

Honk your horns for speech rights

If it sounds like people are blowing their horns more than usual, you're not imagining things. After a long ban on honking car horns as a manner of expression, Eugene drivers are free again to speak out with a toot.

We should all thank Eugene for bringing the vital issue of horn honking to our attention.

The Oregon Court of Appeals ruled correctly a few days ago that Eugene's ordinance against horn honking was unconstitutional. The ordinance was challenged by two drivers who were ticketed for honking their horns during the 1991 Persian Gulf War demonstrations.

The court said the ban was too broad because it regulated more than just potential public safety problems caused by horn honking. If Eugene wants to ban horn honking, the court indicated, it needs to address exactly what those safety problems are.

It's ridiculous that horn honking was made into an issue in the first place. Horn honking should be a protected form of freedom of speech by any standard. If public safety is truthfully the concern, as supporters of the ordinance claim, the city could do much more by getting bad drivers off the road. Eugene wasted our time.

The Constitution shouldn't be overlooked because of unsubstantiated fears about horn honking. It won't cause accidents. People aren't about to swerve out of control just because someone beeps. If that were the case, horns wouldn't be built into cars in the first place.

Honking your horn is the equivalent of shouting praise through your window or clapping your hands at a good speech. It may be a little more annoying, but it poses no more safety hazards than revving a car motor.

If Eugene insists on drawing up a new proposal banning chronic horn users, there needs to be a better rationale than public safety. The city has more pressing needs than making sure the horn honkers are under control — like maybe straightening out the budget mess or revitalizing downtown. Sadly, horn honking ranks last on most lists of city concerns.

And there are certainly far more dangerous methods of expression than horn honking.

Imagine the uproar if citizens started burning horns as a matter of protest. Horn honking only leads to noise pollution, but horn burning would not only be a fire hazard, it would also result in melted, tarnished brass littering our community — and we can't support that by any means.

Horn honking? We had to make a big deal over horn honking? The Court of Appeals shouldn't be criticized. The ordinance was unconstitutional and deserved to be booted out. But why did it have to be brought up in the first place?



OPINION

Track down criminals, not kegs



Write Angles

Hope Neelson

I was a case of having a question you always wanted to ask but were afraid to ask it. Recently, while being handcuffed and hauled into the Eugene police department by an officer, a question popped into my mind.

However, because the officer was shaking and spitting himself into a frenzy, I decided maybe that particular moment wasn't the best time to ask.

That question was for the entire Eugene police department, and it goes something like this:

Is there not enough crime in Eugene to keep you busy, or do you get off on grabbing college students from their bikes or tracking them down at kegers because of the neat, warm feeling of power you get when you bust them?

I would like to know, since when did it become an officer's agenda of the night to find and jail those student criminals who (God forbid!) wrote the WRONG ADDRESS on their keg receipts? Or chase down and ticket those renegades who ride down Alder Street WITHOUT A BIKE LIGHT!

The Eugene police department must have a lot of spare time on its hands to dedicate so much energy and devotion to finding these hardened keg criminals and bike convicts.

The officer explained to me at the police station that he and the University Office of Public Safety review keg lists on Friday afternoons (at least from Emerald Distributors). They check all the names and find out which ones are students. Then they check the addresses.

No, they don't wait for a noise complaint or drive by a house with students spilling into the yard with beer cups in their hands before ticketing

you. They take the initiative and seek out the trouble before it begins.

And I found out that some times they don't even knock.

At least this officer didn't.

He walked into my apartment at 8:15 p.m. and demanded to see my identification. He then ordered all 15 people who were hanging out to leave. No, there wasn't any noise complaint. No, students weren't running around naked on my balcony with beer cups in their hands. We were having a good time and waiting for the party to begin. If the officer had carded more than the two friends of mine who asked what was up, he would have discovered that everyone at the party was over 21.

But hey! Even if he couldn't bust me for serving minors or disturbing the peace, at least he got me on one count of false swearing.

It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it.

Well, at least our tax dollars are getting put to good use. Those parties can get pretty out of control ... beer ... music ... people having a good time.

Thank God the police are there to put that to an end! We don't want too much fun happening in Eugene, especially when there is real crime going on around town like stabbings and beatings.

No wonder there's such a feeling of overwhelming love for the police nationwide. And no wonder so many students I've talked to share my fond affection for the EPD.

It's sad, really. I used to think of the police as allies who were out there to protect me and help me out. But one wrong address, and I'm a criminal along with the sex offenders and thieves.

The bottom line is that our public servants are supposed to be working for students and keeping the peace, not abusing their positions of power by looking for students to harass.

With so much recent student animosity toward the police, I wonder what will happen

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when the police really have a crisis situation to control or maintain? The police believe they are stopping problems before they begin by showing a strong presence. In reality, they are building a powder keg of animosity that may blow up in their faces the next time there is a student-police confrontation.

I wonder how the student attitude will be toward them and how willing students will be to do what they say.

I'll gladly hand over the \$200, which would have gone to Eugene businesses and the Eugene economy.

I will gladly do the 40 hours of community service. After all, I did commit a crime.

However, it's ridiculous to waste my time and taxpayers' money booking me and student keg offenders like me into jail. It shouldn't be such a big deal. The punishment does not fit the crime.

Getting fingerprinted, searched, called "the prettiest bookee we've had in a while," and taking off all of my clothes (yes, even my underwear) so I could change into the latest jail garb was probably the most humiliating experience of my life.

I didn't deserve that, and other students shouldn't have to experience it.

It is outrageous that writing the wrong address on a keg receipt qualifies individuals to that level of civil disobedience, and it should be changed.

Give me a fine. Give me community service. But leave my body out of it.

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