

COMMENTARY

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New 'feedback' rules aim to stop false postings

So I'm a bit angry at one of our readers. The possibility of identity theft on the Emerald Web site has occurred to me before, but until Sunday, I hadn't actually encountered it. I guess I thought people were more mature. How silly of me.

Anyway, here's what happened: Someone posted rather personal feedback on an opinion piece — can you guess? It was Vincent Martorano's May 9 guest commentary — using a student's name and e-mail address. The only problem was, it wasn't that student who posted the feedback.

I was contacted about the false posting, and we immediately removed it from the Web site. The student felt violated and was rightfully creeped out that someone would pretend to be her and write incorrect personal things to the world. I was creeped out, as well. This situation has lurked in the back of my mind as a possibility for some time because we don't verify the identity of people who post feedback.

Some people may be shocked to hear that, but the feedback function on our Web site is meant to be an open forum, not an extended "letters to the editor" section. Our letters and guest commentaries are vetted before publication, meaning we confirm the identity of the writer and require sources for statements of fact.

Feedback postings, however, offer our extended online community a chance to quickly express their opinions in a free-form way. Unfortunately, it apparently was too free-form. Or maybe not free enough, as you'll see in our new system.

To end the potential for misuse and misrepresentation on feedback, we are requiring nearly total anonymity. Only first name, occupation and location will be allowed on feedback postings — no more e-mail addresses or full names.

We think the exchange of information is more important than identity in this case; if people want to submit their ideas and have them carry the weight of their name and title, they are free to submit them as letters to the editor or guest commentaries. But the feedback section is simply about ideas.

And to do otherwise — to require full verification for every piece of feedback — would be prohibitive, both in terms of labor and time. A reader might not see their feedback posted until days later if we had to wait for people to respond to attempts to contact them.

So we will continue to have feedback on the Web site with the same fast turnaround as always. The ideas, sometimes angry, sometimes supportive, will be there as always. The only difference is that no one will have the ability to pretend to be someone they're not. And that eases my anger somewhat. I hope it eases the violation felt by the student in this case.

Contact the editor in chief at editor@dailyemerald.com.

Online poll

Each week, the Emerald publishes the previous week's poll results and the coming week's poll question. Visit www.dailyemerald.com to vote.

Last week: What do you think of homosexuality on campus?

Results: 376 total votes

It's disgusting and should be hidden — 18.6 percent, or 70 votes

It should be out and proud — 32.2 percent, or 121 votes

Everyone should be able to feel comfortable on campus — 38.8 percent, or 146 votes

No sexuality should be publicly displayed on campus — 5.6 percent, or 21 votes

I don't care — 4.3 percent, or 16 votes

Leave me alone! — 0.5 percent, or 2 votes

This week: Should a fetus be recognized as an entity separate from its mother for legal reasons?

Choices: Yes; No; What is this about?; Leave me alone!

The mega-rich cash in

Contrary to invidious rumor-mongering, President George W. Bush's proposed tax bill, which passed the Senate in diminished form on Friday, is not for the rich. Bush is a compassionate conservative, and as such he would never so much as entertain the notion, in the midst of skyrocketing joblessness and stagnant profits, to rub salt into the wounds of our battered economy by lining the pockets of the undeserving.

That's why Bush's tax cut is not for the rich. It is for the super-rich. The mega-rich. The media-mogul, oil-magnate, dictator-of-a-third-world-country kind of rich. In other words, the best kind of rich.

Bush's proposal is that long-awaited opportunity for those noble martyrs, upon whose entrepreneurial genius the insipid masses rely for their daily bread, but whose innovative energies are perennially stifled by a suffocating anti-business tax code, finally to pry their necks from under the government's boot and fulfill their rightful destiny of creating jobs.

Don't be discouraged by the president's rhetoric. As a politician who must appeal to the wide-ranging sensibilities of a large populace, he must engage in a certain amount of misdirection in order to appease the obstinate enemies of reason.

So when Bush says that "the highest percentage of tax cuts go to the lowest-income Americans," don't panic — he doesn't really mean it.

OK, I'll concede that those snaggle-toothed cesspool dwellers who earn from \$0 to \$6,000 a year will see their rate cut from 15 percent to 10 percent. But take comfort, the shabby automatons in the \$6,000 to \$27,050 range, by far the more significant portion of the population, won't get any relief whatsoever!

Meanwhile, those who earn over \$297,350 — and what decent person doesn't? — will see their rate tumble from 39.6 percent to a much more rea-



Steve Baggs Emerald

sonable 33 percent.

Moreover, the Bush plan would erase that pesky dividend tax altogether, a move clearly meant to favor the dignified element of society. I mean, do blue-collar slobs even know what a dividend is, much less how to read a quarterly earnings report?

Can you imagine a beer-bellied pipe fitter, meaty head in gnarled paw, tongue involuntarily protruding from one side of his lips, struggling laboriously to compute a P/E ratio? Ha ha! The absurdity of it is just too much o bear!

And as for the estate, or "death" tax: The White House, in a droll bit of subterfuge — the irony of which I think we can all enjoy — says "the punitively high death tax can fall most heavily on small businesses and family farms that are asset-rich but cash-poor."

As we should know, this is hardly the case. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities notes that, "when fully in effect," the repeal of the estate

tax "would provide as much in tax reductions to the 4,500 largest estates as the entire Bush tax plan would provide to 142 million people."

There you have it, you skittish unbelievers. Bush does, in fact, have America's best interests — those of the superlatively wealthy — in mind. If you need any more confirmation of this fact, just look at the effects of his first tax bill, passed a scant two years ago. The Brookings Institution reports that the top 1 percent of income earners received 36.7 percent of the share of that reduction package, while the middle quintile received only 9.2 percent.

This translates to an average savings of \$45,715 per annum for those who earn over \$373,000, while those who earned between \$27,000 and \$44,000 save about \$570 a year. And you thought that Bush might be unfair. Tsk.

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

Commentary feeds lowest denominator

Guest commentary

If I wished to use the guest commentary as a forum for my feelings of disgust for a racial minority or a religious group, would my contribution be accepted? It is certainly well within my rights as an American to hold and express such views, but most recognize them as flawed intellectually and legally proscribed when they prompt actions against the target group. Respectable publications would refuse to give such opinions an open forum because they only feed the lowest denominator of our species.

Why then did the Emerald accept Vincent Martorano's expressions of disgust for homosexuality ("Homosexual men

should hide their disgusting acts," ODE, May 9)? His expressions of a "moral decency" that allow him to judge others just because they are unlike his well-balanced self are frightening.

It's not the views themselves that frighten me; they are shop-worn and sadly indicative of the social and emotional limitations persistent in our society. However, when a University student has enough comfort and acceptance for such views that he can have them published in the campus newspaper, we demonstrate a transparent lip service to the idea of honoring a diverse student body.

Not only does the publication of this homophobic diatribe ignore the physical danger that these bigots are to those they feel such aversion for, it also makes me

wonder if I will someday soon pick up the Emerald to read a Ku Klux Klan suggestion for ethnic cleansing. Is there an editorial bottom line for the Emerald?

As a closing observation for Martorano: If he were truly comfortable with his own sexuality, he wouldn't be worrying about the orientation of others. No one is interested in his personal choices around sexuality as long as he stays within legal boundaries, and his obsession with the choices of others indicates an aversion triggered by problematic psychological patterns. He should get some therapy before his discomfort triggers behaviors inconsistent with a professional career of any sort.

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Letters to the editor and guest commentaries policy

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.