

Tuesday, January 27, 2004

EDITORIAL

Weapons suit raises campus safety issues for gun owners

In a dramatic challenge to Oregon University System policy, physics graduate student Brian Stubbs filed a lawsuit in Federal District Court against several state higher education organizations. In his claim, Stubbs argues that the system's ban on concealed weapons violates state laws that allow Concealed Handgun License holders to carry concealed firearms on public property anywhere in Oregon, save in courtrooms and where otherwise dictated by the Oregon Legislature.

The case could have wide-reaching ramifications, too.

"For some time we have known that schools all over the state have been violating the law. It is a case with statewide implications," said Kevin Starrett, the executive director of the Oregon Firearms Educational Foundation.

Prima facie, Stubbs is right-on, but the details of the arguments are worth closer inspection.

State law specifically prohibits cities and counties from abridging gun possession rights of CHL holders within their boundaries. However, both the Board of Higher Education and the Oregon University System certainly qualify as lesser jurisdictional authorities. If educational authorities are allowed, in the purported and ill-defined notion of student safety, to abridge liberties on their campuses otherwise specifically granted by law, what's to prevent them from otherwise limiting speech they deem "harmful"? If gun rights are to be curtailed on Oregon campuses, such limitations must be legislated.

OUS spokeswoman Di Saunders maintained that the relevant OUS rules are legitimate and are motivated by safety concerns.

"Student safety on OUS campuses is our first and foremost concern," she explained to the Emerald. "That is why the state board went beyond the Oregon statute and voted to not allow handguns on Oregon public campuses."

What's clear is that safety is important to students and OUS alike. What's less clear is whether Stubbs' possession of a firearm constitutes a sufficient material threat to safety on campuses to ban him, or any other CHL owner, from carrying handguns there.

Some evidence suggests not. The state laws regulating distribution of CHLs (ORS 166.291-166.295) are justifiably rigorous: The twelve qualifying conditions, which range from age and citizen status to handgun training to past criminal record, ensure that, in the state's view, anyone who receives a CHL — including Stubbs — has the sense of civic responsibility to carry his or her firearm on public property and use it appropriately.

Indeed, with evidently law-abiding citizens trained in firearm safety carrying a handgun, many students might feel safer.

"Prohibiting law-abiding citizens from carrying their handguns onto campus will not stop a criminal who is intent on violence," Stubbs said. "It will just ensure that all of the potential victims are unarmed and unable to defend themselves."

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.

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Today is Hockaday

Four years ago, I mopped the floor with Jeremy Lansing while playing his residence hall-room Playstation. On Thursday nights we took tequila shots right out of the bottle and cruised down to the girls' floor.

When you're trying to take somebody's life in a video game, you never imagine that one day he'll save lives. When you're taking shots with somebody, you never imagine that someday he'll help people kick their alcoholism.

After four years of drifting away from each other, that's what I've come to find out. That's what Jeremy Lansing does, or tries to do, every day as a counselor for the Cottage Grove Family Relief Nursery.

Other people think about changing the world. Jeremy Lansing changes it.

The Relief Nursery is an organization aimed at preventing child abuse before it happens. There's a nursery in Eugene, but Lansing works for the Cottage Grove version. He likes the rural community because it's more challenging. If there's one thing you'll learn about Jeremy Lansing, it's that he likes a challenge.

Lansing is an "Early Childhood Intervention and Community Outreach Specialist." It's a fancy way of saying he works with both kids and their parents. He spends hours during the day with the kids, most of whom bounce off the walls like they were superheroes, and he never uses the word "no" or the word "don't."

Then he goes into the community and meets with parents, many of whom have drug problems or emotional issues, and he never uses the word "no" or the word "don't."

"People don't learn from being told what they can't do, they learn from being told what they can do," Lansing said.

Some of the families are required to attend the nursery by the courts after child-abuse cases. Some families seek out the nursery because the weight of parenting is heavier than a dumbbell. Some parents simply want to learn how to be better. At life.

Lansing deals with enough sadness every day to crush a normal person. He deals with kids whose parents were abusive or whose parents stuck needles in their arms while they were pregnant. He deals with kids who won't talk and kids who talk too much.

"I want those situations that are mind-wrenching sometimes, or heart-tearing," Lansing said. "That's where the most change can happen."

Lansing was a psychology major, but applying that psychology still blows his mind.

"It's not always easy," Lansing admits. Sometimes, Lansing has to face issues that the rest of us will never want to or have to face. He tells the story of a young girl who, when she first got to the nursery, wouldn't talk and mostly sat in a corner, biting her lip.

Worse, she reenacted sexual acts with a doll on the nursery playground, underneath a slide. She often broke down crying for no particular reason.

"Seeing a child do things like that makes you awe-struck," Lansing said. "It's not something you associate with a child."

The girl's mother was a methamphetamine addict and her father was a pedophile. The girl would spend days in bed with her mother, and she was neglected by both parents.

After the girl moved in with a foster family, the family didn't know how to deal with her. Their natural reaction was, "Stop!" "No!" "Don't!"

But over several months at the relief nursery, the girl learned how to interact socially. Slowly, with Lansing's positive building

blocks, she built relationships with her foster parents and with other children in the program. Lansing tried to help the foster parents understand their child, so they ended up working alongside him in her development, like partners in a new restaurant.

Lansing helped a little girl say, "Please pass the ketchup." It may not seem like a lot. But he taught a girl without feelings how to feel. He does this all the time. If a kid lashes out, he teaches the kid to lash in. If a parent can't take the stress, Lansing helps them manage it like a bank manages money.

Once upon a time, Lansing was that lash-out kid, without the troubled background. He threw chairs and even hit a teacher in fifth grade. When I knew him freshman year, he was a typical college student, drinking a lot and being social. Now I find out that he's come full circle, he's helping kids like him. And that's the point, he says. If he can do it, why can't other kids?

Lansing wants to enact change on a grand scale some day. He wishes he could've been an athlete, so he could "have a pulpit" to impart his views. Someday, he will have that pulpit. The instant he shows up on my presidential ballot, I'm ticking his name without hesitating.

See, I think Lansing already enacts change on a grand scale. Even if it's only one or two people at a time, it's better to change things in a small environment than not change things at all.

Lansing said his goal is to inspire somebody every day, whether it be a child at the relief nursery or a co-worker or a friend, he doesn't care.

Well, today, Jeremy Lansing inspired me, and I hope he inspired you.

To donate to the Cottage Grove Family Relief Nursery, call (541) 942-4835.

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

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A sorry State of the Union

President Bush shared his wisdom and vision for our country in his State of the Union address. His speech made me want to Act Patriot-like, and write him a letter. So I write this to our President George W. Bush.

George, I can't find a job, I can't feed my children, I have no insurance, I have less privacy, no rebate check, I do not feel safer and extreme uncertainty is the future that lies

ahead. I have seen help wanted ads shrink, pay decrease and jobs close or move. I have seen education cut, social services cut, and I can't even afford to get my hair cut.

Unlike you, George, I know friends and family sent to Iraq/Afghanistan to fight your wars, felt hunger, know poverty, and feel empathy for those who suffer. As a "compassionate conservative," George, I thought that you would apologize for the economic state of the union and for misleading the nation into a war based on misinformation. I guess Bill "the impeachable president" Clinton

taught you a thing or two on how to "mislead." However, I would rather be lied to about sex than about war.

When I go to the poll this year, I will think back to the good old days before you took office. Am I better off than I was four years ago? No! George, your State of the Union was exactly what I expected. You fed us a bunch of crap. Excuse my French, oops, I mean "Freedom!"

Scott Britt
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