

The Behrend College Beacon

published weekly by the students of Penn State Erie, The Behrend College

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Postal Information: The Beacon is published weekly by the students of Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, First Floor, The J. Elmer Reed Union Building, Station Road, Erie, PA 16563. The Beacon can be reached by calling (814) 898-6488 or (814) 898-6019 (FAX). ISSN 1071-9288.

Letter Policy: The Beacon encourages letters to the editor. Letters should include the address, phone number, semester standing and major of the writer. Writers can mail their letters to behrcoll2@aol.com. Letters must be received no later than 5pm Tuesday for inclusion in that week's issue.

A view from the lighthouse

Extra computers alleviate crowding problem



The computers on the first floor of the Reed Building have proved to be extremely popular with students. They are in use well until late at night and are often very crowded in the day.

Needless to say, they have at least helped to relieve crowding at the computer lab. Students can now surf the web and check their email outside of the lab, which opens up computers for those who need to write papers or work on projects.

If this could be duplicated in other buildings, it would further alleviate crowding in the labs. The costs would be relatively low if they followed the same procedure as they did for the machines in Reed. Old computers that have been replaced still work very well for the internet and email.

If students could have access to these computers in Academic or Science or even in the residence halls, there would be much less complaint about lines in the labs. Also, there would be a greater convenience for students. Currently

there are computer labs located on each end of campus: in the library and in Hammermill. One of the reasons the computers in Reed are so popular is they are located in a central place where there are a lot of students.

Residence halls would be another extremely convenient place for these computers. If students could use these computers for the internet, there would be no need to use the machines in Hammermill or the library, which then could be used by students for their school work.

The growing population of Behrend means increased traffic in all of its facilities, including the computer labs. Student Affairs and the computer center have discovered a popular way to help decrease crowding in at least one part of campus.

Two weeks ago, as I sat down in Bruno's to eat my lunch and read *The Beacon*, as I do every Thursday around noon, one item in particular caught my attention. A headline in the lower right hand corner of the front page which read: "SGA postpones freshmen elections."

Now as a former SGA Senator and a former Co-Chairperson of the SGA Freshmen Elections Committee, I

However this is not the case as far as the two Freshmen Senate seats are concerned. These are not seats that became vacant due to resignation, impeachment, or death of anyone, but became vacant because the terms of office of the two previous individuals who occupied them expired.

Article VIII of the SGA Constitution flatly lays out the procedures and/or rules for electing two individuals to the two vacant Freshmen

ever nowhere in Article VIII or anywhere else in the SGA Constitution does it say that SGA has the right to cancel regularly scheduled student wide elections and choose from the candidates themselves.

So why then did SGA, "the voice of the students" by their own slogan, take the voice away from the students? SGA could make the argument that because outside student involvement with SGA is usually very minimal, as evident in last week's SGA student open forum in which, according to *The Beacon*, "none of the student body was present," that they would save a lot of time and money by choosing from the candidates themselves instead of holding a student-wide election in which voter turnout would probably be very low.

If this was their reason for taking the democratic process away the students at Behrend, it is total and complete nonsense. In nearly every presidential election, voter turnout is less than 50% of the population, while in midterm congressional elections voter turnout is as low as 35% of the population. Does this mean we should no longer hold elections for the president and congress? Should we instead allow a few elitists at the top of our government to choose for

us because the majority of American citizens are uninvolved? Maybe the Student Government Association should think about this.

Unfortunately my deadline for this column came before last night's SGA meeting. So I have no way of knowing if SGA, at last, held its so-called "elections" for the two Freshman Senator seats. If SGA again postponed its appointment of Freshmen Senators last night, I would encourage them to forego the idea of selecting the candidates within SGA and hold a campus wide election at the earliest possible convenience to elect the SGA Freshmen Senators.

If SGA did choose the Freshmen Senators last night, it is my opinion that their selections are invalid because they were not chosen in a campus-wide election, and are thus in gross violation of the SGA Constitution. SGA should then immediately apologize to the student body for this action, declare their selections void, and hold campus-wide elections at the earliest possible convenience.

I would encourage all those who read this column, especially freshmen, to tell their SGA representatives how you feel about them electing your representatives for you.

Testrake is a junior political science major. His column appears every three weeks in the Beacon.

So why then did SGA, "the voice of the students" by their own slogan, take the voice away from the students?

thought this was quite odd. I said to myself, "those elections should have taken place a couple of weeks ago". However as I read on further into the article, one sentence in particular infuriated me. It read: "Members of the SGA will vote and choose two candidates for the two open positions".

Now I will be the first person to admit that if an SGA Senate seat becomes open during the course of the academic year due to resignation, impeachment, or death of a Senator, SGA most certainly has the right to choose a person to fill its vacancy.

Senate seats. Under Section 1 it states: "Elections for the Freshman Senators shall be held before the end of the fifth week of the Fall semester." While Section 3 goes on to say: "All elections shall be held on two consecutive days." And Section 4 states: "All full-time students shall be eligible to vote for the Student Senate and SGA officers... During the Fall semester, students of first semester standing shall be eligible to vote for the two Freshman Senators." Finally Section 10 states: "A minimum of ten (10) votes is needed to be elected to any SGA office." How-

One Flew Over the Albatross' Nest

ANNE RAJOTTE

Death of gay student reflects attitudes of America

Matthew Shepard, the gay University of Wyoming student who was brutally beaten and tortured a week ago, died early Monday morning.

Once again the issue of rampant homophobia in the United States has to be brought into the spotlight by means of an act of violence. College campuses all over the United States deal with hate crimes, and Penn State is no exception. Even Behrend, where no act of violence against gays has been reported in recent years, has its share of anti-gay students.

The Trigon mailbox in the SGA office is regularly graffitied with anti-gay comments. Last year's Safer Sex Cabaret was criticized for its inclusion of gay sex in its discussion of safer sex.

The attitudes at Behrend are a reflection of the attitudes in the rest of the country. The United States Congress passed the Defense of Marriage

Act that would allow states to make same-sex marriages illegal even before they had a chance to fight for legality.

"Special rights," the battle cry of many anti-gay activists, simply don't exist.

This summer, members of the religious right launched a campaign against homosexuality, placing large ads in major newspapers featuring "reformed" gays and lesbians.

Southern Baptists have boycotted Disney for, among other things, sponsoring "Gay Day" at Disneyworld and extending spousal benefits to partners of gay and lesbian employees.

The list of assaults against gays and lesbians goes on and on.

As in many other states, there are no hate crime laws in Wyoming. The argument against hate crime laws is that these kind of laws give "special rights" to gays and other minorities.

"Special rights," the battle cry of many anti-gay activists, simply don't exist. If anything it is straight people who have the special rights. It is straights who take for granted rights such as employment, housing, public accommodations and credit. Gays cannot take these rights for granted, because they aren't always guaranteed these things.

Numerous campaigns and voter initiatives have been launched to create or reverse gay rights laws. Last January, Maine voters overturned a law created to guarantee gays and lesbians equal access to basic rights such as employment and credit. Several

states have also had initiatives that would prohibit gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools.

The last accepted American prejudice is still strong, as Matthew Shepard's tragic and premature death has shown. There is already a call from gay rights activists for a federal law on hate crimes. Although it is hoped that this would happen, the history of hate crime in the United States shows that it is likely that it will not.

Despite the horrific circumstances of this crime there will still be those crying that a law against hate crimes will be special rights. How many people have to be assaulted or killed until it is realized that hate crimes laws are not a special right?

Rajotte is editor in chief of the Beacon. Her column appears every three weeks.

Public Figures, Private Lives and Tough Choices for Reporters

By Steve Weinberg
The Baltimore Sun

Media critics who say journalists have no business delving into the sex lives of Reps. Henry Hyde and Dan Burton are probably well-intentioned - but they're misguided about how and why investigative reporters do what they do. The controversy has led me to reflect not only on the current controversy but also on the difficult decisions I made a decade ago as the first independent biographer of business tycoon Armand Hammer, whose private life was messy, to say the least.

When a public official exercises influence over policy and, thus, over other people, that official should expect scrutiny of actions and words, of any discrepancy between performance in the public arena and behavior offstage. Journalists are not the only people capable of doing the scrutinizing. But because no one else has their job description, journalists have accepted the responsibility, sometimes reluctantly, sometimes eagerly.

Whether reluctant or eager, journalists must go through two states of decision-making. Not all of my colleagues agree, but I think the first stage ought to be automatic - learning as much as possible about the public official when a discrepancy seems likely. It is the vacuum-cleaner approach to information gathering: Sweep the carpet (and beneath the carpet), picking up as much as possible. It takes searching skills developed through experience to do the job well, but it should be seen as an ethics-free process.

The less automatic, ethics-laden part of the process comes next, as the vacuum cleaner bag is emptied. There

is no formula to arrive at the answer, no decision that will leave everyone content.

When the online magazine Salon published details earlier this month of Henry Hyde's 30-year-old extramarital affair, many news consumers - not all of them Democrats - applauded the decision. After all, they said, if a congressman is going to be sitting in judgment of a president because that president lied about extramarital sex, why not be alert for hypocrisy in the life of the person doing the judging?

Many other news consumers - not all of them Republicans - criticized the decision by Salon's staff. Hyde's conduct took place so long ago that it must be deemed irrelevant, the critics said, noting that at least several mainstream newspapers had decided to ignore the informant who eventually contacted Salon. Besides, Hyde's conduct is not the point - he has performed conscientiously in his job as a congressman, has earned his position as chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, and thus is qualified to judge whether Clinton should be censured, impeached or given alternative treatment.

To his credit, Salon editor David Talbot substantiated the details of Hyde's affair beyond a doubt before publishing. Justified ethically or not, the piece was solid. Then Talbot issued an extraordinarily detailed editorial explaining the decision to publish. The explanation, while unusually gutsy, also seemed obligatory. Why? Because of Salon's previous insistence that the private lives of public officials ought to be sacrosanct - a premise many, probably most, investigative journalists would dispute

if the private life influences public policy.

Talbot said Clinton's political opponents have made private behavior into a sweeping character issue. So, according to Talbot, "what holds true for President Clinton must hold equally true of the august figure who leads the committee sitting in judgment upon him." Conceding that Hyde never lied under oath about his sexual conduct, Talbot commented that "lying and having an affair can't be separated. To have an affair is by definition to lie about it - an affair is a lie."

Such a lie does not disqualify Hyde, or Clinton, from fitness to hold public office, Talbot said. I disagree; people who hurt others with lies ought to be turned out by their constituents. In hindsight, would anybody dispute the wisdom of the Miami Herald's controversial decision more than a decade ago to reveal the lies told by former Sen. Gary Hart about his sex life while trying to win the Democratic nomination for president?

The Herald's investigation told the citizenry something significant and enduring about Hart's character. But my disagreement with Talbot derives from my citizenship, not my vocation.

As an investigative reporter, I have struggled with how much unpleasant private information to publish. About a decade ago, I wrote the first independent biography of Armand Hammer: Occidental Petroleum Corporation chief executive officer, art collector, patron of cancer research, citizen-diplomat, a man of many accomplishments - and a habitual liar.

Although my publisher trumpeted the unauthorized nature of the biography on the cover over my protest, it was not a mostly negative book. I gave Hammer credit for his accomplishments in chapter after chapter. Many reviewers accused me of treating Hammer's life too gingerly.

I tried to treat his private life thoughtfully, judiciously - not gingerly. My agent and my editor, hoping for best-seller status, did nothing to discourage the inclusion of details about Hammer's sex life. I decided against publishing most of those details. Hammer was alive at the time. So was his son, two grandchildren, his third and longtime wife, and several of Hammer's alleged mistresses.

The revelations about numerous

nonsexual episodes in Hammer's life would have been painful enough to him and his family. Why cause additional pain when I could not clearly connect his sexual behavior with his public decision-making? Could I frame Hammer's private behavior as a character issue? Sure, I could have. Biography ought to be all about character. It seemed to me, however, that I could delineate his character without bringing most of the documented and rumored sexual activities into the book.

So I omitted everything I knew for sure, and nearly for sure, about the times he forced himself sexually on women. I omitted rumor and documented fact about an extramarital affair between the then-octogenarian

and a woman about half his age. Details of that affair, by the way, would be published after Hammer's death by a later biographer, as well as by many other journalists.

Maybe I made the correct ethical choices, maybe I did not. But I did not publish or withhold mindlessly. I used the vacuum-cleaner approach on information gathering - and then used the contents of the dirty bag judiciously after emptying it.

Media critics have every right to carp about journalists' publishing details about the sex lives of Congress members who are Clinton detractors. But those critics ought to recognize that journalists have a difficult job as they decide where to draw the line.

