hold up according to Virginia’s state department numbers. PETA officials have stated beliefs that Berman and his affiliated websites receive funding from “animal abuse industries” in an attempt to defer blame and perpetuate misinformation. In 2009, a segment on the show “60 Minutes” also questioned Berman, calling him “the booze and food industries’ weapon of mass destruction,” and stating that many of the studies he is involved in are contradictory. “You’ve got a hired gun,” CBS correspondent Morley Safer told Berman. Berman responded by saying his role is policing as “do-gooders run amok.” PETA spokeswoman Jane Dollinger said that her group only euthanizes “unwanted and suffering” animals. Words as innocent as “watch,” “pork,” and “sick” are being monitored on social media sites and news organizations by the Department of Homeland Security in order to detect terrorism, natural disasters, and potential serious health threats. The Electronic Privacy Information Center has released a list that includes hundreds of key words used by DHS that may trigger government watch. The EPIC filed a Freedom of Information Act request and sued to obtain the document, promptly releasing words from the 39-page “Analyst’s Desktop Binder.” EPIC stated that these words were “broad, vague, and ambiguous” and included “vast amounts of potential serious health threats. The Electronic Privacy Information Center has released a list that includes hundreds of key words used by DHS that may trigger government watch. The EPIC filed a Freedom of Information Act request and sued to obtain the document, promptly releasing words from the 39-page “Analyst’s Desktop Binder.” EPIC stated that these words were “broad, vague, and ambiguous” and included “vast amounts of threat intelligence.”

The sky is falling:
Global cloud heights have dropped over the last studied decade, 2000 to 2010, according to climate scientists in New Zealand. “This is the first time we have been able to accurately measure changes in global cloud height and, while the record is too short to be definitive, it provides just a hint that something quite important might be going on,” said lead researcher Professor Roger Davies. Cloud levels in the upper atmosphere lowered by 30 to 40 meters across the decade, and this is suspected to be a natural method for the Earth to cool itself and combat temperature increases around the globe. Such a reduction in cloud heights could serve to help the planet radiate heat into space, thus lowering global temperatures. Because of the difficulty in modeling clouds, prior considerations for implications on climate had not been recognized, and continuing research will be necessary to determine future trends and their potential impacts on warming. “If cloud heights come back up in the next ten years we would conclude that they are not slowing climate change,” Davies said. “But if they keep coming down it will be very significant.” The research was published in Geophysical Research Letters.

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