

Tuesday, November, 19, 2002

Editorial

City Council's transgender vote lets confusion turn to prejudice

We'll admit it. The issue of transgender people using public restrooms is confusing. While that shouldn't be an excuse for continued discrimination, the issue is perplexing.

In some regards, one might ask, how did this come up? There must have been instances of discrimination. But if someone has the genitalia and/or reproductive organs of a male, but considers him/herself a woman and dresses and behaves like a woman, then is anyone really going to stop him/her from entering a women's restroom? How would anyone know the person wasn't a woman?

What about a person who has ambiguous genitalia and/or reproductive organs and masculine physical features, but still dresses and behaves like a woman? As we said in our original editorial on this topic, which is more disconcerting, having a masculine-looking but feminine-dressed person use a men's restroom or a women's restroom?

And what if the masculine-looking but feminine-dressing person really is a woman? Will people make that woman use the men's restroom because they suspect she may be a biological male? Will there need to be "gender and sex" police stationed outside all bathrooms?

Yes, the issue is confusing (and we haven't even broached the subject of using public showers, an even more frightening idea for many transgender people), but it isn't acceptable that Mayor Jim Torrey and the Eugene City Council used "confusing" to justify continued discrimination.

Eugene, apparently, is tolerant of difference just as long as it's not too different. From reading local press and hearing elected officials' comments, it seems that transgender issues are just too much for people to wrap their brains around.

It's really not that difficult. Some people are born with genitalia and reproductive organs that are clearly either male or female, and some of those people also identify with the masculine or feminine gender, respectively. But some people identify with a gender that doesn't match their sex.

In some cases, the genitalia does not match the reproductive organs. Yes, Virginia, some people are born with a penis and ovaries. Big deal. These people deserve the same respect and dignity — and right to use public facilities — as people whose gender matches their sex.

We do have an easy, obvious solution to the problem, not that anyone will adopt it: Make restrooms unisex, as is common in other countries. Then, the whole issue of who is entering which restroom would evaporate. (And male predators currently rape women in restrooms, so that specter brought up by councilors is fallacious.)

With unisex facilities, parents worried about their opposite-sex children could use the bathroom with them. And think of the money businesses would save — they could consolidate expensive toilets and sinks.

It's sad that City Council will have to revisit this issue when it's more comfortable with the idea. In the meantime, transgender people are less comfortable in public, and that's wrong.

Editorial policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words.

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Steve Baggs Emerald

Bad deals and snowmobiles

Former President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "There is nothing so American as our national parks. ... The fundamental idea behind the parks... is that the country belongs to the people, that it is in process of making for the enrichment of the lives of all of us." Roosevelt's idealistic view of national parks was shattered last week by President Bush. Bush has turned "our" national parks into nothing more than a "snowmobilers-only" club.

Last week, Bush proposed allowing the number of snowmobiles to rise in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, reversing a decision made by the Clinton administration to protect the natural beauty of the two parks.

By allowing more snowmobiles into the parks, Bush is defying public opinion, as well as 13 years of testing that proves snowmobiles are detrimental to the environment of the parks. The Environmental Protection Agency reviewed scientific studies conducted in Yellowstone by government agencies, the snowmobile industry and universities, and it found that snowmobile use in Yellowstone is threatening

both environmental and human health. But Bush ignored the EPA's findings and recommendation to decrease snowmobiling in the parks.

Snowmobiles produce obscene levels of pollution. An average snowmobile engine can cause as much air pollution in one day as a modern car driven 100,000 miles. To protect park rangers from the noxious chemicals, special kiosks were built at the entrances of the parks for permit checks. They include ventilation systems, allowing fresh air to circulate.

Before the kiosks, the rangers were getting headaches and nose bleeds and having eye problems because of breathing snowmobile exhaust. Preposterous as it may seem, some of the park employees are even issued gas masks. Too bad the animals that inhabit the parks can't be fitted with them.

Yellowstone is home to the last wild bison herd in America. During the winter months, these bison, as well as other wildlife, are at their most vulnerable due to the cold weather and lack of food. Snowmobiles don't make their situation better. Some animals, bison included, have become accustomed to the loud machines and are no longer afraid of them. As a result, snowmobile operators get the benefit of getting a wildlife-safari-type feel without those pesky attendants looking out to make sure that the patrons aren't maimed or

killed by the wild animals.

Harassment and disturbance are two direct impacts, but more serious impacts occur indirectly. As natural reproduction ceases, the steadily rising number of snowmobiles entering the national parks could play a hand in wiping out a species or two.

Snowmobiles have access to millions of acres of land, including national forests and other public lands. Many of these lands are close to Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks. Why not utilize these lands and leave the parks pristine for those who wish to enjoy the land in clean silence?

Instead of being places to revere natural beauty, these national parks are turning into a snowmobilers' paradise. Rather than listening to a geyser erupt, listen instead to the insipid whine of a snowmobile. Rather than watch animals in their natural surroundings, watch instead the trail of smoke pour out of a snowmobile's exhaust pipe. Rather than breathe clean mountain air, inhale instead the toxic vapors that spew from one of the 1,100 potential snowmobiles that visit the parks daily.

Visit a national park in the winter? Not me. I can't afford a respirator.

Contact the columnist at kathrynpetersen@dailyemerald.com. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



Kathryn Petersen
In other words

Letters to the editor

Bush shows heroism in stand against Iraq

I would like to applaud President Bush for his heroic stance against Saddam Hussein. It is very relieving to me to see that there is someone in our government who puts the safety and security of the American people as such a high priority. I understand that war results in tragedy and sorrow, but sometimes force is the only guarantee of freedom. It is the president's burdensome duty to protect the American people and I am glad to see that he is doing it.

I think that if there were a Bush-like figure in the 1930s who had enforced the Treaty of Versailles, then perhaps Hitler would never have been able to launch World War II, and thus 50 million people

would not have died.

That fact of the matter is that Saddam Hussein has been in violation of a treaty he signed and it very much reassures me to see that someone in the world cares enough to do something about it.

Zachary White
sophomore
history

Money trumps decency

"An equal-opportunity, affirmative-action institution committed to cultural diversity and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act." An obvious product of a committee, it's not very catchy, but that's what it says on all official University (excuse me: "O") correspondence. The University also has a Martin Luther King Jr. award granted to those members who have best furthered the cause of human rights on campus.

In order to get a degree, undergraduates must complete a minimum of two courses dealing with gender and minority issues. Add to all this a permanent Office of Affirmative Action located over in "O" Hall, and one might get the impression that respect for human rights is very important to the administration.

Unless, of course, there's a moneymaker at stake, such as anything related to the Ducks. Then all the sanctioned nobility goes out the window (along with the Worker Rights Consortium), and KUGN's Michaels — both Savage and Medved — get a wink and a nod.

Get used to it, as the "O" becomes more and more a profit-oriented organization, and cash flow takes precedence over decency.

Bill Smeek
kiosk attendant