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■ In my opinion

Tyranny of the few



DAVID JAGERNAUTH
CRITICAL MASS

The recent attack on the Oregon Commentator by the Programs Finance Committee should remind us all that, while we need to ensure that minority groups are protected from the will of the majority, there are times when the reverse is true and the rights of the majority need to be protected from the agenda of a small minority.

A note of caution: The "tyranny of the few" argument is often misused, like when conservatives argue that same-sex marriage is an attack on their rights as heterosexuals. This argument might hold water if gay and lesbian activists were advocating mandatory homosexuality. Until that day, it is nothing more than a lie.

What I am talking about is real tyranny from the few, and nowhere is this more evident than in the U.S. government's current war against indecency. When one or two complaints from the overly sensitive public, or the politically motivated activist, can cause a single clueless bureaucrat to threaten our constitutional rights, then something is terribly wrong with the system. That is exactly what happened to the Commentator, and that is exactly what is happening to broadcast radio and television.

Indecency complaints are up dramatically at the Federal Communications Commission. In 2002, the FCC received 14,000 complaints. In the following year, that number leapt to more than 240,000. FCC Chairman Michael Powell has used this spike to argue for more severe indecency laws; after all, the public is obviously clamoring for them. Right?

No so fast. According to Media Week, somewhere in the neighborhood of 99.8 percent of FCC complaints have come from a single

source: the Parents Television Council, a conservative activist group.

PTC was created in 1995 "to ensure that children are not constantly assaulted by sex, violence and profanity on television." Its Celebrity Advisory Board is filled with people you've never heard of and Pat Boone. In addition to other things, the board comes out with a list of the best and worst television shows of the week. In the best category: "Joan of Arcadia," "A Clay Aiken Christmas" and everything on PAX. In the worst category: "Will and Grace" (obviously), "Friends" and everything on MTV.

PTC members scan the airwaves for anything they deem indecent and then spam the FCC with complaint letters. For example, the FCC proposed a \$1.2 million fine for the show "Married by America" after it received 159 complaints. The show had a national audience of more than 5 million. Turns out those complaints came from 23 individuals, and all but four complaints were identically worded. A handful of fundamentalists are dictating what is decent for 5 million satisfied (albeit moronic, but nevertheless satisfied) customers.

The problem extends much further than the boob tube. The extreme Christian right is changing all aspects of this country based on a moral system not shared by the

majority of Americans. Its supreme guidance has led to more government intrusion into our private lives. The freedom to decide ethical matters has been increasingly taken out of our hands. We are now told what is right and true from a religious plurality in Washington. The lack of choice in our personal lives — from what we can say to what relationships we can form to how we can seek pleasure and happiness — is a trend that leaves the majority of Americans disturbed.

For example, over-the-counter sale of the morning-after pill Plan B was blocked by the Federal Drug Administration after conservative and religious groups argued that easier access to the drug would encourage young girls to have sex, an argument made about all forms of contraception. But a new study by the University of California concluded that the groups' fears are completely baseless and that easier access to the morning-after pill could safely reduce unwanted pregnancies. Unfortunately, in this day and age, religious delusions are more powerful than sound science.

Conservatives are a minority group on this campus, and their voices need to be protected. Those offended by the content of the Commentator are also in the minority. Appealing the latter minority group against the majority, and muzzling the minority conservative voice on campus, is far from a progressive act. The same can be said for the war against indecency. At the end of the day, freedom and choice is best for everyone, and judgment as to what is decent and moral should be left to individuals, not government committees, to decide.

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INBOX

Lack of election integrity threatens democracy

I believe that it was the moral duty of all of our senators and representatives to take a stand and not certify the election results. Why? Because this was an election which: (a) is not only completely unverifiable, but (b) is unverifiable in light of continuously mounting evidence of fraud and voter suppression, (c) has at least three lawsuits pending regarding the lack of integrity of Ohio's election procedures, and (d) given how suspect it is, will undermine both the American public's faith in democracy and America's credibility with the rest of the world, if allowed to move forward unchallenged.

In short, no one (never mind a public official) can, in good conscience, certify the accuracy of something that dubious without first

double-checking the results, a task which is now impossible.

Every patriotic citizen should be concerned about this, too. Election integrity is not a partisan issue. If we don't have fair and accurate elections we don't have democracy, no matter what your party. And without democracy we don't have America. All elected officials who didn't fight for the founding principles of our country don't deserve to serve in public office.

Erica Bolliger
Portland

OSPIRG launches local, international campaigns

Thank you for including the Oregon Student Public Interest Resource Group's international campaign work in your Jan. 4 article, "Tsunami affects hearts, minds in

Eugene." OSPIRG is generally regarded as a locally minded group, and I applaud your efforts to include our tsunami relief campaign in your article. In addition to working on this campaign, we will be leading a huge campaign to protect the McKenzie watershed (along with our drinking water) from logging efforts, working to reduce the costs of textbooks and, as always, fighting hunger and homelessness in the Eugene area.

If students are interested in getting involved with our Students for Tsunami Relief campaign, or any of our other campaigns, I would encourage them to come to our general interest meeting on Jan. 12 at 5:30 p.m. to learn about and get involved in our campaigns.

Stephanie Erickson
Eugene

■ Out loud

"Political courage is not political suicide. Ignore the lobbyists. Ignore the politics. Trust the people." — Republican governor **Arnold Schwarzenegger** on Wednesday in his State of the State address.

"We know people just want less spam." — **John O'Rourke**, senior director of Microsoft's consumer strategy division, on Wednesday about concerns from Internet users.

"To allege that the 2,000 Americans working here are conspiring in an effort to abuse or torture the men under our charge is foolishness." — Guantanamo's commanding **Army Brig. Gen. Jay Hood** on Wednesday about suspected prisoner abuse by U.S. soldiers at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba.

"Do not use for personal hygiene." — Warning label on a toilet brush that won **Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch's** contest for the wackiest consumer warning label of the year.

"Thank God he's come. Thank God." — **Mohamed Bachid Madjid**, a resident of Jakarta, Indonesia, about Secretary of State Colin Powell's visit as he looked from a bridge into the Aceh River, where two bloated corpses floated in the aftermath of December's tsunami.

"Boo!" — **More than 72,000 fans** at the Orange Bowl after Ashlee Simpson's halftime performance.

"The Supreme Court a long time ago turned into an organ that just takes politically oriented decisions." — **Taras Chornovil**, losing Ukraine presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovich's campaign manager, arguing that the election be declared invalid because of massive fraud.

"You'll always know where I'm coming from." — Eugene City Mayor **Kitty Piercy** on Monday at her first State of the City address.

"In our eyes, we don't need money. We don't need formal recognition to do the things we do." — **Gary Blackwell**, Portland Student Action Council interim president, on building a student advocacy group at Portland State University.

"Tsunamis cross entire ocean basins. If something happened in the Philippines, we'd have 10 hours of warning." — **Ray Weldon**, University professor of geological sciences, on the possible impact of a tsunami on the Oregon coast.

"One of the outstanding concerns for us is, 'Where are the photographs?'" — **Anne Leavitt**, University vice president for student affairs, on Dec. 8 about missing photos of as many as 200 children photographed at University child care facilities by a man who has since been charged with aggravated incest."

"Legal positions that you have supported have been used by the administration, the military and the CIA to justify torture and Geneva Convention violations by military and civilian personnel." — **Sen. Edward Kennedy** (D-Mass.) to Attorney General nominee Alberto Gonzales during his confirmation hearing.

"Some of us feel it sends the message that the purpose of this retreat was not fulfilled." — ASUO Public Relations Director **Nathan Strauss** about repaying funds from an Oct. 10 retreat where ASUO attendees drank alcohol and smoked marijuana.

"We never really had a policy," University Vice President for Administration **Dan Williams** on the University's new bad weather policy and the previous lack of procedures for inclement weather.

— Gathered from **The Associated Press** and Oregon Daily Emerald news reports

OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

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