

OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. - The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

All sex offenders are not created equal

By John Bigus
contributing writer
April 21, 2006

Two citizens of the state of Maine were murdered, on April 17th; they were sex offenders whose debt to society had been paid. They were punished again, this time with death, for crimes not yet committed by a vigilante who utilized the sex offender registry to track them down.

The sex offender registry should be abolished. It encourages recidivism; it is immoral, and its existence is not justifiable except by politicians who encourage ignorance of the reckless application of its branding power.

Recidivism is the likelihood of a criminal to reoffend. This may appear counterintuitive; however, most articles in my research have emphasized that ostracizing pedophiles increases their likelihood of recommitting. On the fringe of society and "showered with scorn" they will not reintegrate. More pressing, obviously, is that "sex offender" does not necessarily mean "pedophile," and in fact means very much the opposite in many exceptional circumstances. There has been more than one case of "that person who mooned the teacher" and "that guy who pissed outside while drunk" ending up on these lists. These citizens are highly unlikely to reoffend; in fact, the majority of actual sexual offenders are less likely to reoffend than the majority of other criminals.

The immorality of the act of revealing such private information about a citizen who has paid his or her debt lies in the definition of the debt. It has been established through several very thorough studies of tens of thousands of actual sex offenders that rates settle around thirty percent immediately alarming, but to this the Department of Justice has asserted that among real "sex crimes," and child molestation in particular, there is a low recidivism rate in compared to other criminal acts, with the high score granted to thieves recommitting felony larceny.

ny.

There are many cases that are not uniformly adjudicated because of overbroad and inconsistent definitions. Get rid of the cases where an eighteen year old sleeps with his or her seventeen year old significant other. Leave the guy whose one night stand changed her mind in the morning alone. Remove the laws that prevent "sex offender" parents from picking up children from daycare because they cannot come within two thousand feet.

With the act in question, the punishment, especially after jail-time, is open for consideration. There are other crimes with post incarceration penalties, but these penalties do not encourage vigilantism in the form of constant humiliation and punishment, identity theft or death. Offenders must inform their neighborhood of their status, and this invites unwarranted and misinformed retribution in most circumstances. Even the idea of a "murderer list" does not spark as much emotion, because of a common understanding of how muddy the moral waters are.

A lack of public understanding of the frivolity of the "sex offender" list's use is no justification for these blatantly un-American actions: in America, we do not punish pre-crime. Even ignoring inherent rights, the case is made by positive rights. Our court system is founded on the idea that we are all free citizens and as such we should not be subject to such ridicule, torture and death. I do not have a problem with private citizens exercising their rights to free speech. I have a problem with government sponsorship thereof. Harassment is still a crime. Murder is a crime.

Besides these incursions, pure retribution is intolerable because the case for pedophilia and other sexual deviancy being "incurable" does not exist. Provided treatment is effective at getting these people to redirect their urges to something more appropriate. This is common among anti-social disorders: it is not good practice to try and wipe all traces of anger from someone with a rage problem (this has been found to be counter-productive and impossible). Instead, we find

ways for people to deal with problems that are essentially beyond their control. There are obviously cases necessitating life sentences serial rapists and psychotics but these are in the minuscule minority.

I propose a system where one offense is punished normally, but a second offense might place one on the registry, if it must be kept. Another possibility is a system where offenders have the ability to make reparations to be removed from the list. Alternately, instead of a registry with names in it, use a system that says "there are this many sex offenders within this many miles," and include the crimes they committed. This way, people can take precautions without allowing vigilantes to hunt. The possibilities are infinitely negotiable and easily improve on current law.

Do we need it because of a lack of personal responsibility---do we need it as a reminder to not let children go to stranger's houses unsupervised? Is it that it is the right of the citizens to be warned if their neighbors are convicted sex-offenders? Why do they not have a right to know if their neighbor is an arsonist or car thief or murderer? They have a house and a car and a life.

Clearly, retribution is ineffective without rehabilitation; however, rehabilitation is insufficient without retribution. If we don't look to retribution at all, then nothing stops the government from forcibly treating or incarcerating citizens. There is a balance in law and in justice, which ought to be maintained by reasonable individuals aware of the consequences of current law and modern science.

A registry is only useful if what is on it is very narrowly defined so that it only includes definitely dangerous offenders. In that case it would have people worth watching out for. But honestly, this issue is so easily spun that nothing could happen anytime soon. They'd say "that man supports sex criminals, how could you vote for him? Think of the children!" Even in the face of exonerated, tortured free men.

The only response is, "I support the rights of every citizen of the United States of America."

Stop punching me, padiddles aren't funny

By Annie Sevin
editor in chief
January 20, 2006

My sister called me last Wednesday to ask if I had spoken to my mother that day. When I said that I hadn't, she told me I had better call her. Immediately I knew something was wrong, so I pressed my sister to tell me. I was expecting to hear bad news about my father because he's always in and out of the hospital for heart problems. However, she told me that our grandma had found a lump in her breast.

My grandmother is 83 years old; she's always been the sane constant in my life. She and I are very much alike; we're both very stubborn, and we both have a natural tendency to want to feed those who come into our homes. I love my grandmother very, very much, and news of the malignancy is just too overwhelming to think about.

However, there is something that I cannot stop thinking about: an event that happened just the day after I heard that my grandma was dying. A close friend of mine made a mini-website for me (or maybe it was about me, I'm not really sure; I didn't bother to ask). This friend knew that over winter break I had had a breast reduction (if you want to know why, read Michelle Vera Suroveic's article featured on page 8 of last week's Beacon).

Anyway, some other friends had nicknamed me "One Headlight" prior to the surgery in case the doctor screwed up. I thought the name was mildly

amusing, but my friend with the mini-website thought it was really funny because "one headlight" was the theme he fashioned the site after.

He used The Wallflowers song, "One Headlight," as background music for a still image of a naked woman with one breast. At first I was taken aback by the image. Then I realized the photo was of an elderly woman (shown from the waist to the neck) that appeared to be a victim of cancer.

The style of the photo looked like it had been taken for insurance purposes. I had similar photos taken before and after my surgery; having pictures of that nature taken is traumatic in and of itself. Seeing the exploitation of that cancer patient's photo was so unbearable I had to leave the room. I was so upset that I couldn't even think of what to say or shout at this friend who was under the impression that he had made an amusing site for people to gawk at.

And gawk they did. He didn't show the site to just me -- almost everyone who saw it thought it was just hilarious. I didn't tell them about my grandmother; I shouldn't have had to.

Penn State implemented a civility program last year that was meant to teach us more about being civilized people. I can clearly see that time and money has been wasted on that project. Some people can be inhumane monsters and not give a damn about who they hurt or offend as long as they get their jollies off in the process. That is not civility. And civility wasn't what my friend was practicing.

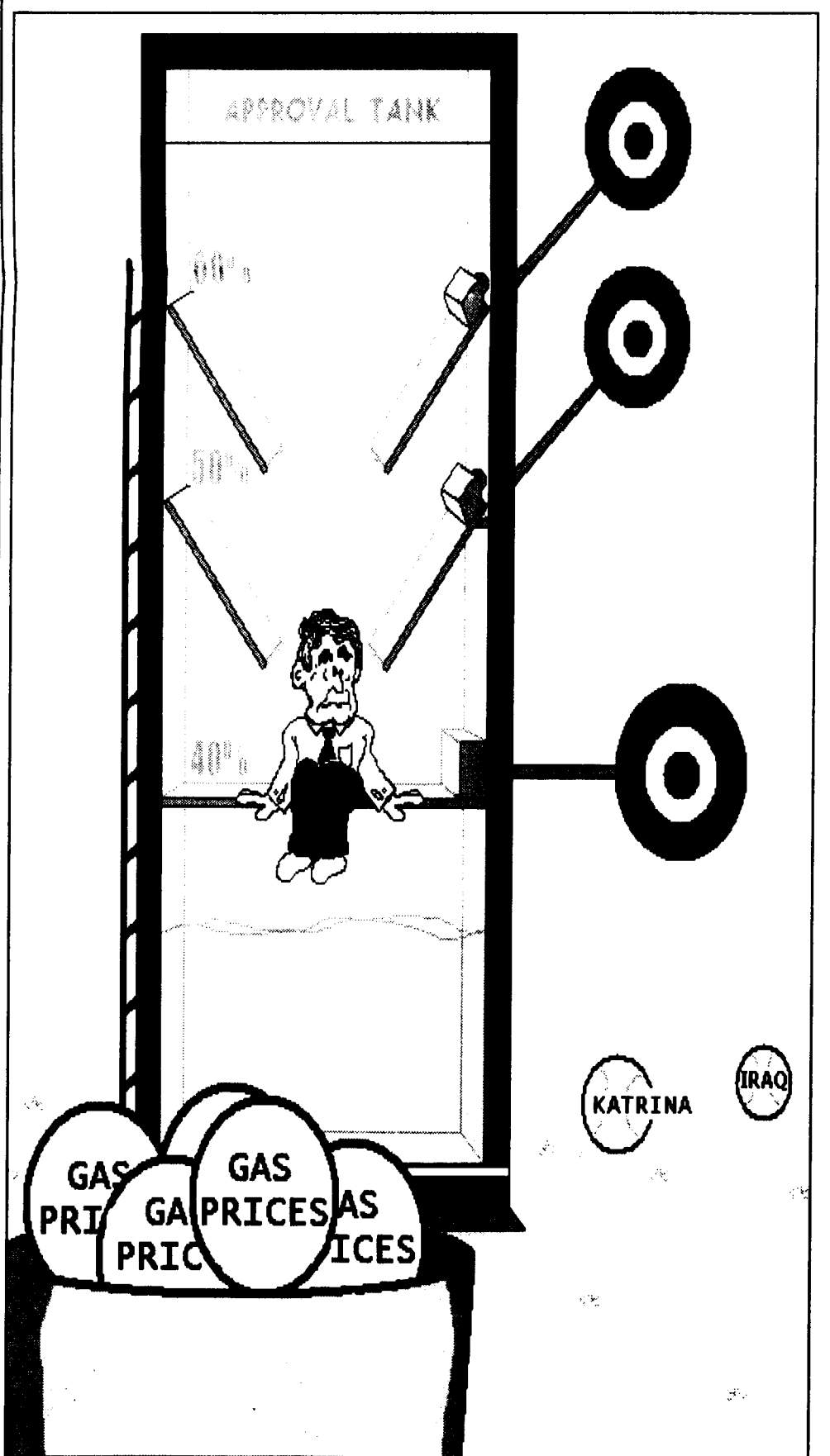
Behrend preaches peace between

different cultures and understanding or tolerating those who are different from you. It's hard to stomach the notion that disgusting acts like the one my friend committed are going unnoticed as acts of incivility. What he did wasn't peaceful. It wasn't a tool of understanding or tolerance. It was meant to be a "friendly" joke. It was meant to get a few laughs.

It turned out to be an abhorrent disfigurement of our friendship. This so-called funny gag was nothing if not cruel and unwarranted. Yes, this was an isolated incident, and it involved very few people, but things of this nature happen all the time - everywhere. The most unpleasant thing about that incident was that it happened between friends, not enemies. How are we, as young Americans, supposed to learn how to fix the problems in this world if we can't even learn to be civil and respectful to our friends?

I'm not one to tell people to tiptoe around others because they might get upset - I'm a journalist, it's my job to push buttons and make people uncomfortable. However, there are some situations that should be handled with a little more couth and class than was presented last Thursday. In short, all of us need to grow up, get cultured, be civilized and learn sensitivity!

When I was a senior in high school, my mother's best friend told me, "Sometimes in life, my dear, you must learn to suffer fools." There are enough fools and suffering in mine and my grandmother's world - don't make us suffer you, my friend.



What do we have to show for it?

By Chris Hvizdak
staff writer
December 9, 2005

Fall '05 has come, Fall '05 has gone. What does the Opinion page have to show for itself? We've approached a lot of diverse topics, from social and political issues to cheesesteaks and emo. We have given an awful lot of thumbs up and thumbs down. Many great and powerful persons have been quoted in our stylish quote section. I think you'll enjoy the dichotomy of our "Holiday Quotes" this week.

What haven't we done? We haven't received a great deal of feedback. Less than half a dozen letters and submissions have made it to the Opinion page from persons outside the Beacon. This from a college community of 3,700 people, according to Behrend's website. I've harped on this before, to little avail, and the lack of response doesn't bother me.

The lack of response to my frequent solicitations for participation from the Behrend community does; however, affirm many observations I can right make about Behrend, America and the US of

A in general. People don't care. That's a fact. Most people are simply absorbed in their day to day life and only get involved in something beyond themselves if it will yield a direct benefit to them, be it monetary, psychological, material, etc.

If you think otherwise, you're likely to be disappointed. Oh, of course some people legitimately care. But they're by far in the minority. If you're lucky, you'll be fortunate enough to encounter enough people who care to be capable of setting and accomplishing goals that require more than the dedication of one person. In my life, I have been this

fortunate. I'd say this gives me the credence to evaluate situations that lack people who care.

So what of the Beacon Opinion page and America? They both lack legitimate participation. Fortunately for you, it matters little whether the Beacon Opinion page is participated in. America is a different story. Unless people who legitimately care about engendering a tolerant nation that looks out for the best interest of all its citizens, we'll be perpetually worse off than we are now.