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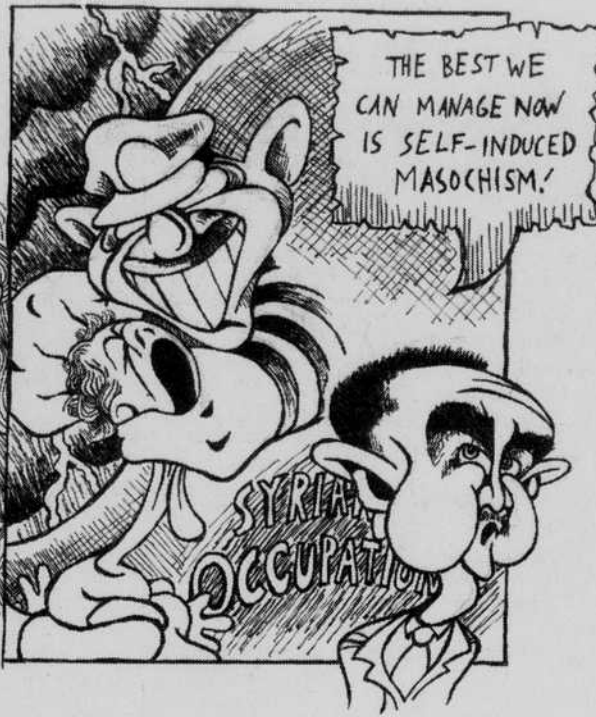
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US? ASSASSINATE THE
LEADER IN LEBANON?
THAT WOULD BE LIKE
SUICIDE FOR US...



BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

■ In my opinion

Beat the parents?

Valerie Thompson of Utah has a daughter with severe diabetes. Her little girl is susceptible to illness, often hospitalized and has to wear an insulin pump. Now she has to live with the knowledge that her mother was thrown in jail. Thompson was sentenced to two days of jail time and a \$500 fine because her daughter missed too many days of school because of her illness.

Jailing parents for their children's truancy is one of the more disturbing trends in the fight to improve our schools, which has been on the rise since No Child Left Behind came into effect. In order to be competitive, schools need to raise their test scores, and the best way to do that is to make sure kids show up for class. In the past few months, 34 people were arrested in Michigan, New Mexico and Tennessee because their children were absent so often. While most of these parents were not thrown behind bars, they did face fines and were sentenced to community service.

For younger children especially, parents have the biggest effect on attendance. About 60 percent of Tennessee's school attendance officers point to neglectful parents as the leading cause of truancy. However, by trying to punish the parents, schools are often passing the buck. Social workers are overloaded, parents are not contacted when their children are absent, and many have accused the system of being racially biased — allowing white students to skip class without penalty while coming down hard on black families.

In my own school, there were many ways of beating the system. One guy I know checked off that his parents only spoke Spanish on his registration form, resulting in his parents picking up a phone only to hear a spew of language they didn't understand. Another friend



JENNIFER MCBRIDE
QUASHING DISSENT

gave the phone number of a church as his contact number. Of course, the automated message couldn't understand the priest's reply that he had no children, being celibate and all. I preferred the old fashioned method of intercepting every phone call made to my house, or saying the teachers must have missed me sitting in the back, which happened quite often because I am the quiet, mousy type.

It's not as if children who skip class are automatically doomed to failure, so any kind of criminal punishment for a parent seems a bit extreme. Despite my skipping, I turned out to be a quite normal human being ... well, more or less.

While two days of jail time may not sound like much, there have been worse punishments. The American Civil Liberties Union reported that in Brewster, Ala., a parent was sentenced to 60 days in jail for not keeping children in school. Permanent arrest records have far-reaching implications. Jail time threatens a parent's employment and community standing and, depending on the state, can put parents under statutes that prevent them from voting.

Jailing only happens in rare cases, but I feel uneasy leaving a weapon of such magnitude in the hands of school officials who are often influenced more by political pressure than a child's well-being. It also makes me uneasy that the courts have almost without exception gone after mothers for truancy charges.

Furthermore, throwing parents in

jail may not even work. Kary Moss, director of the ACLU in Michigan, said, "The problem here is motivating children, and I don't believe throwing their parents in jail will accomplish that."

Statistics suggest mixed results. In Citrus County, Fla., a county leading the way in parental-arrest rates, truancy rates dropped between 10 percent and 16.3 percent since 1997, according to The Christian Science Monitor. However, in the United Kingdom, increased prosecutions, fines and an anti-truancy campaign costing millions of dollars did not stop children from "bunking off." It is likely we will never find out how successful such laws are because it will be difficult to prove that jailing parents is the cause of any drops in absence rates.

And where will this end? Laws blaming parents for choices made by children can only snowball into the preposterous. Should my parents go to jail if I choose to use drugs? Should my parents go to jail if I participate in underage drinking? Should my parents go to jail if they forget to make sure I flossed my back teeth?

One day, we will decide that parents are responsible for all our problems, from the neurotic to the physical. On that day, we will abolish the family and declare parents obsolete. The breast of the mother becomes the breast of the state. I can't wait for the pod beds and the mandatory abstinence education preached from loudspeakers in the cafeteria. I can only hope that the uniforms they make our descendants wear will be sexier than the traditional Trekkie gray jumpsuits, because no daughter of mine will ever be caught dead in polyester. Not even when I'm in prison.

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■ Editorial

ASUO acts properly in Constitution Court case

The news Monday that the ASUO Constitution Court ruled to boot two members of the Programs Finance Committee, both who essentially declared themselves above the law at a Feb. 1 budget hearing for the Oregon Commentator, marked one of the first occasions that the editorial board could applaud the actions of a branch of the ASUO. The court has done right.

The court ruled that former PFC members Eden Cortez, Dan Kieffer and Mason Quiroz "acted in willful defiance of viewpoint neutrality," a response to Commentator Publisher Dan Atkinson's petition filed Feb. 7.

The final judgment removes Quiroz from the PFC and Cortez from the PFC and the ASUO Student Senate. The action also affirms Kieffer's resignation — thankfully, he already left his PFC post last month.

In his writing for the court, Chief Justice Randy Derrick stated that Cortez had said: "Of course we can look at content in determining a group's value. Otherwise this job could be done by robots." A statement Derrick wrote says this quote "clearly demonstrates that Cortez was considering content in his analysis of the Oregon Commentator outside of the bounds set by viewpoint neutrality."

Cortez told the Emerald he will appeal the decision by the end of the week, saying the court acted improperly by basing its ruling on a quote he claims he did not say during the meeting. He said he has reviewed minutes from the meeting and can verify an audience member made the statement, not he.

"That's a false statement to be making," he said. "To quote me on something (they) assume I said ... that's just giving wrong information from the Oregon Commentator's part to the Con Court."

Atkinson told the Emerald the statement is "not an exact quote," but said Cortez did say something to that effect. He said he specified in the petition that he wasn't quoting Cortez's exact words.

"I was just trying to recall my own experiences of the hearing," he said.

While we cannot deny that the court has made a sloppy error by falsely attributing a quote to Cortez, we must point out the blatantly obvious. In this case, Cortez's actions speak far louder than someone else's words.

In the meetings, Cortez willingly attempted to defund the Commentator on the basis of its content rather than its fiscal responsibility — he was the physical manifestation of the phrase "lack of viewpoint neutrality" — a point that the court has already made in the decision. Derrick stated that Cortez erred because he "did not provide a budgetary rationale for disapproving the (Commentator's) budget."

If Cortez wants to appeal, he is more than welcome, but he would be wiser to take few shreds of dignity with him, leave his position and follow Quiroz and Kieffer out of the ASUO.

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