

PERSPECTIVES

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

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.

Charles M. Schulz had the right idea

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Thanksgiving break is over and now it's a crazy time, getting things finished in your classes and getting your schedule together for studying for finals. But with all the hectic responsibilities one of the things we all remember is that in three short weeks we will be home again for Christmas break.

If you haven't seen *Merry Christmas Charlie Brown*, then go rent it. Obviously, it is specifically for

Christmas but it still the best Charlie Brown holiday movie out there. It's about Charlie Brown realizing that there is something more to Christmas; but just doesn't know what it is. Lucy asks if Charlie would like to direct the Christmas play, thinking it will help him find the true meaning of Christmas, and he accepts. After everyone in the play has obviously lost the idea of what the true meaning is, Charlie asks if anyone know what it's about. Linus tells the story of Christmas and the birth of Jesus.

The problem Charlie Brown has with

Christmas is that it's all too commercial. His dog, Snoopy, enters a light and decoration contest for his dog house. Charlie's baby sister writes to Santa saying that he can just send money, tens and twenties (all she wants is what she has coming to her, all she wants is her fair share). Christmas has everything to do with religion but there is more.

Now I love presents just as much as the next person but I don't like how the "true" meaning of the season is lost. Religion aside, people call this season "the season of giving." Which means most find themselves volunteering at

soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and donating to charities. The problem is that this "season of giving" shouldn't only be in December.

Every year you see volunteers sitting outside the mall and other stores ringing bells next to their red buckets. As much as it makes me mad that by Christmas, when I have no more money to spare, I get stares and violent rings in my direction for not donating. (You can't donate everyday but you can donate in February or March.)

One year my friend and her family skipped Christmas and didn't give or

accept gifts. They made sandwiches and walked around their nearest city and gave them out to those who looked homeless and hungry. She said that that was the best Christmas, by far.

It's not just December when people need help but it's a great place to start. Make sandwiches and hand them out, spend Christmas Eve in a soup kitchen, offer to be one of those ringing the bells, or offer a friend a few dollars because her meal plan is out. The season of giving is year round and it can be something small or something big, just do it.

Bailout scapegoats

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With the bailouts being debated across the country and in Congress, conservative pundits are identifying a new set of scapegoats. During the debate over the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP), we heard all about the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 and how the financial crisis' roots lie at the feet of government regulators who, "Under the CRA... forced banks to prove they weren't 'redlining' - i.e., discriminating against minorities - by approving loans to minorities and various left-wing 'community group' shake-down artists whether they were bad risks or not," at least according to conservative columnist (I use the term loosely here) Jonah Goldberg. This is a gross simplification of the problems this crisis has exposed and a conclusion unsupported by data or logic.

Now, with talk of a bailout of the Big

Three automakers, Ford, GM, and Chrysler, conservatives have identified the clear culprit. Unions, specifically the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, or UAW. The argument is that the automakers can't compete with foreign companies because of the stranglehold unions have on the companies.

One common claim is that the average hourly wage of an autoworker is \$70, a result from union negotiations, and a far higher wage than workers get paid for Honda or Toyota. This claim has even made its way to the mainstream media and nightly news programs, but no one bothered to actually assess its validity. To be sure, the \$70 or so per hour rate often quoted does come from numbers, but their significance remains dubious.

Felix Salmon of portfolio.com notes, "As of 2007, the UAW represented 180,681 members at Chrysler, Ford and General Motors; it also represented 419,621 retired members and 120,723 surviving spouses. If you take the costs

associated with 721,025 individuals and then divide those costs by the hours worked by 180,681 individuals, you're going to end up with a very large hourly rate. But it won't mean anything, unless you're trying to be deceptive."

And it's not as if the UAW has sat idly, watching the collapse of the automakers with glee. After all, their primary concern is its members and protecting their jobs. They have already made concessions to help the automakers. Jonathan Cohn, senior editor at *The New Republic*, points out that the oft-cited 2007 numbers are unrepresentative because of UAW concessions. He writes, "In 2007, the Big Three signed a breakthrough contract with the United Auto Workers (UAW) designed, once and for all, to eliminate the compensation gap between domestic and foreign automakers in the U.S."

Stephen Spruiell, writing for *The Corner* at The National Review Online, doesn't think this is enough; "Labor contracts have also burdened the Big

Three with mounting buyout costs as they try to shrink their workforces to keep pace with falling demand. Product commitments and work rules have hindered their efforts to adapt to the market."

How dare unions look out for the interests of their members? How dare they try and help workers who have lost their jobs for reasons out of their hands?

How dare they look out in their own self-interests? Isn't that the point of capitalism, the beauty of the invisible hand, that a group of people who act in their own divergent self-interests somehow creates the most efficient economy?

Of all people who have commented on the crisis, former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan made the best summation of what this economic crisis represents, saying in congressional testimony that he had found a "Flaw in the model that I perceived is the critical functioning structure that defines how the world works."

That flaw, I believe, is that if everyone

tries to maximize their profit, no matter at what expense to others, the economy does not work out for the better of all. If someone truly believes in the philosophy represented by free-marketers, they have no right in criticizing unions who were looking out for their own self-interest in their labor contracts. Let us not forget that it takes two to tango and those contracts wouldn't exist if the automakers did not agree to them.

This flaw, highlighted by Greenspan, makes an important point about the role of government in the economy. Without government intervention, in regulating the pursuit of profits, our world would be much worse off. This is why we have environmental regulations, because there is no doubt that it would be cheaper for factories to produce goods without environmental regulations, but the cost to the commonwealth, the health of the people, would be too great.

Let us not forget, the first and primary role of the government is to protect its citizens, not maximize profits.

The bathroom project

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Where is the best bathroom on campus?

The Bathroom Project (BP), composed of Catherine Frisina, Jamie Durfee and Emily Reichert, has set out to judge every single bathroom on campus. Each week a different building will be judged on a systematic scale. Cleanliness, inventory, room, mirror quality, baggage, smell, and technology will be measured on a scale of one to five, one being the lowest quality and five being the highest. The scores will be added to form a total score for that bathroom.

Cleanliness refers to the general appearance of the room. If it is cluttered or untidy, it will take away from the overall score. Inventory concerns the toilet paper, soap, and paper towels. If they are all properly stocked then that will equal a perfect score. Room refers to the space inside and outside the stalls. How easy it is to maneuver oneself inside will determine this score. Mirror quality will cover the placement of the mirrors. Baggage is the convenience of the room in terms of easy backpack placement. If you have to resort to putting your backpack on the floor, then that equals a bad bathroom. The smell speaks for itself and technology covers

how well the toilets, hand dryers, sinks, etc. work.

This week, the BP judged the REDC building. There are four lavatories in the building: one on the ground floor, two on the first, and one on the second. The winner is Room 003 on the ground floor. The average score was 30/35. With top ratings for inventory, room, baggage, and technology, and almost perfect scores for the mirrors, this bathroom is definitely the potty of choice for anyone heading to the REDC. The lower scored areas were the smell and cleanliness. There was an odd smell that resembled burning, and at least two of the toilets were clogged. The BP will revisit this bathroom next week to see if it upholds its current standards, and if the previous violations have been corrected.

Second place goes to R211 on the second floor with an average score of 29/35. Inventory, room, mirrors, and baggage scored perfect, but the technology and cleanliness caused the room to take a dive. Two out of four of the automatic sinks did not work, and toilet paper could be found all over the floor. Clogged toilets also caused a cleanliness issue.

In third place, R113 located on the first floor had an average score of 25/35. It only had one perfect score in the area of technology. Cleanliness, room, and baggage suffered low scores.

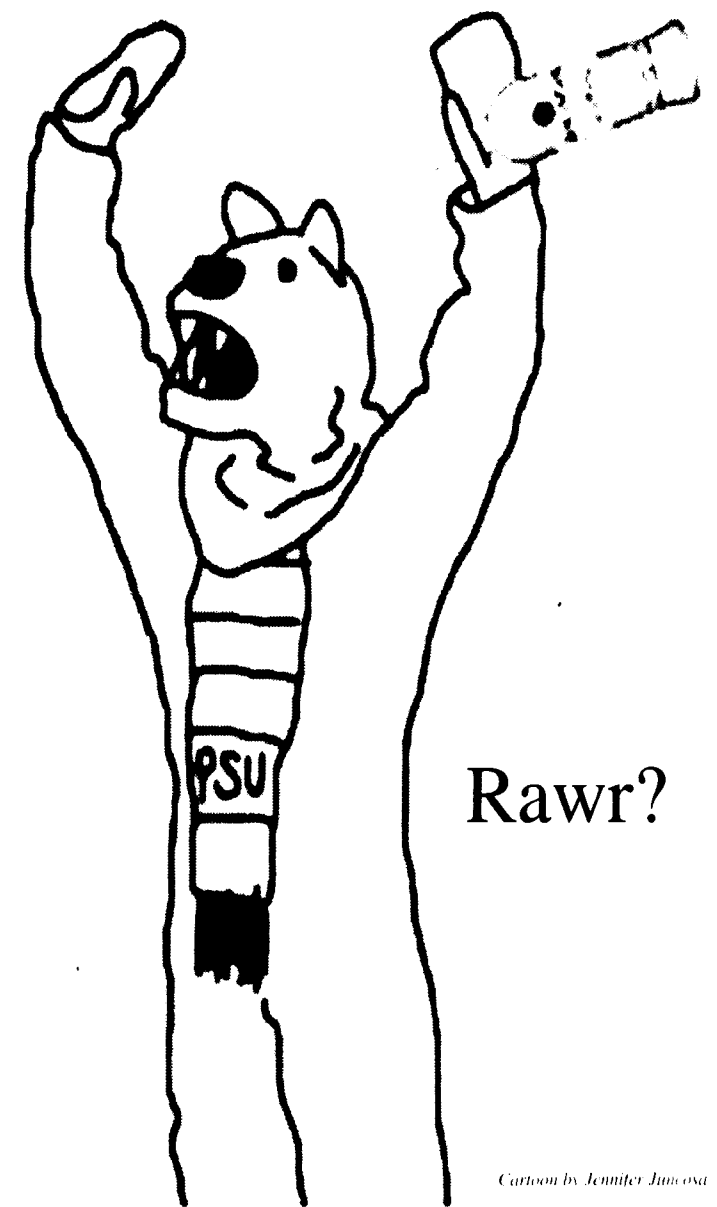
The other areas had around almost perfect scores. Notes about this bathroom was that there were various clogged toilets, hair on the sink, a mold spot on the ceiling, and like R211, toilet paper all over the floor.

Last place is awarded to R176, also on the first floor. The average score was 19/35 and no area scored a perfect. Smell, technology, and room scored relatively high scores but cleanliness, inventory, mirrors, and baggage all suffered. For inventory, the paper towels were empty, which was the cause of this low score. The mirrors in that bathroom scored particularly low because their placement is not practical at all. The full length mirror is placed right beside the entrance so anyone who was using it would be in the way of anyone who wanted to leave or enter.

One thing worth noting was the room inside the handicapped stall. Its space caused one of our judges to comment that "you could fit a bed" inside it, especially since the actual toilet apparatus is smooched into the top right corner of the stall. This is good for a dressing room, not a toilet stall.

Tune in next week when the BP judges the Kochel building. If you have any comments about the bathrooms we have judged, or would like to submit a bathroom for judgment, write to *The Behrend Beacon*.

I didn't do it



Cartoon by Jennifer Juncosa

Beacon Thumbs Up



- Christmas
- Chanukah
- Kwanza
- New Year's

Submission Guidelines:

Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries 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 it.

The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Please include your major, faculty or administration position, and semester standing. Deadline for any submission is 3 p.m. Thursday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue.

The Behrend Beacon reserves the right to edit any submissions prior to publication. Please keep complaints as specific as possible.

Email submissions to jdj5061@psu.edu or drop them off at the Beacon office.

Beacon Thumbs Down



- Finals
- Salt rings on jeans
- Wet pant legs
- Last minute homework