

COMMENTARY

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Editorial

War on terror claims casualty: government's common sense

The story of Jake Johnston, a Salem native and friend of University freshmen Jay Rowan and Thomas Maffai, is just short of ridiculous. And the ridicule doesn't belong to Johnston or his family, but to the hypervigilance of government officials who think they will somehow stop all evildoers by trampling on common sense and freedom.

Nineteen years ago, Johnston's parents were living in northern Washington and rushed across the border to the nearest hospital to have their child. Paperwork was never completed, by his parents or by immigration officials, and so on March 24, Johnston was detained while trying to re-enter the United States after a spring break overnighter to Mexico. He was promptly incarcerated in San Diego for more than two weeks.

What's amazing about this story is that his release required significant intervention by Johnston's friends, who collected signatures on petitions and contacted elected officials to ask for help.

The government has said it is making renewed efforts to "connect the dots," a catchphrase that became popularized after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The newly created Department of Homeland Security, which currently oversees immigration, is supposed to be able to combine the workings of hundreds of other agencies and departments into one giant bureaucracy that can see all of the dots at once — in order to connect them.

But is anyone really safer since this effort? Sure, as long as you don't cross the border with a bureaucratic snafu in your past. Is it really possible that there was no one in the immigration office at the Mexican border who could see the insanity of detaining Johnston and throwing him in jail? No one in that office had the common sense to connect the dots and see Johnston isn't a terrorist?

Apparently, no is the answer. Johnston's mother went into bankruptcy pleading her son's case and paying for a lawyer. Either the government is going overboard, or a dangerous terrorist is free in Salem, waiting to make his move after 19 years of laying low in order to pull off this clever ploy. We hope the sarcasm is evident in the latter choice.

What's also amazing about this story is that Johnston was let out at all. Kudos to his friends and family for pushing the issue. But how many other stories with similar details exist out there and no one hears the cries? Would this story have ended the same way if Johnston was black or Hispanic, or Middle Eastern? It seems unlikely. What would have happened if the family hadn't intervened? When would officials have come to their senses?

The lesson is that much of America's infrastructure is porous. It's designed that way, so freedom can flourish. It means that sometimes, people with bad intentions get access where they shouldn't. Look at the example of the U.S. soldier suspected of a grenade attack against Camp Pennsylvania in Kuwait just four days into the war with Iraq.

Americans will never be completely safe, no matter how large the bureaucracy, no matter how wide-ranging the powers to squash freedom and civil liberties. But the less porous American life becomes, the more it will resemble a totalitarian regime. Let's be hypervigilant against that for a change.

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. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.



Steve Baggs Emerald

Unsportsmanlike conduct

Last week, the Baseball Hall of Fame canceled plans to celebrate the 15th anniversary of 'Bull Durham,' the superb movie about life in the minor leagues. The reason? Its costars, Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon, had spoken out against the war on Iraq. The Hall of Fame claimed it did not want to be pro-war or anti-war. Said Dale Petroskey, its president, on the Hall's Web site: "As an institution, we stand behind our president and our troops in this conflict."

Say what?

This act of censorship violates American values. Robbins and Sarandon, partners on and off the screen, had not planned to protest at the Hall of Fame.

This disinvitation goes beyond limiting dissent at Cooperstown. It silences dissenters. It encourages others to exclude people with unpopular views, which discourages people for their exercising their freedom anywhere. And the freedom to express our thoughts is the bedrock of American democracy.

Since when did supporting our troops mean silencing the dissenting voices? Haven't our troops fought to give Iraqis the very freedom to speak?

The Hall of Fame's action is also unsportsmanlike. In a letter to Robbins,



Philip Huang
 A different light

Petroskey wrote that his "very public criticism of President Bush at this important — and sensitive — time in our nation's history helps undermine the U.S. position, which could put our troops in even more danger." So dissenters are aiding the enemy! Now that's hitting below the belt. The insinuations of disloyalty also shatter the Hall's neutral pose.

In sports, rules ensure fair play. Sports fans accept whether their teams win or lose, because the rules are neutral. They apply to everyone. Not so off the field. After basketball star Steve Nash wore a T-shirt saying "No War / Shoot for Peace" last month, team owner Mark Cuban reportedly told players not to talk about the war. Then he wore a flag-waving T-shirt himself.

Here's a secret: On the political spectrum, the sports world is hardly neutral. It often huddles on the right, near the land of country music, which just witnessed the burning of Dixie Chicks CDs. At least no one is ripping Steve Nash basketball cards. What do track legend Jim Ryun, football star Steve Largent and Hall of Fame pitcher Jim Bunning have in common? They were elected to Congress, largely on their celebrity status. They are also conservative Republicans.

Dale Petroskey himself served President Ronald Reagan as assistant press secretary and as spokesman for the Department of Transportation. "I don't think we'll ever see another president like Ronald Reagan," he once gushed to the Daily Star, which covers Cooperstown. Not surprisingly, the Hall's Development

Advisory Group includes W. Dennis Thomas, another member of Reagan's staff, and Robb LaKritz, a current Bush Administration lawyer. No wonder we're told to "stand behind our president!"

Being neutral is often difficult. The only solution to our bias is not to discriminate against other views. Only a bad sport tries to disqualify opponents from a game before it starts.

Finally, this decision profanes the spirit of "Bull Durham." This funny and sexy film reveals a little-seen side of sports. Where the Hall of Fame puts athletes on a remote pedestal, "Bull Durham" pokes fun at their flaws and brings you into their daily lives. While the Hall admits a select few, the movie is about the countless boys of summer who play in obscurity for just one chance at The Show.

Ron Shelton, the writer and director of "Bull Durham," also made "White Men Can't Jump" and "Tin Cup." In those films, the most dynamic character is not a man. And she's not an athlete. Sarandon plays Annie, a smart, sassy woman who isn't afraid to tell off the men in her life. She takes under her wing a cocky young prospect named Nuke (Robbins), who has a "million-dollar arm and five-cent head." His saving grace? He learns to listen.

If only the five-cent heads in this world could follow his lead.

Contact the columnist at philiphuang@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Letters to the editor

Christa and Greg have leadership experience

Christa Shively and Greg Bae have what it takes to be an effective team for ASUO Executive. Succeeding in student government requires experience and leadership, and Christa and Greg will work hard, ensuring that their experience and leadership make the University a better place for you to go to school.

Shively and Bae have been very involved with our student government. Christa, for example, has worked as the ASUO Community Outreach Director, she has served on the Associated Students Presidential Advisory Committee, and she is the EMU Board chair for the third year in a row. Greg also has been very involved, as he has worked as the programs director for the Multicultural Center, as a board member for OSPiRG, and served as the treasurer for our fraternity, Delta Sigma Phi.

Christa and Greg know how important leadership is and will further the creation of a Leadership Development Center, which will benefit all students looking to become better leaders. This is just one of their many great platform ideas, which are outlined at <http://gladstone.uoregon.edu/~gbae/>. Christa and Greg are the most qualified candidates for ASUO Executive. Please join me in voting for Christa Shively and Greg Bae.

Justin F. Zuiker
 senior
 business administration

Stop hating Christian fundamentalists

I'm disappointed in Jerome Garger's letter ("Free speech in classes shouldn't be stifled," ODE, April 2). As I was reading, I was thinking, this was going to be a rational letter regarding intellectual freedom. However, I was saddened by the hate-filled and intolerant rant against so-called "Christian fundamentalists" that ended the piece.

While not religious myself, I have respect for those who are, and despite what the media and our Dead Kennedys' records have told us, many "Christian fundamentalists" are very thoughtful, kind and intelligent people. Even when I was at the height of my radical days, I was never treated as anything less than equal by the so-called "American Taliban."

My conservative aunt never "preached" about hellfire and damnation but invited me to reach my own conclusions through logic and reason, not "indoctrination" or "intimidation." Sure, there are conservative Christians who are nauseating people, but name a group that doesn't have these people within its ranks.

I'm disappointed at the intolerance shown toward these people. I'm further disappointed that this kind of hate speech goes unchallenged. In the spirit of equality, diversity and tolerance, let's stop the hatred of "fundamentalist Christians."

Lucas Szabo
 junior
 political science