

Tuesday, July 6, 2004

EDITORIAL

Saddam's trial is censored suspiciously

The United States has doled out more ammunition for those who continue to take aim at the legitimacy of Saddam Hussein's trial.

Much of the video and audio of Saddam's first public trial appearance Thursday was censored by the U.S. military, according to news reports, adding fuel to the belief that the judicial drama is nothing short of a kangaroo court engineered by the United States.

Before the trial, U.S. officials told media not to take footage of Iraqi guards or court personnel, according to a www.variety.com article.

This is probably fair, given that there are valid concerns that insurgents may target those involved in the trial, but, according to the article, U.S. officials heavily censored audio of the trial, forcing crews to turn off some of their equipment and to delete sound and video.

The Christian Science Monitor also reported that "most of the audio track was initially deleted and the images carefully screened" by U.S. military censors.

According to the www.variety.com article, media outlets agreed to let the military censor their audio and video. Not only does this reflect the media's willingness to cave in and abandon any leverage they may have had over the trial coverage, but it sets a dangerous precedent, sending a clear message to the military that the ball is in its court and negotiating access to information is unnecessary.

That the government is engaging in this sort of heavy-handed censorship should draw concern. If it were purely for the security of those involved in the trial, then, clearly, the censorship of audio of Saddam speaking would not be necessary.

But, there may be another, more dastardly reason.

On July 3, the Associated Press reported that interim Iraqi prime minister Iyad Allawi earlier suggested closing the trial to keep Saddam from talking about "embarrassing links with past governments," such as Iraq's close ties with the United States during Iraq's war with Iran. (Notably, Iraq deployed chemical weapons during the war.)

But, whatever its reason for the censorship, the U.S. government needs to quit attempting to force the media to turn out what is de facto propaganda by omission and let them do their job. The military so desperately wants to make the trial and the power handover appear legitimate, but the answer is right below its nose, and within its control.

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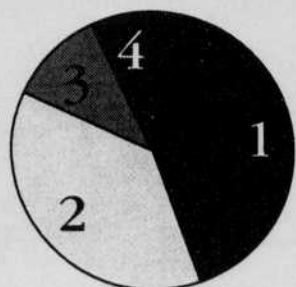
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ONLINE POLL

THIS WEEK'S POLL RESULTS



Is it fair that conservative special interest groups are trying to help Ralph Nader get on the Oregon ballot? (27 votes)

1. Yes - They are not breaking any laws, so who cares? 44 percent
2. No - It undermines the spirit of democracy 37 percent
3. Yes - They want their candidate to win and they are doing everything they can to ensure it 11 percent
4. No - It is unethical for them to try to hijack Nader's campaign 7 percent

NEXT WEEK'S QUESTION

What is your favorite hangover remedy?

- Cactus juice
- Greasy breakfast
- Coffee/Cola
- Hair-o'-the-dog (keep drinking)
- Don't drink in the first place
- Herbal supplements

Interesting rates



J. TOBIAS MONTRY
STOP BREEDING

Every once in a while I feel it necessary to stop what I'm doing, walk onto my front porch and scream "Congress, are you on crack?!" up toward the heavens. Lately, however, I've been directing my inquiries toward the ground, for obvious reasons.

Case in point: The latest in an unending effort to screw college students in this country is House Resolution 4283, the so-called "College Access and Opportunity Act," which is so laughably corrupt that it would astound Richard Nixon himself.

At its face, the bill seems like a gift from all the rich men up in the House Education and Workforce Committee who, as we all know, have such a bleeding heart for the penniless college grad struggling to find a job in the face of staggering unemployment rates. But one clause in the bill — the one that would repeal the ability for graduates to lock their consolidated loans into a fixed interest rate — should concern any college student.

See, all the wonderful financial aid loans that students receive will inevitably be a monetary black hole for years after college. To make the repayment period easier, though, Congress passed legislation years ago that would allow graduates to switch from variable to fixed interest rates on loans. That way, graduates could pack all their debt into one consolidated loan via a business such as Sallie Mae, lock in a set interest rate for the life of the loan (right now the interest rate is at a record low), and then pay the company back for the consolidated loan, either to reduce monthly payments or reduce the total payment.

What resulted was less burden on the graduate while he or she tried to find a job and start a career. What also resulted was the federal government losing billions in interest at the expense "America's future." Now, that fixed-rate plan is under attack by the vultures in Washington.

It's easy to blame Congress for simply having a bad idea. It would be nice to say, "Yeah, the lawmakers just got it wrong"

and keep a straight face. But it's not possible anymore. Look a little deeper into the motivations of the new plan and you will see the cold, hard truth.

Here goes: Sallie Mae, arguably the largest student-loan corporation, is lobbying heavily for the bill, saying subsidies for college graduates should instead be used to help potential undergraduates get into college. Aw, how sweet. Corporate America DOES care! It cares about that, and the millions that major loan companies stand to gain if students repaying consolidated loans are forced to cough up more for longer periods of time.

Anyway, continuing: Republican Rep. John Boehner of Ohio, the chairman of the Education and Workforce Committee, received thousands from Sallie Mae for his re-election campaign to Congress, according to www.opensecrets.org. Holy credibility gap, Batman! Similarly, Democratic Rep. George Miller of California, the ranking minority leader on the Committee, received \$10,000 from Sallie Mae in 2004. Is it a coincidence that the two ranking members of the Committee were also the targets of such contributions? I think not.

This next part really tugs at the conspiracy-theory heartstrings, but bear with me. Sallie Mae, in defending its noble mission to save education from Communist college graduates, points to a study called "The Fiscal and Social Costs of Consolidating Student Loans at a Fixed Interest Rate." The study was conducted in part by Kevin Hassett of the American Enterprise

Institute, which has Harvey Golub, a former chairman and CEO of American Express, on its board of trustees. American Express, as it turns out, is also a major contributor to Boehner. D'oh!

So, let's review. We know the political motivations for the bill (money), and we know the Institute's motivations for the bill (money), but what's in it for Sallie Mae? Would a corporation focusing on the bottom line really be concerned that future student borrowers need more money? Perhaps, but the Public Interest Research Group has another theory. The group says the bill will discourage lenders from seeking out competitors of Sallie Mae. That is, if this bill passes, loan consolidation will become more expensive, especially with the bill's proposed increase in the interest rate cap from 6.8 percent to 8.25 percent. Consolidating with different lenders would therefore become unattractive, leaving one particular leading traditional lender with a whole lot more business (it starts with S and ends with allie Mae).

Sure, the bill is great for the federal government, which would save \$20 billion on the backs of college students. And it's great for major loan corporations, which would face less competition and more business. But what does the bill mean for us? According to the Congressional Research Service, interest on an average \$17,000 loan would more than double, meaning the average student would shell out about \$5,500 more.

Not that politicians really give a damn. In the off chance that a student makes it through the under-funded public K-12 system, and somehow manages to face skyrocketing tuition increases and make it through college, this bill will give that student another thing to enjoy: Finding a job in this economy and paying back more money for longer periods of time!

See, it's good to be a student in America.

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Court should keep porn from children

(U-WIRE) Blacksburg, Va. — On the still-smoldering heels of the Janet Jackson mammary-revealing Super Bowl escapade and Howard Stern's never ending expletive-laced comments and subsequent fines by the FCC, the Supreme Court has taken it upon itself to take a step backward in the fight to protect children and other unsuspecting innocents from unwanted invasion of moral decency.

In a 5-4 vote June 29 over a law passed in 1998, the majority ruled that the Child Online Protection Act, signed during President Clinton's administration and supported by the current Bush administration,

GUEST COMMENTARY

was a violation of the First Amendment. Simply put, the pornographers who push their obscene material upon unsuspecting web-surfing children are well within their right to do so under the First Amendment.

I don't deny that pornography is legal and enjoyable for adults, but it is clearly indecent for children under a certain age.

We've heard the stories before, about how if you type ".com" instead of ".gov," or omit a letter or a backslash, you'll end up at a XXX site with ubiquitous pop-up ads. Of course, these are pure accidents in some cases, but there are pornographers who prey on the children out there who make innocent mistakes in their typing of Web sites. The COPA was out to punish those who took advantage of the youngsters' mistakes, and now we'll have to wait even longer to see justice done.

It's not that I think pornography itself is inherently wrong or even subject to the First Amendment, but I have a problem when it is placed in front of someone who couldn't tell you what the First Amendment is. To this end, we need to apply John Stuart Mill's Harm Principle when dealing with issues of this nature. Mill stated that we should be allowed to freely express ourselves as long as no other individual or their property is harmed by our expression. In this columnist's view, all we're doing is harming the youngest generation of Americans by allowing indecent materials into the homes of children who are at the most impressionable stages of their lives.

In light of the COPA, I don't think it's an

unreasonable request to have adults who want to view pornographic Web sites and content identify themselves as, in fact, adults who are old enough to do so. We are carded at movie theatres and rental places so that we're able to view R and NC-17-rated movies, why not do the same sort of online check for obscene sites?

The American Civil Liberties Union claims that the suppression of some pornography online is a violation of the First Amendment, but why aren't they arguing about movie theatres and video stores and the discrimination made against people who aren't old enough to see movies that have a certain rating? In fact, why should pornography be treated any differently than a movie in terms of restriction to a certain viewing audience, online or otherwise?

I'm a staunch advocate of the First Amendment, but even the most intrinsic rights and liberties have to come with a little censorship at times -- and pornography in the hands of children is one of those times.

Jeff Ferguson
The Collegiate Times (Virginia Tech)