

Monday, October 27, 2003

EDITORIAL

Boxcutter placement misguided, benign act

In mid-September, Nathaniel Heatwole sent an e-mail he will never forget. The 20-year-old student — a political science and physics major at Guilford College in Greensboro, N.C. — dropped the note to the Transportation Security Administration, letting them know that he had planted box cutters and other items aboard Southwest Airlines jetliners, according to an FBI affidavit.

Now, such a message should attract at least some immediate attention. But, the first response from any level of government came weeks later. Only on Oct. 20 did federal authorities charge Heatwole with carrying a concealed weapon aboard an aircraft — a felony.

Critics like U.S. Attorney Thomas DiBiagio, who called Heatwole's actions "foolish" in an interview with CNN, blasted him for needlessly endangering others. Heatwole and his supporters have denied his wrongdoing, characterizing his actions as justifiable — if not responsible — civil disobedience.

The last time an act of "civil disobedience" hit the national news was when misguided, self-styled "human shields" traveled to Iraq and camped out around strategic targets in an effort to deter U.S.-led coalition bombing, implicitly threatening the government with severely negative media attention for (inadvertently) killing American civilians in the attacks.

But these claims make the present a good time to review what legitimate civil disobedience actually entails.

Civil disobedience does not include exposing others to undue harm. Heatwole claimed in his affidavit that stowing in airplane lavatories the same kind of weapons used by the hijackers in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks was "an act of civil disobedience with the aim of improving public safety for the air-traveling public." While an otherwise merely disgruntled passenger likely wouldn't be nudged into an impromptu hijacking of a plane just because he or she found a knife in the mile-high bathroom, such a passenger could use the weapon to rather dramatically infringe on a fellow passenger's life, liberty or happiness while granting the victim (obviously) little opportunity for escape.

While Heatwole's ends don't justify his means, his actions have drawn the media's spotlight to the difficulty of filtering the countless suitcases, duffel and messenger bags, purses, wallets, compacts and keychains that make their way through now federally managed airport security checkpoints. Moreover, they illuminate just how far the TSA is from totally protecting the modern air traveler in American airspace.

Rep. Tom Davis, R-Virginia, echoed these grave sentiments in a letter to TSA chief James Loy: "Despite significant seizures of prohibited items from passengers going through TSA security checkpoints, this week's events highlight possible weaknesses in the system which need to be addressed."

Heatwole's point about America's difficult adjustment to burgeoning threats to the civilian flier may have been illustrative and illuminating, but it was also illicit, illegal and ill-conceived. In any case, his acts were clearly not malicious, and thus is likely no further material threat to society. Accordingly, should he be convicted, the government should not incarcerate him. Rather, we propose that he be sentenced to tag along with an airport security checkpoint team for a week.

Perhaps sorting through piles of dirty laundry, holey socks and other unmentionables isn't as easy as it looks.

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Time well spent

Rumor has it that it takes two to tango, three to make a crowd and a village to raise a child. I am convinced it takes just one bureaucrat to ruin a perfectly wonderful idea.

Take, for example, Daylight Saving Time. It's not a bad idea; it's a good idea poorly implemented.

We probably owe our changing clocks to that venerable old fellow Ben Franklin. The idea of changing the clocks to take advantage of the changes in sunrise and sunset appealed to his frugal nature — that is, the more natural light you have available, the fewer candles you will burn. Of course, dear Ben suggested that church bells — and, as necessary, cannon fire — be used to inform the citizenry of sunrise. He posited that if you "oblige a man to rise at four in the morning ... it is more than probable he will go willingly to bed at eight in the evening."

He obviously never met undergrads.

Saving daylight hours and the corresponding resources is a perfectly reasonable idea, particularly when it means that every year each and every one of us gets issued an extra hour for our very own. The problem is that some narrow-minded bureaucrat decided that it would be better for all of us if we took our extra hour at the same time and on the same night. Then they made it worse by placing our extra hour in the wee small hours of the night.

After pondering, I came up with just three things I could do with an extra hour between 1 a.m. and 2 a.m.: sleep, have sex, or watch two extra episodes of Mister Ed on late-night television. It's not that these are particularly bad choices, it's just that there would be so much more scope for the imagination if we structured this time business differently.

Imagine, for example, having an extra

hour at lunchtime. Wouldn't that be a nice place to start? Instead of bed or television, you would now have a wealth of options: food, errands, manicures, oil changes, the gym, et cetera. All the places that are stubbornly closed for business at 2 a.m. would now be open and available for you to patronize during your extra hour. We might even be able to stimulate a flagging economy this way!

If not lunchtime, how about an extra hour in the evening? Families could have more quality time, and I'd love to be able to



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Huh? What? Really.

come home after a long day of school and finally be able to watch a rerun of Buffy the Vampire Slayer without thinking that I should really be doing my reading for the next day. In this case, an extra hour in the evening wouldn't really change my habits, but it would relieve a lot of guilt.

By far my favorite idea is to have each of us issued our very own extra hour to use when we like, how we like. Those of us with punctuality problems could take it in 12 five-minute increments. Finally, we'd know what it feels like to arrive on time. Perpetual procrastinators could save theirs to take right before a major term paper is due. Of course,

those rare souls without time management problems might feel at a disadvantage, but I propose we allow them to save their hours up. After just two and a half decades, they could have an entire extra day!

I see just two problems with this more flexible approach. First, we'd have to create the GIAO — General Time Accounting Office — to keep track of everyone's hours. After all, there would be some unethical folks out there who would try to take more than their allotted hour. And given our free market society, I can easily see a day where people trade their extra hour for economic gain. So, the GIAO would probably require us to fill out time forms to document when, where, and how we spent our time. Rules would be implemented to govern the hows and whys of our extra time to keep people from investing in time shelters. Eventually, the Time Code would rival the Tax Code and we'd spend three hours trying to document how we spent our extra hour.

The second problem is spring. You see, while we are issued an extra hour in October, it's more of a loan than a gift and, come April, we're supposed to give it back. That would seem to be a formidable problem. The solution, however, is simple: deficit spending. The current administration has convinced me that deficit spending is the only way to go. Balanced budgets are the hobgoblin of little minds and Democrats.

So, between now and next October, I urge you all to consider when, where and how our extra hours should be spent. Me? I'm going to go nap. I was up late watching Mister Ed.

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

ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the results of the previous week's poll and the coming week's poll question. Visit <http://www.dailyemerald.com> to vote.

Last question: What happened to the University of Oregon's alternative

mascot, Mandrake?

Results: 52 votes
 Flew south for the winter, along with the football team's talent: 52.0 percent or 27 votes.
 Waiting in Phil Knight's freezer for Thanksgiving dinner: 19.2 percent or 10 votes.
 Kidnapped by OSU mascot Benny the Beaver: 9.6 percent or five votes.

Took a year off to run for California governor: 9.6 percent or five votes.

Went to a party with one of the football players and is still walking home: 9.6 percent or five votes.

This week: Do you support the distribution of free condoms in the residence halls?

Choices: No, students will

abuse the privilege; No, if you can't handle asking for condoms at the University Health Center, you shouldn't be having sex; Yes, it will increase my chances of getting laid; Yes, it will prevent disease and overpopulation; Maybe, will this increase my chances of getting laid?