

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

Vice President Dick Cheney visited Pakistan and Afghanistan last week in an attempt to bolster support for the war effort against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in the region. While staying at the Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, a suicide bomber staged an attack a mile away, killing 23 people, and the Secret Service ushered Cheney to safety. Hopefully it served as a wake-up call to the Vice President; if he and President Bush had not focused on the Iraq war at the expense of the 'real' war on terror in Pakistan and Afghanistan, then suicide bombers and a spring offensive wouldn't be an issue there anymore.

However, the more important story coming out of this trip provides real insight to the thinking, or lack thereof, of the Bush administration. The story I'm

talking about is the briefing to the press corps after Cheney's meeting with the President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf. The Bush administration refuses to discuss what was said in the meeting but many in the news media speculate that in usual Cheney fashion, Musharraf was subjected to a very stern warning by the Vice-President; after the meeting, the Pakistan government issued a statement rebuking the visit saying, "Pakistan does not accept dictation from any side or any source."

Of course the Bush administration denied this, but the way they denied these accusations highlights their relationship with the press and how it operates in a cloud of secrecy. When trying to discredit these claims, Cheney agreed to speak to the press, but only under the condition that he be quoted as a 'senior Bush Administration Official.' His plan might have worked, but while commenting to the press, he referred to himself in the first person. While speaking as the 'senior official,' Cheney said, "I've seen some press reporting that says Cheney went in to beat up on them, to threaten them, but that's not the way I work." In a press briefing today, White House Press Secretary Tony Snow refused to admit that the quote could be attributed to Cheney even after many news media reported the slip up by Cheney.

This is just one more instance in which the Bush Administration tried to sway

public opinion by intentionally leaking information or speaking anonymously (see pre-Iraq invasion intelligence). The reason he had to speak under a pseudonym is obvious. When a Vice-President goes on the record time and again telling the public we are winning in Iraq, something has to give and in this case it was his credibility. No one can give any legitimacy to him anymore and that forces him to pretend to be someone else when speaking to the press. If the people were skeptical of information coming from unnamed sources in the Bush administration, no one is going to believe them now.

This week the Bush administration announced that the United States would attend a mid-east conference that includes Iran and Syria. Topic of discussion: what to do about Iraq. This is the highest level talks between the United States, Syria, and Iran in more than two years. This seems to be a change in the Administration's refusal to negotiate with the two countries, but officials in the Bush Administration refuse to admit this. They maintain that they are not softening their stance because the US would only be 'observing' the talks. Why can't Bush just admit he made mistakes in Iraq? History would be much kinder to him if he could show that he has learned from his mistakes instead of trying to convince the public this has been his plan all along.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

If Liz can write about her random thoughts during class, I figured I could write a random rebuttal to an article from last week's *Beacon*. I know many of you think NASCAR is a boring redneck sport, so I'll get that out of the way first. In last week's paper, Danielle Brown writes, "several Toyota cars were accused of having a foreign substance in their engines that was supposed to help enhance their performance." This is simply not true. Not only was Michael Waltrip's #55 Toyota the only Toyota found with the illegal oxygenating substance, but was the only Toyota that failed pre-race inspection. Following Brown's paragraph that "several Toyota cars had a foreign substance," she continues on to state that, "NASCAR suspended the crew chiefs for Matt Kenseth, Kasey Kahne, Scott Riggs and Elliot Sadler," implying that these drivers drive for

Toyota. Actually, Kenseth drives a Chevrolet and the others drive Dodges.

The article then quotes Brian Kundrod, who states "NASCAR is an American sport, and American cars should be the only ones allowed to drive." Dodge, a branch of Germany's Daimler-Chrysler, is currently no more American than Toyota. And ironically, the Toyota Camry is the only car featured in NASCAR that is made in America. The Ford Fusion is made in Mexico, the Chevy Monte Carlo and Dodge Charger in Canada, and the Toyota Camry in Georgetown, Kentucky, right here in the good ole US of A. Toyota has already been accepted and embraced in the Craftsman Truck Series, especially after dominating last year's season. I am confident that the Nextel Cup will follow suit and will come to accept that Toyota is here to stay.

-Patrick Krott
English

Need an extra-curricular for your resume? Bored, and have nothing better to do? Like to complain a lot? If you fit into any of the above, then should you definitely write an opinion article! Whether it's a letter to the editor, or a regular old opinion article, your submissions are always welcome! Just send them to jan219@psu.edu.



Jerry Pohl

Are Erie residents ready for this casino?

By Patrick Webster
managing editor

The new Presque Isle Downs casino opened on Wednesday to much fanfare as thousands of people flocked to try their luck on commercial gaming machines while the opening chords of "Viva Las Vegas" played in the background. The Erie Times-News even devoted three full pages in the first section of the Thursday newspaper, lauding the quality of entertainment and construction of the casino. Presque Isle Downs will no doubt change the Erie area permanently, but at this point there is no telling whether the overall change in the long term will be positive or negative.

Any spokesman for the gaming industry or our state and local governments will be more than happy to tell you the benefits of having that sparkling new casino in town, loudly and repeatedly. You don't need to listen to them, though; the benefits are immediately apparent. Local businesses in the area will see an increase in traffic as locals and tourists spend more time in the vicinity. More than six hundred jobs were added with the construction and operation of the casino, which helps offset the recent closings and layoffs in some of Erie's larger employers. Gambling also has something of an intrinsic tourism and entertainment value.

The biggest positive is the swelling of tax and other licensing revenues for both the local municipal governments and the state. Hopefully, some of this money will be used to partially control some of the problems that come with casinos and casino-related business, which are varied and many.

The state government and the gaming industry have done an effective job of downplaying the downside to operating a casino. It's in their best interest to do so, for they stand to make the most profit off its operation. However, the impact that casino gaming has had on other cities is readily apparent.

Casinos make vast amounts of money by accepting it from everyday people, hoping and sometimes desperate to "make it big" despite having better odds of getting struck by lightning. Joint research from Purdue and Georgetown Universities has shown that personal bankruptcies skyrocket for residents who live within 50 miles of a casino as residents effectively hand their hard-earned dollars over directly to the multi-billion dollar industry and receive nothing in return. Every so often some-

one will come out with a big win, but this is necessary...if no one won, people would stop coming. Therefore, wins are highly publicized and odds are nowhere to be seen. The Times-News even helped, printing stories of people winning up to \$10,000 on the opening day, the better to lure more lemmings into the water. The net effect of this could push an already economically borderline-depressed region even further down while Harrisburg and the massive corporations reap the benefits. Crime is always an issue when the consequences of casino business are discussed. The huge amounts of money changing hands and the creation of a transient population unfamiliar with their surroundings creates opportunities for enterprising criminals to take advantage of, from your basic muggings for cash to more elaborate schemes to leech money from locals and tourists in other ways. The results vary from city to city, largely depending on how a city uses the increased revenue associated with the operating casino. Cities that immediately reinvest their windfall funds in

police and public safety measures have largely avoided the stigma of increased crime, ensuring the continuing increases in tax and business revenue as the public perceives the casino to be "safe." Most other cities instead see drastic increases in related crime rates.

Some residents living within a mile or so of Presque Isle Downs have already noticed some negative results: their water, sewage and power bills are going through the roof as they are being charged for infrastructure improvements to increase the volume of service for these utilities that they didn't need or ask for. Traffic in the area is also rapidly worsening.

If you've ever been to Las Vegas or Niagara Falls, you also know that casinos can be wholly depressing places to visit. Once you get past the glitter and bright lights, it can be disconcerting to walk in and see that little old lady with bleary red eyes clutching her cup full of quarters as she feeds her life savings into a slot machine twenty-five cents at a time.

Like every other city that opts to open a casino, the final verdict as to whether it was a good idea or a bad idea will take years to decide. Even then, it's only a matter of whether the local positive benefits outweigh the negatives, and that's up to you to decide.

Submission Guidelines

The Beacon welcomes readers to share their views on this page. Letters and commentary pieces can be submitted by email to jan219@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 phone as The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Deadlines for any submission is 3 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.

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