

Forced membership possible necessity

It may work, but then again it may not. As always, this idea has at least two sides to it.

Several Ohio businessmen heading up companies that have been illegally dumping pollutants have received a twisted punishment, or a twist on their punishment, shall we say.

The men have been offered an option in order to receive early release from their jail term. The option? Serving time as a Sierra Club member.

The most recent subject of the controversy surrounding the new plan is Donald Bohnert, a Cincinnati supplier of dry cleaning products. Bohnert was convicted last year of 219 counts of illegally transporting, storing and dumping hazardous waste.

Although Bohnert believes the club membership requirement is fair, the Washington Legal Foundation, a public interest law center, doesn't like the idea. The group claims the forced membership violates Bohnert's constitutional right to freedom of association.

The foundation added that the condition requires Bohnert to advocate "a highly activist and politically oriented special interest group."

It's true. The Sierra Club is extremely influential, and one can see where supporting such a group would be scary, even for big boys like Bohnert. After all, the group stands for everything big business is against.

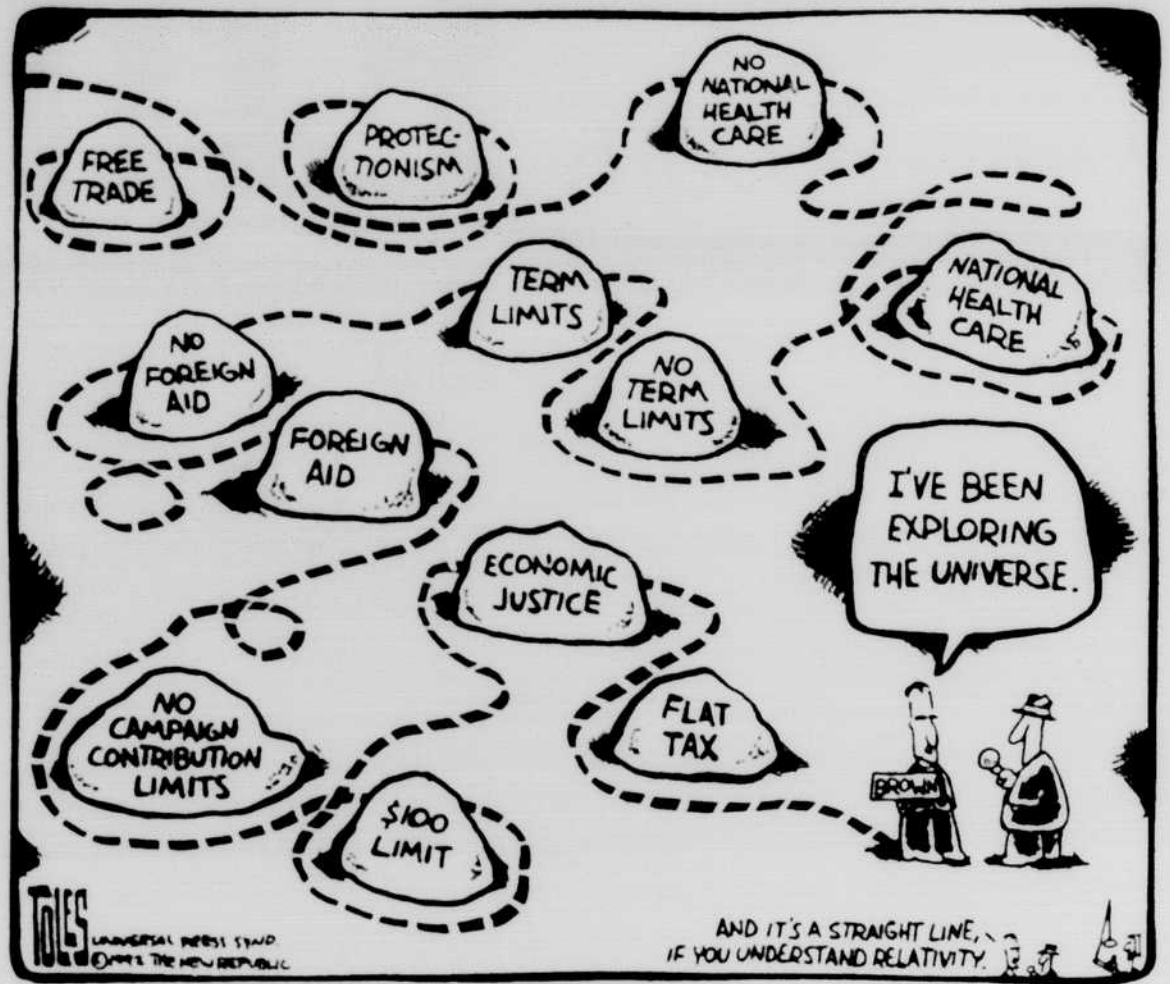
It's understandable, whether one agrees with this particular situation, how forced participation in a group contrary to one's beliefs can be legally and morally offensive.

On the other hand, it's just as understandable how this specific membership requirement could benefit the offender as well as the rest of society.

It's undeniable our environment is in worsening shape, and that something must be done to turn the tide while it's still possible. The club membership actually makes the offender's sentences more productive by educating them on a subject they're obviously ignorant in.

As always, the questions come down to where to draw the line and who decides. In this case, it's forced membership in a group one would otherwise not support vs. necessary educating.

You decide.



OPINION

Sides many in abortion argument



THE FINE PRINT

BY CATHIE DANIELS

Just when we thought there was nothing anyone could do to actually affect U.S. governmental decisions, a group about as big as a small city marches on Washington to demand an ear to their concerns.

And it just might work.

Nearly a half-million women's rights demonstrators walked down Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House to a rally on the Washington Mall by Capitol Hill to show their support of abortion rights last Sunday.

Why all the concern? The Supreme Court is set to hear arguments April 22 on a Pennsylvania case that could overturn or limit the 1973 pro-choice Roe vs. Wade decision. The upcoming case is a pivotal point regarding national abortion rights, possibly resulting in a ruling permitting states to increase restrictions on abortions.

The abortion issue is infinitely complex, with as many sides to the argument as there are women and men.

On one hand, it's totally correct to say America's politics have no place in the personal lives of those deciding whether to bear a child. The role of the

government is to protect the means by which one makes an individual decision, including abortion.

Should the person(s) involved decide to abort, that option should be as available as the option to keep the child. Without the abortion option open, the decision to keep the child is forced upon those concerned, which ultimately goes against the supposed morals of America. Remember, freedom of choice.

This argument basically states that all options should be available to those making the choice, so that the ultimate decision is one made by the individual — not the government.

The opposing side, however, asks, "What about the child being aborted, what about its rights?" This ultimately leads to attempts to stop the aborting adults from performing a misguided action through legal stipulations.

Think about what laws are for: They are put in place to protect the public at large from harmful actions performed by individuals not in agreement with the common "good."

Those individuals committing the misdeeds either know they are doing "wrong," or they believe their actions hold no malice; one of the two. Regardless, through legal action, these people are forced to comply with what the majority deter-

mines to be the common good, in a way saving them (and us) from themselves.

This works when one considers the laws against rape, murder, stealing and the like. Whether the perpetrator knows she or he is doing wrong, the laws attempt to force the offender to act in accordance with the common good, or pay his/her dues.

Now, if those aborting individuals are in fact performing misdeeds that are in interference with the common good, they must be stopped through legal action. Laws must be put in place to stop these people from committing their crimes.

And that's where one of the big questions comes in: Is abortion a crime against the greater public good or not? Must that good be protected by laws against abortion, or for choice?

Another issue to consider is the fact that those most against abortion rights (primarily conservative Republicans) are the same folks against the social programs necessary to support the babies once they are born.

Since a good number of abortions are performed in cases where the adults are not ready for a(nother) child, whether it be financially, emotionally or mentally, there's the possibility that the borne children will be supported by some sort of social program. We all know how

Turn to OPINION, Page 3

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