

Tuesday, April 13, 2004

EDITORIAL

Crusading against porn wastes time, cash, sense

What would you say if you found out the U.S. Justice Department is spending millions of your tax dollars to pay government employees to look at porn?

Not illegal types — such as child porn, which should be actively sought out and purged — but the kind that has been deemed acceptable by the legal system for years.

The kind of porn those in the private sector would get fired for viewing at work.

Well, it's true, and it's all part of the Justice Department's ongoing mission to trample free speech rights in this country. Attorney General John Ashcroft is spearheading the effort, where 32 employees are spending millions to find new ways of charging pornographers with "obscenity." (In fact, the Justice Department has an entire division dedicated to obscenity prosecution.)

And, according to the Thought Police, nothing is safe from the clutches of governmental tyranny, including everything from soft-core sex in television programs to adult movies offered in hotel rooms.

"We want to do everything we can to deter this conduct," both on the production and consumption ends, obscenity prosecutions chief Drew Oosterbaan told the Baltimore Sun. "Nothing is off the table as far as content."

Luckily, giddy teenagers sharing bootlegged Playboy specials over the Internet aren't the only people involved in the porn industry. Multibillion dollar companies, such as Comcast, have a stake in the future of pornography broadcasting. Big companies means a lot of money, which means highly paid lawyers and an uphill battle for Ashcroft and his cronies. It will be interesting to see just how far President George W. Bush will let Ashcroft take his crusade; after all, Comcast President Stephen Burke has agreed to raise at least \$200,000 for the president's re-election campaign.

ASUO Board vies to build voter appeal

ASUO Executive hopefuls will square off in a battle of political wits tonight, with candidates debating who among them is most fit to administrate the University's student body government in 2004-05. After two-minute opening statements, the ASUO Elections Board-hosted debate proper will start with questions from two pre-selected ASUO groups, and then move to general audience questions.

However, those groups — which aren't necessarily student groups, ASUO Elections Coordinator Stephanie Day noted — won't be named until the event itself, to stave off solicitation from candidates.

But any hypothetically approached group representative could always simply say, "No." With that simple caveat in mind, there's little reason to hide the group's identities from prior student body review. Such openness is all the more important because the groups chosen "best represented the University campus," Day said — a tall order for a diverse population of some 20,000 students.

Still, aside from this and elections scheduling problems, the Elections Board's efforts this year deserve some applause: With Monday's and today's candidate fair, and offering crowd-pleasing pizza before tonight's debate, this year's Board is doing more than some of its predecessors to culture more student interest in elections that have long suffered from low turnout.



Steve Baggs Illustrator

UP IN *smoke*

In Eugene, everybody gripes about housing codes. We want housing codes so our dishwashers won't make the dishes dirtier and our garbage disposals will actually dispose of our garbage.

But there's a little town in Italy that needs housing codes way more than Eugene does. The town of Canneto di Caronia, on the north coast of Sicily, needs housing codes like a whale needs water.

In Canneto, the appliances don't work. They blow up.

It all started in January, when the air conditioner in Antonio Pezzino's house burst into flames. That was no big deal. Maybe it was an electricity surge, or maybe a train was passing on the nearby tracks.

Pezzino is one of only 39 people who live in Canneto. Or, lived in Canneto. Soon, everybody was being visited by the appliance demon. Lamps and refrigerators burst into flames. Car alarms went batty. Cell phones, which barely worked before, really went on the fritz.

By mid-February, the entire town was evacuated and living in a nearby hotel. Police, electricity experts, geologists and even spiritual experts parked on Canneto's one *strada*, or street. Satellite trucks and seismic-reading devices turned the town into what seemed like a movie set.

Still, nobody could find the answer. "Someone wrote to us, saying the solution was to sacrifice a black goat and collect its blood," Canneto Mayor Pedro Spinnato told Reuters news service. "At some point, that's going to start looking like a good idea."

The utility company shut off the town's power in January, but it didn't help. They tried to hook up the town to a generator, but the generator exploded, too.

Looking for answers, the town bigwigs even called in Massimo Polidoro, the head of Italy's Committee for the Control of Paranormal Claims. Polidoro officially nixed the demon explanation.



Peter Hockaday
 Today is Hockaday

"The fact that the phenomenon occurs only when there are people present makes it hard to believe that it is a natural, or even supernatural, phenomenon," he told Reuters.

That helps. Finally, by the end of February, the fires stopped. The town residents got excited about the possibility of moving back into their homes.

But then they started again, worse than before. An apartment went up in flames. More appliances combusted. Police held onto the theory that a pyromaniac was starting the fires. Until, that is, a power line went up in smoke.

Canneto residents are still holed up in the hotel. People have theories. They think it could have something to do with power lines near the train tracks. They think it could be natural surges of electricity welling up from the earth's core.

"I just want to go home," Canneto resident Rosi Cioffo told Reuters. "I don't know what's causing it and I don't care anymore, even if it's the devil."

So, the next time your washing machine turns your favorite shirt pink or your freezer melts your ice cream, think about the people of Canneto. Think about the possibility of sitting in the Eugene Hilton while the town around you is shrouded in darkness, save for the occasional fireworks when Johnny's microwave bursts into flames.

Think about that the next time you complain about housing standards.

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

ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald runs an online poll and publishes the results, along with next week's question, in this space.

Visit <http://www.dailymerald.com> to vote.

Last question: Will you be voting in the ASUO primary election this year?

Results: 31 votes

- Yes — I support the democratic process: 41.9 percent or 13 votes.
- No — Why waste my time? 35.5 percent or 11 votes.
- Yes — So few people vote that I know my vote will count: 12.9 percent or four votes.
- No — I don't know enough about the issues: 9.7 percent or three votes.

This week's question: What should the U.S. military's next steps in Iraq be?

Choices: Bush's cease-fire proposal; Send more troops and continue with current strategies; Pull out ground troops and use long-range tactics like bombing from the air; Ask for more assistance from the United Nations; Surrender.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Iraq occupation similar to American Revolution

There once was a corrupt and hypocritical society that had race-based slavery, a government controlled by the wealthy elite, and a policy of denying women basic human rights. That flawed society waged war against a great imperial power that thought it knew best about what was good for the corrupt society. The insurgents didn't care what the colonial power thought and felt that no matter how bad their own society was, it was better than being ruled by outsiders. Thus the American Revolution succeeded and thus the American occupation of Iraq will fail.

Christopher Calder
 Eugene