

Proposed Colorado law steals tax-exempt rule

■ **OUR OPINION:** Exempt status is important to humanitarian and religious organizations

Oregon, ever the referendum state, will probably be watching Colorado as it goes through the process of putting a controversial initiative on their November ballot. If passed, the law would hurt infinitely more people than it would help.

The proposed initiative would eliminate practically all property tax exemptions for churches and non-profit organizations.

Non-profit schools and universities, groups that provide housing for prisoners, the elderly, the homeless, the disabled and orphans would all still be exempt from property taxes.

The initiative specifically targets the tax-exempt status of churches, synagogues and mosques, a variety of non-profit organizations, religious retreats, many hospitals and health-care facilities, fraternal organizations and even soup kitchens.

If the initiative becomes law in Colorado (or Oregon), churches supported by smaller communities might be forced to close their doors and soup kitchens could be financially pinched out of existence.

The new law might deny that last ray of hope for thousands of needy people who would no longer have access to that one hot meal every week. Places of worship, long considered by people of faith to be havens from a hostile world, would no longer have any guarantees as to how long they would be around.

Colorado officials calcu-

late the amendment would add approximately \$3 billion worth of land and buildings to the state's taxable base, resulting in nearly \$70 million in new property tax revenues.

Those figures sound substantial, but one initiative opponent crunched the numbers and found that Colorado Springs homeowners would only save a whopping \$44 per year on a \$110,000 house.

Clearly, the benefit does not outweigh the possible harm such a law would inflict on different organizations.

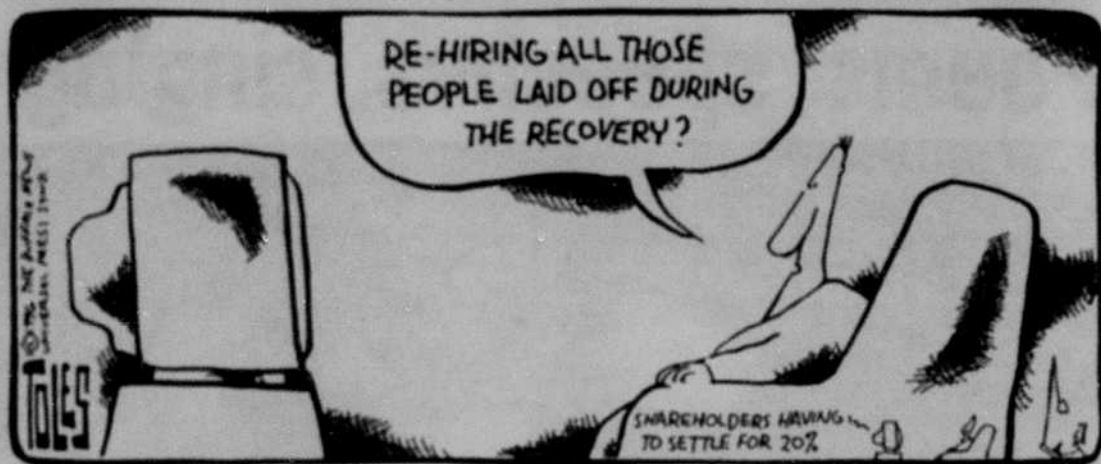
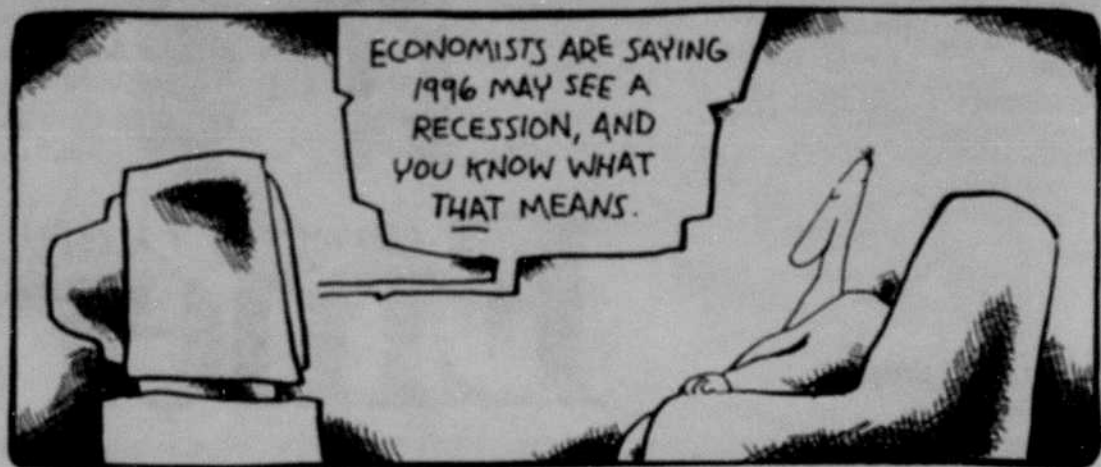
No matter what a person believes in (or doesn't believe in), gathering together to express faith is an intrinsic American right — one that provides many with a sense of community and fellowship.

Removing the tax-exempt status for churches and other nonprofit organizations would be an infringement on that right. The law would cross the invisible line that separates religion and government. Without this line, government intrusion would be the norm instead of the exception.

Colorado's initiative, though sinister, does raise some interesting arguments.

Existing laws need to be tweaked to discourage unscrupulous religious leaders from raking in money hand over fist and buying lavish homes and cars. In many instances these false profits are allowed to wallow in the lap of luxury largely because they are tax-exempt. Remember the Bhagwan Shree-Rajneesh?

Despite these cases of abuse, Colorado's proposed amendment would not be a good law for anyone.



Please don't shoot me; I'm just horny

Violence is as American as cherry pie.
—Hubert Gerold Brown

Sex and violence. Two of America's favorite pastimes — both in act and in argument about them. Or more specifically, arguing about which one is worse for little Jane and Johnny and for society as a whole. And far too often doing both at the same time.

So why do we spend so much time debating sex and violence? Who knows? In my humble opinion, only one of them is worth considering. Which one? Hmmm ... Let's see.

One is illegal in most instances, can cause enormous amounts of emotional and physical stress, and can lead to one or more participants ending up either being dead or in a giant world of hurt — and that's just having sex in Mississippi. (Sorry, I couldn't resist it.)

Violence is painful and generally an all around unpleasant experience. Sex, on the other hand, is usually quite enjoyable and is perhaps the most wonderful experience two people can share. If you have the two confused or think that the two go great together, you're one sick individual.

If you are, just calmly put the newspaper down and then listen to the voices in your head that tell you to load up the ol' 12-gauge and go pay a visit to those antichrists in the Pentagon who are sending subliminal messages through *Melrose Place* in an attempt to control what brain you still have.

If you're not confused, I'm assuming that you are a well-enough adjusted individual to keep reading.

So why is it, then, that everyone gets their panties in a bunch every time someone shows a little skin but couldn't really care less if a dozen people get perforated by gunfire?

Why is it that presidential candidate (and Mr. Warm Fuzzy himself) Bob Dole blasts violent films he's never seen (*True Romance* and *Natural Born Killers*) and then praises the film *True Lies* starring Mr. Violence, Ah-nuld Schwarzenegger, for its "strong family values"?

In a side note, Arnie also starred in a little film about 10 years ago, in which he took out 17 officers of the peace, called *The Terminator*. Interestingly enough, when musical artist Ice-T wrote a song on the same subject entitled "Cop Killer," Sen. Dole wanted to nail Ice-T's ass to the wall.

Perhaps Ice-T should donate more to the Republican party and refer to Newt Gingrich

as "our leader," like Arnie does. Maybe then Ice-T can get the family values seal of approval on all his albums instead of a Parental Advisory sticker. However, I digress.

The big question: "Is sex worse for you than violence?"

The Moral Majority, religious right, and the ever-vigilant Bible-thumpers certainly think so. Sex is bad; sex is evil; sex is the devil's foul temptation. Violence? Hell, that's why we had the Crusades and the Inquisition. Work out that sexual frustration in purer ways. Kill a little; go crazy! God don't care if you knock off a couple of non-believers. But if you start to enjoy copulation, yer gonna burn boy! Oh, OK. Yeah, I'm going to believe this from a bunch of repressed Puritans.

Then there's the argument that sex incites or causes violence. You know something? They're right.

Every time I see a naked woman I just want to go postal and take out a couple dozen yahoos just like me. The world would be a safer place.

Sex doesn't cause violence. Repressed sexual frustration and people who are genuinely tweaked in the head to begin with cause violence.

If sex is so detrimental, then why is violence so appealing? People want to live out vicariously what they can't or won't allow themselves to do. Action flicks are big money. That's why idiots like Van Damme and Stallone are paid so much to be tough guys. Men want to be them and women want to be with them. The actors probably wish they were as cool as the characters they portray.

What's frightening, however, is how desensitized we are becoming to violence. A scene out of *Pulp Fiction* illustrates this quite well.

Toward the end of the film, the two main characters, hit men, accidentally shoot a kid in the face in a car. My initial reaction was shock, but the scene was played up for laughs (sounds sick in retrospect), and soon the theater was filled with nervous laughter from both me and others.

I didn't notice how bizarre this reaction was until the second time I saw the film. During that scene, I looked at a friend who was looking at the screen in horror. Here a kid lost his life, and people were laughing. It was sickening.

This isn't meant to be a moral tirade on American culture or on "good family values." Rather, it is to get you to think about where your values come from, what defines them, and whether or not you could change them if you wished to. Too much sex in our lives is not necessarily a bad thing, but too much violence may be.

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OPINION



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