

Death-with-dignity ruling frees individual liberties

OUR OPINION: All people should be able to choose how and when they die

Civil libertarians landed major victories last week. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned a Washington state law that banned doctor-assisted suicide, and the infamous Dr. Jack Kevorkian was found not-guilty of violating Michigan's law against the same thing.

Finally, some common sense in the judicial system.

Although America prides itself on individual freedom and the right to pursue happiness, it frequently erects unnecessary barriers to individual choice. The notion that suicide in any form is illegal is ridiculous. If the person attempting suicide is successful, whom does the law punish? If the person fails his or her shot at ending it all, being fined or imprisoned hardly seems a positive way to beat the blues.

The terminally ill, or anyone else for that matter, should be allowed to determine how and when to die. Suicide affects only the person committing it, and, as such, should not and cannot be controlled by a governing body.

Certainly, we, as a culture, believe in the sanctity of life. And yes, the family and friends who are left behind by the self-killing person suffer the pain of that loss. But in the end, the law should not prevent any person from determining the course of his or her physical existence.

Throughout the history of this country, we seem to have increasingly placed the government in a parental role. We want our political

leaders to also be our moral teachers, guidance counselors and babysitters. We dump our problems and our accountability on the steps of the Capitol and ask for solutions.

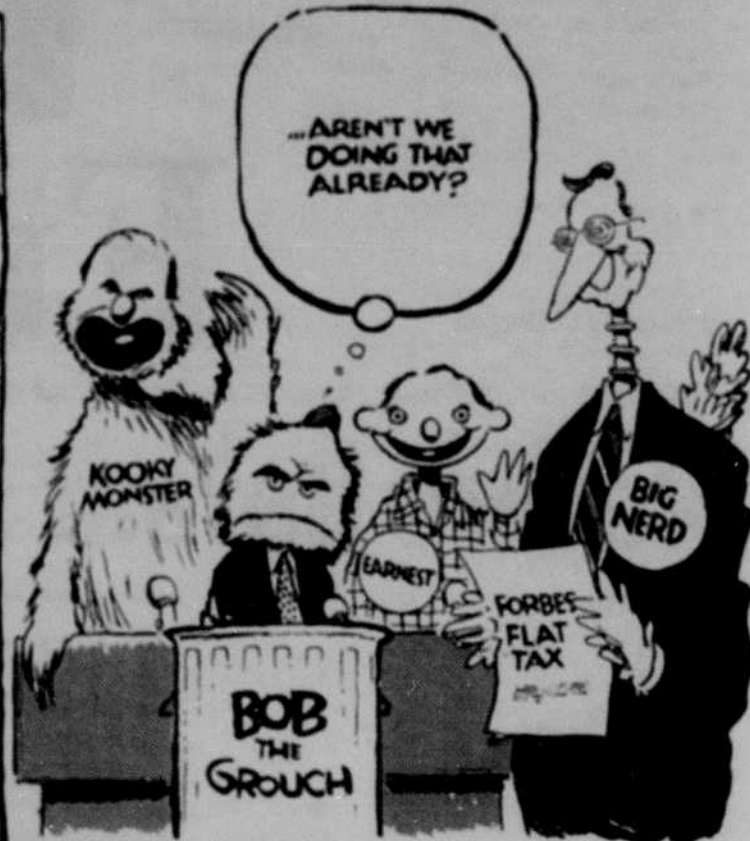
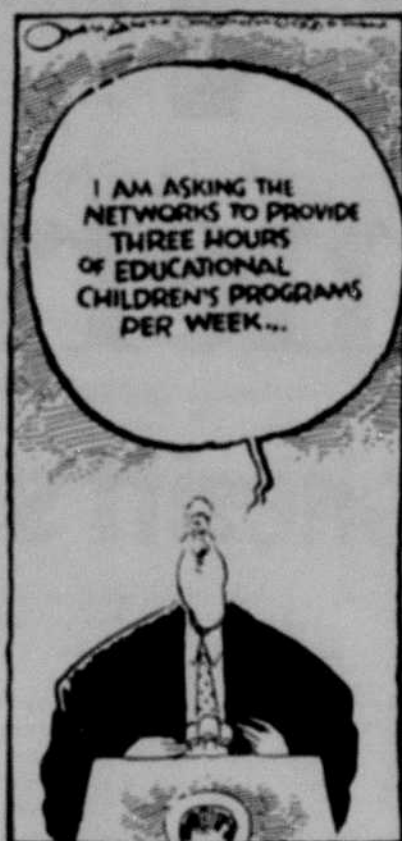
And then we complain about big government. Hmm.

But we are the leaders. We decide how we want to live our lives, and now we can decide how we want to end them. Determining the quality of life is an individual choice and cannot be established by any group. One person may rather suffer than face the unknown, while others may want to "go gentle into that good night."

Some opponents of doctor-assisted suicide argue that killing oneself is antithetical to religious teachings, and is, therefore, immoral. However, not everyone has the same religious beliefs.

Some doctors oppose assisted-suicide because it violates their oath to preserve life at any cost. Perhaps it's time to re-examine the Hippocratic oath. It's more logical that doctors should be morally bound to prevent or reduce suffering at any cost. Ending the life of a terminally ill patient who is in chronic pain and no longer wants to live is a morally correct act.

In either case, laws against suicide put the needs of the survivors and society's conscience ahead of the needs of the individual. Not only are these laws unenforceable, but they are also unconstitutional. The courts made the right decision last week. Even in death, we should be the captains of our own ships.



Confrontation will save environment

What does it mean to live with wild things, to know they are out there? "There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot." Aldo Leopold wrote that.

"At night the breeze that whispers over us has also, just before, whispered over the backs of big-eyed deer, touched elk in coats the color of copper pennies, ruffled the feathers of hawk and owl, and whuffed the fur of bobcat and cougar and the wild wolverine."

I wrote that.

"When I hear an elk bugle, there comes a primordial tingle along my spine, and my attention is riveted to that ancient compelling call. For that instant it is very clear to me what is truly important. Somehow, there is an announcement that there is wholeness and wildness left and — for that instant and in that place — all seems right with the world."

Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas wrote that.

Why support laws that protect the environment? Because we need to know that wildness is out there. We want to know that wild creatures thrive in wild places.

U.S. Department of Justice attorney Gerald Torres spoke Saturday at the University's annual Environmental Law Conference. He said this idea of wildness is what sets America apart from other countries. "Civilization," he said, "is an urban idea — but one that entails an idea of protecting wild spaces."

Pat Parenteau knows about protecting wild spaces; he represented the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at the God Squad hearings and now teaches at Vermont Law School. His conference workshop outlined a response to Congress' "Contract With America."

He said we must first of all *confront the lie*: Environmental law is *not* running roughshod over the little guy. We must confront the rhetoric and photo ops used by politicians whose goal is the gutting of environmental laws.

Parenteau said we must also *confront the costs*. Though the Northwest has not been transformed into the Appalachia predicted by the timber industry, many environmentalists prefer to shut their eyes to areas where habitat protection has caused economic hardship.

"Environmentalists who ignore the cost of protection," Parenteau said, "completely miss the opportunity to look at the costs of *not* protecting the environment."

We must also *confront the change*. Mary Wood, Professor of Law at the University, spoke of "Environmentalism For A New Millennium." She points out that corporate representatives function now as de facto congressional staff, influencing members of Congress and even drafting legislation (such as the Salvage Rider).

But in confronting the realities of environmental issues today, we must also *confront the divisions*. Poll results indicating that 70 percent of Americans support environmental protection is what stalled the "Contract with America"; what may stall the environmental movement, however, is the divisiveness, the blaming and bad-mouthing and looking for the enemy.



Kelly Andersson

It's the corporations; it's big business; it's corporate greed and plunder; it's politicians who gut environmental laws; it's agencies that allow loggers to rape and scab our forests; it's this or that enemy. It's my ancient old growth preserve and your job.

This land is your land; this land is my land; we're all stuck here till we die.

When we feel the urge to heap public scorn upon the corporations, we must remember that many of those who support environmental protection work for and own shares in corporations. When we verbally abuse the agencies that manage our public lands we must remember that people who support environmental protection work for those agencies.

Ten years ago Jack Ward Thomas spoke of those employees, and cautioned that the public needed to take an active role in conserving those wild places.

"They are good people," he said. "But they can accomplish only what the political and financial situation of the moment allows. They can't do the job with inadequate and declining resources and a silent public that stands back and quietly watches the struggle."

The public is no longer quietly watching, but some are too loud. Our nastiness toward perceived enemies does nothing to enhance the image of the environmental movement. Infighting among the environmental community (more than a little of which was evident during the conference) does nothing to attract marginal supporters.

We talk positive activism, yet we don't hesitate to publicly shred the people who could be — should be — part of the broad-based support for environmental protection. The next time you're tempted to say "corporate greed," remember what Parenteau said Saturday:

"If all corporations are bad, then we're doomed." And remember that without corporations we would have no public TV, no Sierra Club, no Nature Conservancy — and without them we'd have far fewer wild creatures out there in wild places.

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