

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



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You Can Vote Now

By Christopher Brown
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No, seriously you can, like for real. All citizens over the age of 18 have the opportunity to vote. Unfortunately, most college students do not take advantage of this. In the 2004 Presidential Election less than half of those eligible between the ages 18-24 voted, while 73 percent of eligible voters 65-74 participated. We should take a lesson from our grandparents and parents and learn to establish our generation as a significant group who has needs. No one will look out for our needs as college students, Harborcreek residents, or Americans if we don't vote.

Behrend is one of the few college campuses in the United States lacking any restaurants or food businesses within walking distance, a chief complaint from many students. There are many reasons for this (check out my article next week), but a primary one is that Harborcreek residents have a vision for their township that doesn't include Behrend students. The township has done little, if anything at all, to help encourage growth near campus. And next time you are walking across or down Jordan Road from the REDC and get buzzed by a car or truck you can thank the Harborcreek Supervisors. There were plans to put in a sidewalk but the residents and supervisors have stalled on the plans.

Local politicians have done little to help students deal with landlords in the area as well. Just this past year the city of Erie started compiling a list of landlords and conducting inspections to make sure rental properties meet building codes. Personal experience has taught me that if there is a problem, officials quickly take the side of landlords, creating a sense of invincibility. When I was at the University of Iowa city officials inspected my apartment at least twice a year, landlords were held accountable, and the University was willing to step in on behalf of students. This is unheard of in Erie. Local officials complain about college students leaving the area after they graduate, but can they blame us with the hospitality they show us already.

A number of students have told me, "But Erie is just not a college town." This is no excuse. Erie is not a college town only because we have not made it one. We have the chance to be a powerful voting block in this community and we are not taking advantage of our numbers. Dr. Robert Speel, Chair of the Political Science Department, says, "If everyone on campus voted in the next

election they would out-vote everyone else in Harborcreek."

It can be a pain to get out and vote, especially with classes and trying to find transportation. The Erie County Board of Elections has expressed interest in moving a voting machine to Behrend's campus, but there are not enough registered voters. Registering to vote is simple and it only takes a few minutes. Some students are already registered to vote back home, but they don't want to change districts or municipalities. This doesn't make sense, absentee voting can be difficult. The deadline is months before the election and even then their vote won't affect local elections that have the biggest influence on where they spend the majority of their year - Behrend.

The effects of voting are not always immediate or tangible. Even if everyone voted for someone that could make a difference now, it is unlikely that real change would occur in the two or four years you are on campus. But, that is a horrible way to view the process of voting; the most important and worthwhile things are never easy. The only reason this campus is what it is today is because someone was willing to put in effort for something even though they probably were not going to see the benefits of something. Now is our chance to take this a step further and establish this campus as part of the community.

Voting is important on other levels besides making this campus and area better for future students. The politicians

Erie is not a college town only because we have yet to make it one.

we elect today will have a huge impact on the job market we will enter, the communities where we will raise our kids, the age we get to retire, and the benefits we will receive when we do retire. Our grandparents realize this and have used their numbers to their advantage. No politician can talk about changing social security benefits and expect to be re-elected.

This November one of three seats is open for Harborcreek Board of Supervisors. The Political Science Society and Student Government Association are organizing a forum for candidates so they can hear student concerns. They have not set a time yet so pay attention (actually open e-mails from SGA or Student Affairs) and look for more information around campus. I urge everyone to attend. This is our chance to make a difference.

Faculty Forum: Bush and Burma

By Christopher R. Cook
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Over the last few weeks Buddhist monks have led pro-democracy rallies against the Burmese military junta. The government has started a brutal crackdown. President Bush rightfully used his recent address at the United Nations to call attention to this gross abuse of human rights. However, trouble in Burma is nothing new. In 1990 the junta held free elections (the first since taking power in 1962), and when they predictably lost they cancelled the results and arrested Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of that democratic opposition and winning party. She remains under house arrest to this day.

The United States has consistently believed that those elections were valid and that the junta should step down. The latest protests only underscore this fact. But how does one change the Burmese government? If we as a country are serious about democracy promotion, Burma should be the perfect test case for Bush's agenda.

In 1996 one human rights group thought of an interesting legal strategy to pressure the Burmese government. It was pointless to sue Burma. Instead, they sued the American oil company UNOCAL, a corporate benefactor of the regime using a 1789 law that allows foreign citizens to sue American companies in American courts (Alien Torts Act.) Why? A UNOCAL gas pipeline was built through Burma using slave labor, rape, murder and forced villager relocation. Of course UNOCAL claimed they had no knowledge of the working conditions arranged by the Burmese military. But what UNOCAL does not want to admit is that totalitarian governments need foreign capital to survive. In the age of globalization-- without western firms, most dictators would collapse. It is really that simple: no UNOCAL contract, no cash to suppress people. The displaced villagers became the plaintiff John Doe. In March 2005 the case was settled. The villagers are to receive compensation for their "work" and see improvements for their living conditions. Companies should now be wary of working with Burma.

So why delve into this legal case? You would think that the Bush Administration would not only support such a move but encourage these groups. Legal actions like this have the potential to really hurt dictatorships where it matters most-- the wallet. The Administration has staked a claim that we live in a "post 9/11 world." Burma is one of the most brutal regimes in the world. However, the Bush Administration saw the case differently. They actually wanted the case dismissed because a ruling for the villagers would discourage American business from making money. In a set of amicus briefs to the court they argued that such cases would discourage "economic engagement." That's right--the White House would never want to tell American companies who they can trade with. What is left unsaid-- American companies dealing with Iran.

Such a stand completely contradicts everything President Bush has said about Burma in public. In 2003 the White House released this statement on the *Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act*:

The President applauds today's passage of the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act by the Congress, and he looks forward to signing it into law. This legislation sends a clear message to the Burmese regime that their continued detention of Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and their assaults on freedom cannot stand. The Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act is the result of close cooperation between the Congress and the Administration and is intended to focus the world's attention on the Burmese regime's continuing oppression of its people. The United States fully supports the Burmese people in their struggle for democracy.

Bush's position on Doe v. UNOCAL contradicts his flowery rhetoric about freedom. But actions speak louder than words to the people of Burma. If corporations like UNOCAL provide economic cover for state sponsored rape, torture and murder then what message are you really sending? You cannot have democracy both ways. You cannot publicly condemn the Burmese government but then allow multinational corporations to continue trading with them. If we are serious about democracy--anywhere in the world--be it Burma or Iraq then we need to do more. Profits are not as important as people. Otherwise freedom is just an empty word.

The Behrend Beacon's Staff would like to encourage faculty members to submit essays and commentaries for our monthly series *Faculty Forum*. If you are interested e-mail Chris Brown at cmb5313@psu.edu

Beacon Thumbs Up



- Pirates
- Radiohead
- MLB Playoffs
- Snickerdoodles

Beacon Thumbs Down



- Barbed wire tattoos
- Ninjas
- Bleeding
- Movie re-makes

Submission Guidelines

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.

The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Please include your major, faculty, or administrative position and semester standing. Deadline for any submission is 5 p.m. Tuesday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue.

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

Email submissions to cmb5313@psu.edu or drop them off at the Beacon office.

Can you hear me now?

By Rachel Reeves
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Burn T-Mobile, burn!" I found myself belting into my phone. Of course, after over 30 minutes of either sitting on hold or arguing with a machine, this is the precise moment in which I am finally switched over to a human being. I thought I had been cursing bad 80's soft rock to eternal damnation, but in reality I was screaming at some unfortunate T-Mobile peon named Jim. Who by the way was very understanding, reassuring me that he never gets to talk to a customer until they're already good and mad.

I signed with T-Mobile this summer, believing that I had found my way around the \$40 per month minimum that every other phone company charges.

My plan rang in at a beautiful \$29.99 per month, and I could call any area code without an extra charge. I had done my research; made charts, ran figures, and I truly believed that I had won this ugly battle with the cell phone companies.

Except that a month later finds me on the phone, eyes bulging in rage, trying to figure out the obvious discrepancy in my bill.

I sat quietly for a moment, so frustrated that I nearly blacked out.

"But how am I already over my minutes?" I deplored. "I have been very careful, look, it even shows in my services summary. I've only used 68

been after 9:00 or on the weekend!"

"You're being charged after 9:00. Those minutes aren't unlimited on your plan."

"So why does it say on my online account that I have unlimited minutes after 9:00?" Hysteria begins to creep into my voice.

"That's a typo, we'll be fixing that soon. But no, unless you go up to the next plan for 600 minutes per month for \$39.99, you only have unlimited weekends."

I sat quietly for a moment, so frustrated that I nearly blacked out. Three hundred minutes per month plus weekends did me absolutely no good. I was only two weeks into my first billing cycle and I was already cut off from my phone unless I wanted to pay obscene overage charges. I was paying \$30 per month for a phone that I couldn't use. I defeated myself and began to prepare to admit defeat. I also tried to recover from getting "ma'am" for the first time at a tender 18 years of age.

hardly daring to hope.

"\$250.00, ma'am."

"How do I upgrade to the next plan?"

"I'll just connect you to someone who can help you with that. Can I put you on hold?"

One month later, I am paying forty dollars per month for 600 minutes and unlimited nights and weekends, just like every other person in this country. Except throw in texting and taxes, and I'm looking at a nice, fat \$53 a month. It actually causes me physical pain. I am going to become one of those crazy people that spends four hours straight on the phone because it's the end of the month and I haven't used up all of my minutes yet. One of those bitter people that will go to any lengths just to be able to trick myself into thinking I've gotten my money's worth. One of those slack-faced, half-dead workers spending their summers in a doctor's office or a garden factory or an ice cream shop, repeating this conversation to every nosy passer-by: "Oh, is job for paying off school?" they'll ask.