

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

EDITORIAL

Before inmates can own TVs, cable content needs curtailing

Moral question of the day: What do state correctional officials do when group television periods in prisons lead to bloody battles between the child molester who wants to watch the Olsen twins and the ax murderer who wants to catch "Friends?"

Take away the television? Nah, just let them buy their own. And let them get cable, too.

The Oregon State Correctional Institute — where one inmate recently stabbed another inmate for chatting during the precious group television hours — now allows prisoners to have individual television and cable access. Starting in January, convicts will have the ability to use money they earn while working in prison to buy televisions and cable, leaving taxpayers footing only the electricity bill.

While taking more money from taxpayers to pay extra electricity costs may seem unfair, less violence resulting from secluded television viewing seems worth it. After all, if prisoners are choosing to work inside the institution, then it only seems fair that they should have the ability to spend their own money on items that prison officials approve. Granted, the inmates likely did something terrible to end up in prison — and thus, most of their basic freedoms have been stripped — but that doesn't mean they shouldn't have the right to spend money they earn.

Losing freedoms for a certain amount of time constitutes remuneration of debt to society for committing a crime. Forcing the criminal to brave dangerous television rooms where pencil-wielding inmates go ballistic and stab fellow inmates is not. If prison officials provide a room where convicts can go to watch television, they should at the very least make it safe, which currently is not the case.

A few problems may exist with the new television policy in state prisons, however.

First, whether or not one believes that violence on television influences behavior, it is reasonable to argue that extensive violence may not be the best thing for criminals — especially death-row convicts — to watch. According to the American Psychological Association, violence on television can result in children becoming "less sensitive to pain and suffering of others, more fearful of the world around them (and) more likely to behave in an aggressive way toward others." But what about hardened criminals? Past speculation it's hard to say for sure, but the issue deserves further investigation.

And how would scenes of rape affect convicted sex offenders who are trying to reform themselves? After all, a blatant rape of a teenage girl could be seen just last week on the latest episode of CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, one of television's hottest crime dramas.

Second, wouldn't the convict be better served by reading a book or participating in educational classes in the prison? Given, a lot of educational materials are shown on television shows, but who will guarantee that criminals will actually watch them? With a variety of channels to choose from — including everything from Fox to ESPN — it's unlikely that educational shows will be the most popular among prison convicts.

While the Editorial Board recognizes the right for criminals to spend money that prisons have allowed them to earn, we see a few potential problems that should be worked out before criminals are given the ability to watch cable television.

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.

Poker fever

So I've been watching a lot of the Travel Channel lately, and I'm not planning a trip to the beautiful beaches of Rio de Janeiro.

I watch the Travel Channel because it has The World Poker Tour, the third-best show on television behind ESPN's World Series of Poker and Joe Millionaire.

I watch these shows because I, like many others around the nation, have Poker Fever. My doctor is 2003 World Series champ Chris MoneyMaker (yes, that's his real name). My pills are straight flushes and full houses. My hospital is somewhere between "the turn" and "the river."

Poker is one of the fastest-growing games in America. The grand prize at the World Series, which is determined by the number of people entered in the tournament, started at \$30,000 in 1971 and now sits at \$2.5 million. MoneyMaker made more money (ah! the alliteration!) for his victory in April than some baseball players will make for their roles in the piddling "real" World Series.

For many college students, the transition from drinking games to money games is as easy as a pair of jacks. It makes sense. We're making our own cash for the first time, we're smart enough not to spend it all and the allure of risking money is fresh and new. We don't go to casinos to blow tons of cash, we go to make \$10 on the tables and \$30 in free drinks. Where's the harm in that?

On Monday nights, a few friends and I live out the World Series of Poker in our living rooms. We play No Limit Hold 'Em and Omaha, Good-Bad and Chicago.

Johnny Law, if you're reading this, we don't play for money. We play for pats on the back. We're all about supporting one another.

Just like any regular poker game, we have our characters around the table. We call one guy "Casino" because he drives to



Eric Layton Illustration

Seven Feathers every Friday, by himself, to play in an almost-free Hold 'Em tournament. Another guy is "The Face" because his countenance is concrete for four hours on Mondays.

We're playing t-ball in a land of baseball players, but we don't mind. We know there's not a whole lot of bluffing going on. We don't check-raise or figure out the percentages of our down cards like they do on the World Series. We play a lot of "free poker," when everybody checks and nobody bets (pats on the back, that is). If they did this at the World Series, the dealer would slap everyone across the face three times.

We keep "Rounders," the only true poker movie out there, on "repeat" in the DVD player. We adopt our best Russian accents to mimic John Malkovich's character, Teddy KGB. We say "Take eet downn" and "Paaay that man his moo-nee." We eat Oreos and twist them around just like the KGB.

But even "Rounders" defers to the World Series in the end. One of the best scenes in

the movie comes when Matt Damon is watching an old World Series on tape and rejecting Famke Janssen's advances. Johnny Chan, the greatest poker player of the current generation, is on the screen, and nothing will derail the Damon train off its World Series tracks. Good stuff.

The World Series is the thing. It gives every poker player in the nation, a group that's growing by the month, a chance to win the biggest pot at the end of the biggest rainbow. MoneyMaker is a prime example. He bought into an online tournament for \$40 and ended up with a stack of cash that would make Donald Trump blush.

And while the Monday night lights of my living room might be worlds away from the clockless land of Las Vegas, we don't care. When you're staring down three queens and two aces, both places are one.

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

Budget cuts burden UO students

As the budget crisis escalates, Oregon legislators look for easy ways to make cuts. Cutting \$75 million from the higher education budget seemed easy, because colleges can make up for it by raising tuition. However, steep tuition increases will be detrimental to both higher education and our state's long-term economic health.

GUEST COMMENTARY

Affordability has gone out the window. In 1999, students split the cost of education, with the state paying 50 percent and students funding the remaining half. Four years later, 64 percent comes out of students' pockets. Some students have seen the cost of tuition jump as much as 50 percent. And Oregon ranks near the bottom nationally in state-funded financial aid.

The combination of soaring costs and weak financial aid will cause enrollment to decline. So, the beating higher education took this legislative session set off a chain reaction that will result in further tuition hikes and dwindling enrollments. Traditionally, students who cannot afford university costs fall back on community colleges, but they didn't fare much better

when budgets were slashed.

While demand for their services increases sharply, community colleges have been left reeling from a \$38 million cut in funding. An increasing number of Oregonians need job training from community colleges, and university students save money by taking transferable courses. Shrinking budgets and growing enrollments hinder the ability of community colleges to provide access to high-quality service.

As lawmakers and voters hold the line on taxes, higher education loses. The public insists on getting more but paying less, so students are left paying more but receiving less. And if citizens overturn the tax package passed by legislators, higher education will lose an additional \$11 million.

While skyrocketing costs price a growing number of students out of higher education, the availability of financial aid continues to plummet. Because of the tireless advocacy of students, there were some bright spots. The legislature restored some funds to the Oregon Opportunity Grant and Childcare Block Grant. Still, Oregon provides less financial aid than most other states.

The Oregon Opportunity Grant turned

away over one-third of eligible students during the last two years. New, stricter eligibility requirements mean that even fewer students will meet the criteria for receiving the grant. Although legislators restored \$4 million to the fund, students will still be turned away at the same rate.

Last October, the Student Childcare Block Grant, which covered childcare costs for nearly 500 student parents, was eliminated. During the recently adjourned session, legislators supported student parents by adding \$1 million to fund the program. While this money will allow about 100 parents to attend school, at least 1,000 others will be left unable to afford the combined costs of childcare and tuition.

Balancing the budget on the backs of college students is not the answer to Oregon's budget crisis. Cuts to universities and community colleges limit access to post-secondary education, ensuring that fewer Oregonians are prepared to make significant contributions to our economy in coming years. To secure a productive future for Oregon, legislators and citizens must make higher education a priority.

Andy Saultz is the board chair of the Oregon Student Association.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Column failed to mention U.S.'s foreign influence

In response to Travis Willse's Oct. 10 column ("Recognizing Patriotism"), he ought to be commended for his fair-mindedness toward both sides. Flag-waving Bushites and flag-burning Zinnians both have committed heinous atrocities against

academic decency.

Yet Mr. Willse obfuscated the full truth on at least one key issue. I am speaking of America's human rights reputation abroad. Admittedly, U.S. military forces are much less cruel than most others in the realm of war. However, the federal government has encouraged and educated foreign militants about how to act in the wholly wrong and despicable ways that

America would never allow her troops to.

Clear examples of the products of these various means include Pol Pot, Osama bin Laden, Augusto Pinochet and Saddam Hussein. These monsters may not be our agents, but they are our children. As such, we bear their moral burden.

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