

OPINION

THE DAILY
Collegian

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Letters

We want to hear your comments on our coverage, editorial decisions and the Penn State community.

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EDUCATION FINANCE

Altered proposal still unfair

Let's say you throw a party. You hang the balloons and streamers, prepare the Chex Mix, and by 11 p.m., everybody's having a good time.

But one of the guests has his own personal stock of Riesling, and soon, he's getting belligerent. He starts picking fights, so like a good host, you ask him to leave. He does, but right after he leaves, he begins punching someone in your yard.

The police come and take him downtown. An officer questions you about what happened, and you tell him. Do you get fined?

You shouldn't, but if Borough Council agrees to a second version of the Nuisance Gathering Ordinance, you might.

Even after changes, the Nuisance Gathering Ordinance remains an unfair proposal.

It would make party hosts shoulder the blame for offenses committed by their guests. Someone at your party urinates in public or commits vandalism or an assault? If it happens close enough to your house or apartment, the ordinance makes you pay a fine for their behavior.

The fact that someone is hosting a party doesn't give he or she the ability to control a guest's behavior. A host can request, beg or try to reason with rowdy guests, but he or she can't control how they act. A host also can't watch every guest all the time. Things happen. When they do, they're the

fault of whoever committed the crime.

Furnishing alcohol to minors is different. Party hosts take it upon themselves to do that, so they deserve blame.

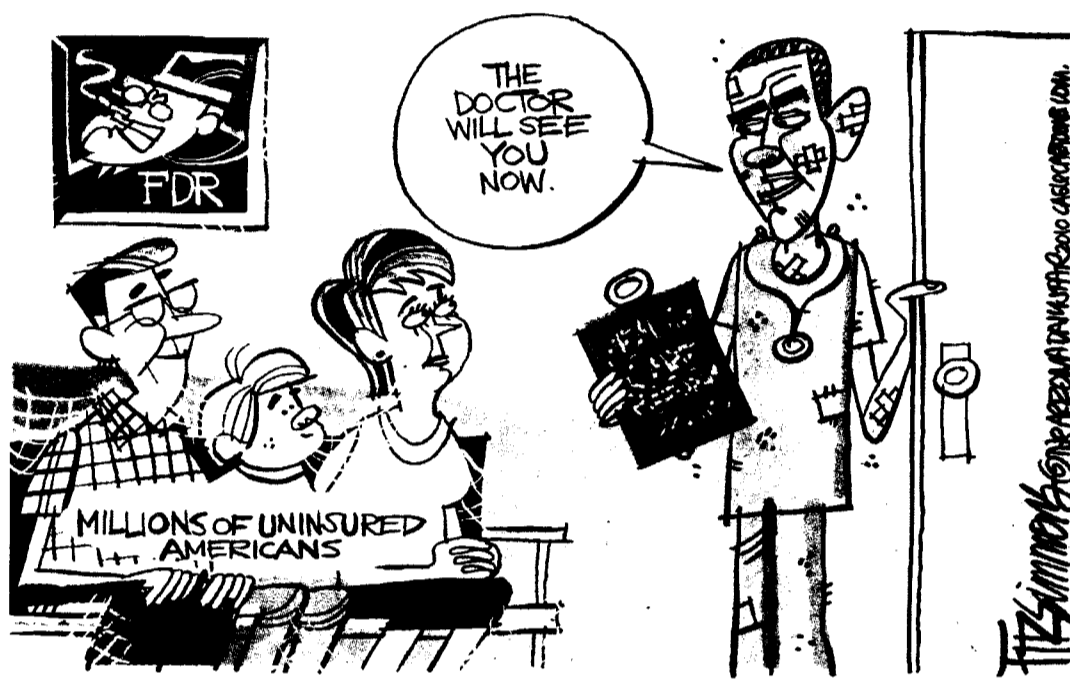
That's very different from throwing a party in which two big, drunken dudes decide to fight each other.

Borough Council is still deliberating the ordinance, and students have the opportunity to be part of the decision-making process, as they did with the first proposal.

Though this version is an improvement over the last draft, it is still unfair.

The ordinance makes party hosts guilty by association.

Borough Council should be wary of painting with such a broad brush.



Rational anti-sexting steps encouraging

By Caitlin Cullerot

The first time I heard about sexting was in high school. A sophomore girl had skipped class to hook up with a senior guy in the back of his car, and the guy told his friends where and when the hookup was going down so they could document the event. By the end of the day, even the girl's sister had seen the picture.

I felt awful for the girl. People whispered about how "slutty" she was, while the senior guy got high-fives from strangers in the hallway. Back then, people chalked an incident like this up to typical teenage antics. Today, this same act could brand you as a sex offender for the rest of your life.

Sexting seems to be gaining popularity among teens and young adults. According to a study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl, 20 percent of teens have sexted. Even Disney sweetheart Vanessa Hudgens found herself in the midst of a sexting scandal in 2007 after a few private pictures were leaked on the web.

As the issue becomes increasingly problematic, the question of how to punish those responsible grows more and more complicated. Technically, what the

senior at my high school did could have landed him in jail for creating, possessing and distributing child pornography because the girl in question was only 15.

And there's no arguing that sexting can have serious consequences for the subjects in the photo — last year, an Ohio teenager committed suicide after her ex-boyfriend forwarded nude photos of her to classmates. And in December, a 13-year-old girl hanged herself after a topless picture of her circulated her high school.

Lawmakers are struggling to deal with the issue, but their solutions aren't always on target. For example, Wyoming County district attorney George Skumanick Jr. threatened to charge two 12-year-old girls with felony child pornography after photos of the girls in bras — and one topless photo — were discovered circulating on students' cell phones.

The prosecutor for the case explained that the boys who circulated the photos did not face charges because "high school boys did as high school boys will do, and traded the photos among themselves." A lot of high school boys also sell coke, but I don't think anyone is going to chalk that up to "boys being boys." Thankfully, the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania stepped in on the girls' behalf and prevented Skumanick from pursuing charges.

However, Pennsylvania is taking steps to lessen the punish-

ment for teens involved in sexting cases. On March 17, the state House Judiciary Committee approved a bill that would make it a misdemeanor rather than a felony for someone between 13 and 17 to send an explicit photo to another 13- to 17-year-old.

The bill would eliminate the possibility of jail time for teens involved in sexting scandals and make it easier to expunge the crime from their records, so they're not permanently labeled as sex offenders.

As serious as sexting can be, this is a step in the right direction. I like to think I was a pretty responsible high schooler, but I'll be honest. I very rarely considered the long-term effects of my actions back then, and I'm sure sexting teens face the same problem.

I'm not defending sexting, and the fact that young girls are committing suicide as a result of it is nothing short of tragic.

That being said, I don't believe a 12-year-old can fully grasp that taking a picture of her friend in a towel amounts to child pornography.

It's obvious sexting is only gaining popularity among teens, and it's encouraging to see lawmakers like Rep. Seth Grove — who is sponsoring the bill in Pennsylvania — taking rational steps in dealing with the problem.

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Health care plan admirable but irresponsible financially

Universal health care is an admirable goal, and one I would like to see one day accomplished. That said, this bill is terrible for America's future and could not have come at a worse time.

The economy is just finally showing strong signs of coming out of the recession that has left so many jobless and others struggling. We need that growth to continue, and throwing another \$940 billion on top of our trillions of dollars of debt isn't going to help get us back on track and certainly isn't going to do anything to get us out of China's pocket. We're just going to have to keep borrowing all of this money from them and the rest of the world. If China ever decided to call in our debt, we could have no hope of paying and the dollar would be destroyed in the international market.

This doesn't have to be the political issue that Barack Obama, Democrats, Republicans and the media have made it. It shouldn't be about party power struggles or whether this is what President Obama needs to cement his legacy. We need to be realistic with what we are actually financially able to do right now. We've already spent so much on borrowed money, and we have nothing close to a legitimate plan for how to pay it all back.

CJ Maza
junior-economics

Republicans must win back control, repeal health care

We have been betrayed. In the face of overwhelming public disapproval, a Democratic Congress forced an utterly useless health care "reform" bill on the American people. The bill does nothing to address rising health care costs, does nothing to empower individual Americans, and does nothing to reduce our health care bureaucracy.

The Democrats will tout this bill as victory. But in truth, everyone lost. The American people have lost what remained of their faith in this government. Those insured have lost their right to control their own health care and will instead be forced into Medicaid-like welfare programs. The Congress has lost the support of the common people. And next November the Democrats will lose their majority.

Opposition to this bill will only grow now that it has passed. Thirty-three states have taken steps to challenge parts of the "Obamacare" bill, and more will follow. The populist outrage represented by the Tea Party movement will continue to flourish.

The crucial question, however, is what Republicans will do once they retake the House. They are far from faultless; poor Republican leadership brought the Democrats to power in the first place. Nevertheless, they have a great advantage: The bill passed without the support of even a single Republican congressman or woman. If the Republicans want to build a lasting majority and to restore the faith of the American people, their mission is clear — they must repeal this bill.

Samuel Settle
sophomore-political science
Young Americans for Freedom

blog lines

Snap, Crackle, Pop

When I think of authors I enjoyed as an elementary school student, a few names spring to mind — but one of the foremost is undoubtedly Shel Silverstein.

Many kids love Silverstein's work, and it's easy to see why — most of his poems deal with real issues for the elementary school bunch. For instance, who could forget Silverstein's ode to feigning illness in order to stay home from school in "Sick"? With a knack for witty wordplay, though, Silverstein made even these young-minded topics applicable to older readers.

Silverstein died in 1999, but his work lives on, as his second posthumous poetry collection will be published in 2011. Entertainment Weekly's Shel Life reports. The new collection will feature about 120 poems that haven't yet had the opportunity to light up our faces.

Read more from the arts blog Snap, Crackle, Pop and the rest of The Daily Collegian's blogs at psuollegian.com/blogs

Small World

For a long time, the first thing people used to say to me when I mentioned I was going to France was, "Oh man, isn't the drinking age like 10 over there?" Disregarding my suspicion that this sentence says more about Penn State culture in a sentence than Sara Glass did in an entire radio program, my classmates were mostly right: Pretty much anyone can drink here, but you have to be 18 to buy alcohol yourself.

I'm 21. I've been legal in the U.S. for a little over three months now and legal in France for a little over three years, and I am the only person I know in the entirety of Europe who gets carded on a regular basis. It's getting a little embarrassing now. Before we head out for a night on the town, my friends and I usually pick up a bottle of wine. After they waltz through the checkout line at the local Monoprix, I'll confidently plunk down my bottle of 6-euro white wine on the counter, only to have the cashier peer curiously at me and demand identification.

Read more from the study abroad blog Small World and the rest of The Daily Collegian's blogs at psuollegian.com/blogs.