

Jell-O president waffles on gay ban

If recent events are any indication, President Bill Clinton doesn't have any beliefs that he won't compromise. Clinton's "honorable compromise" over the contentious issue of whether gays and lesbians should be allowed to serve in the military is a striking example of a man without a center.

Confronted by strong resistance from the military and Congress, Clinton abandoned his promise to lift the ban on gays in the military. Instead, he has agreed to support the so-called "don't ask, don't tell policy." The military would no longer ask recruits if they are homosexual, but they could not be openly gay.

Clinton's "honorable compromise" sounds ominously like Prime Minister Chamberlain's "peace with honor" sell-out of Czechoslovakia to Hitler in Munich in 1938.

Trying to find a moral gray from a black-and-white issue, Clinton's policy takes on Orwellian overtones. Essentially, it states in all seriousness that gays still shouldn't be in the military and it's about time we had more of them in the ranks.

Homosexuality should not be a bar to military service and the ban should be lifted, period. As former Sen. Barry Goldwater said, soldiers don't have to be straight to shoot straight. Individual rights must not be sacrificed because of bigotry.

Clinton's defenders say that the president cannot instantly wave a magic wand and shape the country in his image. (Which is probably for the best, as the country would physically and symbolically take the form of Jell-O).

Obviously, Clinton — like all presidents — has finite power and influence, which is why he has to pick and choose the issues he will fight for. Up until he was confronted with political opposition, Clinton seemed like he had the will to fight to lift the ban.

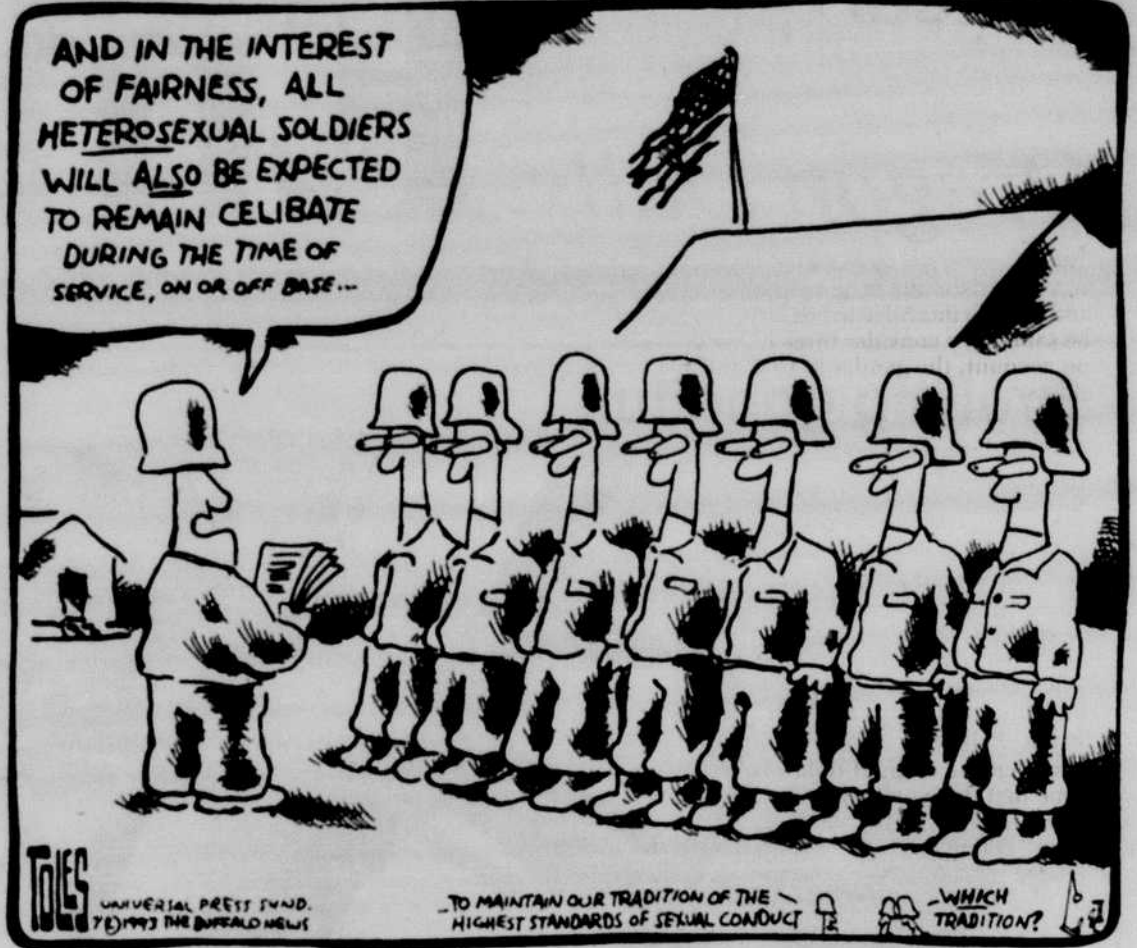
During the campaign, Clinton said he would lift the ban. Between his election and his inauguration, he said he was serious. As soon as he was in office, he announced his intention to speedily do away with the ban.

Compromise isn't always a bad idea. Often it's necessary to abandon a low-priority issue in order to win a more important cause. However, Clinton has compromised on what he claimed was a top priority of his administration. Either he wasn't telling the truth, or there is no issue that he believes in strongly enough to resist compromise.

Reagan campaigned for lower taxes and increased defense budgets. Right or wrong, he held to these principles when he was elected and was successful. Bush, in contrast, didn't stand for anything except his "no new taxes" pledge, which he promptly broke. Except for Desert Storm, he fought for no positions, and hence won no battles.

When Clinton pulled the plug on Lani Guinier's nomination to head the civil rights division of the Justice Department, he said that his decision was motivated by his desire to find "his center." Compromises on such black-and-white issues as gays and the military give people the sinking feeling that Clinton has no center to find.

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OPINION

Miscreants must pay for offenses



Write Angles
Lia Saliccia

It's not a good idea to sneak into the Oregon Country Fair during the non-public hours. It's a worse idea to tell others about how you snuck into the fair during the non-public hours. And an idea so rotten that it ranks up there with duck hunting at the millrace is to publish a story about sneaking into the fair during the non-public hours.

Trust me, I've done all three. The fair knows who I am, and they want me to pay. I'm told that I'm guilty of theft and fraud. I've been called a "parasite" and a "trespasser" with a "future in the supermarket tabloids ... mapped out" for myself. I've received chidings ranging from the general "shame on you" to 10 minute-long diatribes on my answering machine, the purpose being to inform me of the implications of what I have done.

Let me share those implications with you so that they are clear to us all.

Miscreants such as myself who sneak past security into the nighttime fair festivities make the lives of fair staffers harder in a number of ways. A fair official said that every one of the extra 1,000 people who snuck in this year generated 2.2 pounds of trash a day, not to mention the added excrement they plopped into the lavatories. There are people who have to clean those trash cans and toilets, and 1,000 extra party crashers don't make their jobs any easier. Perhaps I will heed her suggestion to join the clean-the-toilet squad to earn my camping pass next year.

Furthermore, the fair is on private property. When the public leaves at 7 p.m., the fair is just beginning for those who have

toiled by day selling food and wares, emptying trash and toilets, and working information and security. The Midnight Show — as the official was quick to add in a message on my answering machine — "is put on for people who work all day and ... every butt that's out there on somebody who doesn't belong is displacing someone else who can't hear because they're too far back because they were working when you got your seat."

Then there are the implications of writing about my deviance — in effect, broadcasting the message. "Hey, guys, I snuck into the Country Fair! It's easy! It's fun! Try it!"

While I don't agree that I "forget responsible journalism altogether" as one reader wrote in a letter to the editor (ODE, July 22) or that I have disgraced my university, my newspaper and my entire profession, as the official said, I do believe that the choices to sneak into the fair and to write about it were the wrong.

I would hope that all of the media would not be banned from the fair in the future based on the irresponsible actions of one student journalist.

Not only have I seemingly jeopardized the whole future relationship between the media and the fair, the official said, but also I have "introduced one of the lead crime demographics to come and perpetrate the same theft and fraud that you did ... and the number one demographic for rape." Meaning, I suppose, that Emerald readers are the group most likely to commit crimes, especially rape, out of all of the people who have ever hankered to slink past security at the fair.

Interpretations aside, rape is a serious matter. If my story has encouraged anyone with that intent, then I have indeed disgraced my profession, not to mention myself.

Although that was not my intent, I sort of have the notion that sometimes a reporter has to sneak in order to get a story she

would not otherwise get. While I don't consider myself the Woodward and Bernstein of the Oregon Country Fair, I certainly didn't sneak and write with the intent to encourage the "lead crime demographic" to come out in droves to ruin next year's fair with their trespassing.

Every action has its consequences, and mine are to take responsibility for whom I may have given the idea to and to "get into the paper with the same cavalier attitude that you had before and fill up some print space with the implications of this and telling people that they are trespassing and we will throw them out and that we don't take kindly to this and they are creating serious problems for a community event ... and if I don't get it, I will pursue the administration," the official said.

Had I written a community-oriented story instead of going off on my own tangent, I probably would have sooner recognized my errors in judgment regarding the event itself and the people who run it. In my ignorance, I assumed that the fair represented the countercultural movement, which is typified by philosophies born in the 1960s, such as "question authority."

As far as I know, people have snuck into the Midnight Show since they started having it, and I assumed that the few who make it past security are all a part of the experience.

Yet these are the 1990s, and it's reckoning time for the free-wheeling 1960s notions that a person can go around doing anything they want while others are working hard, and that even supposed bastions of counterculture such as the Oregon Country Fair don't have rules.

They do have rules, and those who disregard them shall have their day of reckoning.

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