

Ashe becomes yet another AIDS patient

Is the stigma gone yet? Has some mythical quota of "straight" people been reached, whereupon narrow-minded bigots truly understand what AIDS is?

On Wednesday, tennis star Arthur Ashe announced he has known of having the HIV virus since 1988. Ashe apparently contracted the virus from a blood transfusion during an open-heart operation in 1983 — before there was an accurate screening test for blood donors.

Ashe is neither homosexual nor an intravenous drug user. He does not fall in any of the so-called "high risk" categories for contracting AIDS. He is another victim of ignorance; not his ignorance, but society's.

The myth of AIDS being a disease attacking a stigmatized few has been irrevocably shattered. To be sure, there are some who run a higher risk of contracting AIDS, just as someone who stands in room full of pneumonia patients stands a greater chance of becoming sick. But one can contract pneumonia — or AIDS — without putting themselves in that high risk category.

It is about time we all understand that AIDS is not selective. It strikes with the randomness and intensity of a train wreck.

Another tragedy about Ashe's case is the fact he didn't wish to disclose his illness. It wasn't until a *USA Today* reporter, responding to an anonymous tip, questioned Ashe that he decided to go public.

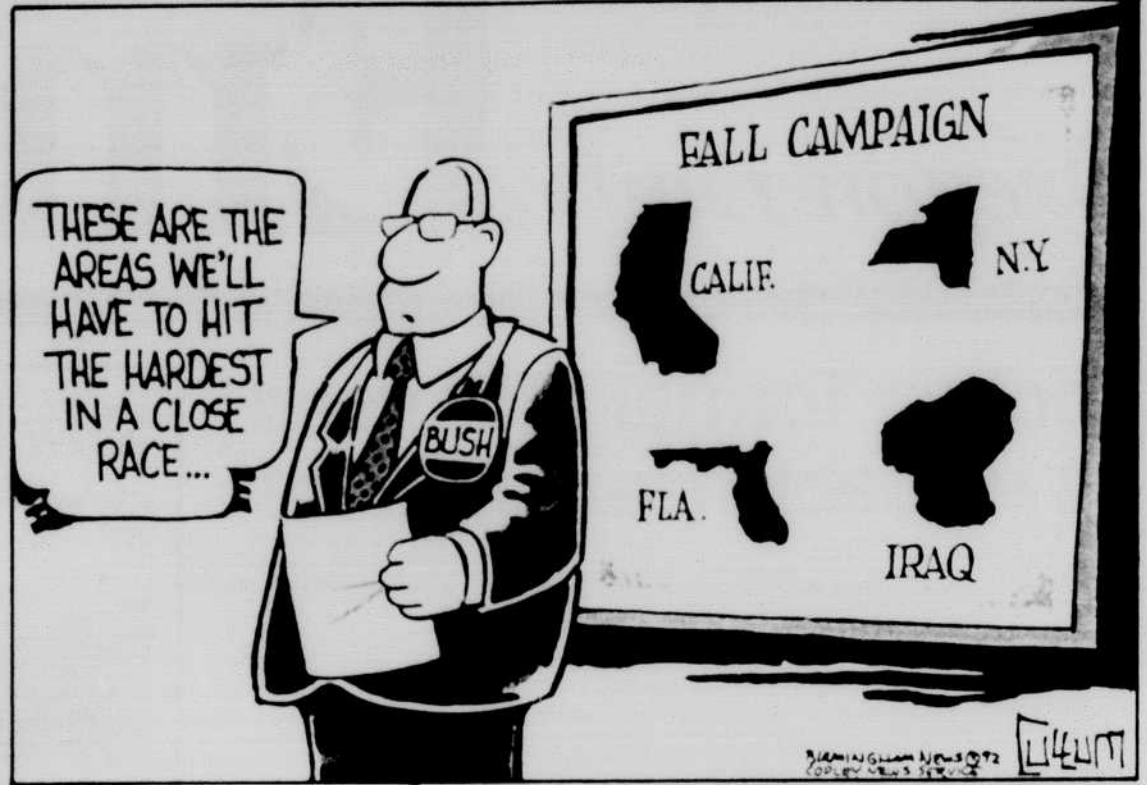
As in any similar circumstance, there is usually a wish to assign blame. Ashe's right to privacy was definitely violated, not so much by the newspaper but by the voice on the end of the telephone. Once the story became known, *USA Today* was under the gun — to quell it or not. Had they decided to kill the story, there would have been equal criticism.

There are those who would also criticize Ashe for not coming forward sooner. That is warped logic. In 1988, AIDS had an even greater stigma than it does today. Besides his right to talk or keep quiet about whatever he wants, by coming forward Ashe would have subjected himself and his family to public spectacle. He was right to think his many accomplishments would have suffered from ignorant speculation by small-minded people.

Ashe has said he will work to promote AIDS awareness, for which he deserves applause. He is making the best of a situation into which he was forced.

Maybe through his courage, things can be accomplished. A true understanding of the disease. And maybe, just maybe, a government that will stop playing ostrich and start doing something.

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COMMENTARY

Brand: Take a stand on the OCA

By Ron Schlittler

On April 1, the *Register-Guard* had a front page article highlighting a legal analysis of a proposed amendment to Oregon's state constitution being sponsored by the Oregon Citizens Alliance. The analysis, by University law Professor Dom Vetri, suggested a number of alarming consequences which would affect higher education should this proposed amendment be adopted by Oregon voters.

The article also discussed that University President Myles Brand said he has been too preoccupied with concerns about Measure 5 to put any energy into dealing with the OCA's plans for the future of the University (and every other public school in the state). Brand indicated it would be improper for him to comment in favor of or against the proposed constitutional amendment.

While the OCA is using the slogan that gay and lesbian students should not be entitled to "special rights," the gist of the initiative would be to require the state to adopt a right-wing, Christian fundamentalist view in all levels of government toward gays and lesbians. A part of the text reads, "All levels of government, including public education systems, must assist in setting a standard for Oregon's youth which recognizes that these 'behaviors' are 'abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse.'"

The preventing of "special rights" is hardly the issue here. Whether Oregonians will mandate into law a view based not on critical thinking, but on emotionally charged, narrow religious biases is more to the point. Whether the Oregon public education systems will be forced to promote, encourage and facilitate prejudice and discrimination and be required to misrepresent truth is at issue.

If this initiative passes, all educators in the state will have to ignore the past 50 years of international research and understanding that has emerged regarding human sexuality and the significant role of gays and lesbians in political science,

history, law, literature and all other fields.

It would most certainly be illegal, for example, for an instructor of history or science to say that Alan Turing, the brilliant British scientist and mathematician who broke the Nazi submarine code, also happened to be homosexual, or that he committed suicide a few years later when his sexual orientation was discovered and became a public scandal. Such a historical footnote might, after all, be construed as suggesting that a person could be "unnatural" and "perverse" and still become a hero.

This is hardly the image of homosexuals the OCA would want anyone to think too much about. They might, however, let it be said that Turing killed himself because he could not live anymore with his "wrong" and "abnormal" tendencies. The OCA would much rather have everyone believe that such people have nothing worthy to contribute to society anyway, except for its undoing, so it is probably the better that he ended his life to provide us all with an object lesson in the hazards of "inappropriate behaviors."

With all due respect and gratitude for Brand's efforts regarding Measure 5, issues of academic freedom and truth in education are more than proper for him to comment on. The firing of any professor known (or suspected) to be gay or lesbian, whether or not they ever mention homosexuality in the classroom, is also a goal of the OCA. This, too, is more than appropriate for Brand to comment on.

It doesn't take much to realize that if Brand — as well as top spokespersons of all the state's educational institutions — do not comment loudly and clearly on this measure, they have grievously wronged the spirit and potentially the future of academic freedom in Ore-

gon. It is in jeopardy as are the careers of exemplary educators throughout the state.

What will the OCA demand next? Should divorced people not be permitted to teach our young people, thereby avoiding infecting them with dangerous, anti-family values?

The only possible rationale for Brand to take less than an unequivocal stand on this potential fascist direction of state law is, well, less than honorable. It is also unfair to his colleagues and to the students. While he is concerning himself with the financial future of the University and presumably the state, perhaps he should stop to consider how state finances will be affected by the expensive lawsuits which will be generated if this appeal to intolerance becomes law.

Community leaders and organizations statewide are speaking out in opposition to attempts of the OCA to hijack the political process. Brand would be in excellent company if he were to use his office for organizing a statewide response by the entire educational community to educate about the OCA and its tactics.

It is unsettling to speculate about how the outcome of World War II may have been affected if Turing, a Fellow at Kings College, Cambridge by age 22, had lost his opportunity to be a part of the university system because of something as ignoble as the OCA's ballot initiative. It is horrifying to think about the reluctance of many influential people in pre-World War II Germany who felt it was improper to comment in favor or against what was happening there when they had the chance to take a leadership role and do something about it.

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