


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

The Behrend Beacon

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This Week in Politics

By Chris Brown
copy editor

On Dec. 19, while we were taking finals, Erie County Council decided to pass a smoking ban that goes into effect Feb. 17. The ban applies to all enclosed public areas, including bars. While I think it's a noble task to try and protect public health, this is not the way to go about it. If people felt so threatened by second hand smoke then non-smoking bars would be all the rage, except they don't exist and for good reason because, no one wants them. Also, I don't think the Council realizes the number of problems they just brought upon themselves. The ambiguous nature of the resolution ensures that almost no "Private Clubs" will be exempt from the ban and this will almost certainly not hold up in court. How is this going to be enforced anyway? Authorities can't even stop beer distributors and bars from serving minors something many would consider a far greater threat to public health.

President Bush announced his solution to the civil war in Iraq: an increase in the number of troops on the ground by over 20,000. But, the problem was never U.S. resolve in the fight to win, but Iraqi cooperation and their desire to be free and united. U.S. presence is the problem, not the answer. As long as U.S. forces stay on the ground...the more it fuels Sunni hostility toward Shiite collaborators. Were America not in Iraq, Sunni leaders could negotiate

and participate without fear that they themselves would be branded traitors and collaborators by their constituents," writes Nir Rosen, a Fellow at the New America Foundation.

Despite press statements saying otherwise I fail to see how this is not an extension of our current open-ended commitment. President Bush still hasn't placed a time-table on withdrawal which leaves us at the current predicament; the Iraqi military's reliance on American Forces as a crutch. Even if the troop increase solves the security issue, the Iraqi constitution leaves a majority Shiite population in control that will inevitably leave other groups on the fringes of political participation guaranteeing internal conflict for years to come. A democratic and pro-western Iraq is an unattainable goal at this point in the war. We've hurt our credibility enough already, the best thing we can do is leave Iraq, admit our mistakes, and start negotiating with its neighbors and the world for help in reducing conflict there.

This past week the Democrat controlled 110th Congress finished its first 100 hours in session. They succeeded in showing that Democrats would not repeat the same "do-nothing" attitude of last year's Republican controlled congress. The House of Representatives passed much of the Democrats' agenda including a bill to increase the minimum wage, a bill to decrease oil subsidies, and another bill that reduces the interest

rate on federally subsidized tuition loans for college students. While these bills still need to be reviewed in the Senate, this trend gives me hope for the future of congress as long as it is in the Democrats' hands.

On Tuesday, Jan. 23, President Bush gave the sixth State of the Union Address of his presidency. Each year it surprises me how few of my fellow classmates actually watched the speech despite their supposed strong feelings towards our current administration. The fact that you disagree with someone means they deserve your attention more, not less, because a better understanding of his position will ultimately result in a better understanding of your own personal views. This year's speech was especially unique and historic. It was the first time that Bush had to speak in front of a Congress with a majority of Democrats, one of the few times he actually has to speak in front of a hostile crowd, and the first time a woman Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) presided over the speech. While the policy goals in State of the Union Addresses are often more fantasy than anything else, I was shocked to hear Bush talk about domestic issues that he normally strays from; reduction of gasoline consumption and elimination of the federal budget deficit, a problem he helped create nevertheless. Only time will tell if any of these policy initiatives will come to fruition, but I'm not holding my breath.



Where's the security?

By Jessica Samol
staff writer

Federal Bureau of Investigation Officials (FBI) revealed this past week that U.S. forces found documents indicating another attack on U.S. soil by Al Qaeda. Intelligence officials said the documents revealed that members of Al Qaeda were planning to use student visas as a way to get potential terrorists into the U.S., the same method of entry used on 9/11. Officials also revealed that when the documents were found, immediate advisories were sent to state and local partners about the student visas.

With President Bush's idea of heightened U.S. security, one would certainly think that intelligence officials would have already traced the footsteps of how the 9/11 terrorists entered the U.S. However, now FBI officials said they are prompting universities to keep tabs on visiting students. This comes as a great relief to the American people, considering it is something that should have been taken care of five years ago!

It seems unbelievable that five years after the 9/11 attacks, the security of the American people appears to be nowhere near secure. The war in Iraq continues to

show no signs of progress, and no relief for the future of the United States. Innocent lives continue to be lost daily, yet President Bush announced his plans to send more than an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq to counteract the sectarian violence there.

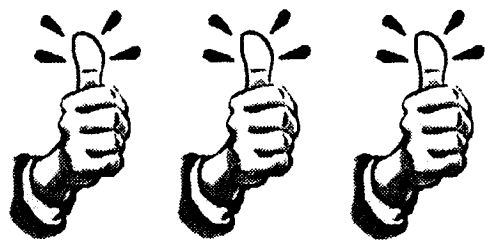
The war in Iraq is spiraling out of control; support continues to be lost for both the president and the war. Bush needs to take advice wherever he can get it. He needs to stop trying to control the security of the Iraqi people and start opening his eyes to realize how he is risking the security of the United States.

The war is becoming a war lost in translation; many Americans no longer understand what the United States is fighting for. Bush continues to say that he is trying to ensure the security of the American people, yet instances such as the current FBI report prove that he has made no progress in doing so.

With no end predicted for the war in Iraq, there will continue to be no sense of security for the American people. The idea of security being a shared destiny makes sense, but when it comes from Al-Zawahiri (Al Qaeda's No.2 man) and not President Bush, it questions what the U.S. is really trying to win.

Attention: I have an opinion page. You have opinions. We should talk. Email letters to the editor or opinion articles to jan219@psu.edu.

Beacon Thumbs Up



- It's actually snowing!
- Student loan interest rate decrease
- After-Christmas sales
- Smoking the hookah
- Open mic night at Bruno's

Beacon Thumbs Down



- Maybe it's snowing too much...
- Back-to-school time
- Trying to find a job
- Bad plowing in parking lots
- CDs too scratched to play



Have a Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down?

(check a box)



Submit it to the "Thumbs up-Thumbs Down" box at the RUB desk.

Submission Guidelines

The Beacon welcomes readers to share their views on this page. Letters and commentary pieces can be submitted by email to klk5005@psu.edu or directly to the Beacon office, located in the Reed Building.

Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries should be limited to 700 words. The more concise the submission, the less we will be forced to edit it for space concerns and the more likely we are to run the submission.

All submissions must include the writer's year in school, major and name as The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Deadline for any submission is 5 p.m. Tuesday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue. All submissions are considered, but because of space limitations, some may not be published.

The Behrend Beacon reserves the right to edit any submissions prior to publication.