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ROB NELSON
EDITOR
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BOARD EDITORIALS

Image Is Everything

Which is more important: fire safety in UNC's 29 residence halls or a "charismatic" housing director?

Recruiting, managing and maintaining a full staff of hardworking housekeepers or a "charismatic" housing director?

Making sure UNC's Master Plan doesn't become another South Campus ghetto or a "charismatic" housing director?

To hear Dean Bresciani and Murray Coleman talk about it, you'd learn that when it comes to hiring a permanent director for the Department of University Housing, image is everything.

But with all the present problems and future challenges facing UNC's housing department these days, Bresciani, Coleman and the rest of the committee charged with picking a permanent director need to get moving and hire a new leader.

Good luck, guys, given how you just slammed your finalists' "charisma" publicly.

Bresciani, the interim housing director, and Coleman, president of the Residence Hall Association, told The Daily Tar Heel on Tuesday that they and their committee refused to choose one of the finalists because they wanted someone with "enthusiasm."

"They didn't represent what we were looking for," Coleman said. "Out of all three, none stood out as a dynamic individual."

Bresciani had the gall to note that the candidates "reflected the best of the field. But we weren't satisfied; we just didn't feel the chemistry."

If the contenders - Mary Hummel of the University of Michigan, Frankie Minor of the

University of Missouri, and Gerard Kowalski of Virginia Polytechnic and State University - were truly the nation's best, the committee should have offered one of them a job.

It's taken entirely too long - former Director Wayne Kuncel skipped the department for the Carolina Parents' Office last summer - for the committee now to reject extremely qualified individuals based primarily on "chemistry." Someone who would push for tangible action in fire safety would be better than "chemistry."

Despite having taken months already, the committee seems certain it can hire someone by fall. To get a supposedly better pool of applicants, Bresciani has added "enthusiastic" to the job description - "innovative, accomplishment-oriented individual" - running in national advertisements. Come on, Dean - as if the three qualified finalists thought they were social bores before they undertook the whole application shebang.

No wonder candidates for the chancellor job don't want to go public. What Bresciani's search committee did to admittedly qualified candidates was despicable and inexcusable.

Qualified professionals such as Hummel, Kowalski and Minor deserve to be accepted or rejected based on their accomplishments and abilities - not fuzzy, unquantifiable judgments of their "charisma" or "enthusiasm."

Certainly, one of them would have made a productive and effective housing director. With all the work ahead of the housing department, the committee should have stopped running a beauty pageant and hired one of their qualified finalists.



Religious Have Equal Public Rights

Last week, I suggested that our society has become increasingly suspicious of the political influence of those who freely profess their religious convictions.

Most of the handful of responses I received came from students on campus who had sensed hostility toward their expressions of religious faith. A few others came from individuals who argued that the activism of the religious right warranted suspicion of the influence of religion on politics.

For the most part, the negative responses came from reasonable people, writing with the kind of concern that deserves a thoughtful response. While I think their intentions were good, I will persist in noting their automatic linking of religious individuals with political extremism.

Simply acknowledging that one's political positions are derived from a religious worldview should not provoke immediate criticism.

First, however, let me say that I am aware that obnoxious extremists, deserving of thoughtful criticism, have scattered themselves among many different systems of belief, including Christianity.

I am not primarily interested in them, but in the tendency to link any orthodox religious faith with such extremism.

Stereotypical representations of religious people, particularly Christians, often go largely unchallenged in communities that call themselves liberal.

We rightly resist stereotypes based on gender and race, and we try to understand the nuances of political conversations rooted in cultural difference. One would not conflate Louis Farrakhan's extremist, unpopular stance with the position of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and then suggest that the black Civil Rights Movement goes hand in hand with anti-Semitism.

But the automatic association of religious people with political extremism occurs unself-consciously. It is disturbingly common to imply that any conservative Christian in politics is likely to lynch a gay man at home, promote imperialistic policies abroad and close his or her mind in every situation.

The fact that Al Gore, who is something of an anathema to the religious right (by any definition of the term), could be linked with that

political movement simply by mentioning his own faith suggests that our society needs a little clearheadedness in evaluating the effects of religion on politics.

I am not arguing that religion should be kept out of politics to keep political discussions from getting muddled; I am arguing that explicit, critical discussion of religious beliefs should be part of the political process.

Discussing our beliefs in public requires that we recognize that people of good conscience might disagree with us and might even want to persuade us of something we do not already believe.

Wanting to convince someone of something does not denote disrespect; refusing to try to understand his or her beliefs does. My disagreeing with a reader about an issue would not mean I disrespect him; a refusal to evaluate the potential validity of his position would.

Our current resistance to proselytization has become a little paranoid, to the detriment of our free exchange of ideas.

For example, let us imagine that an American couple moves to Saudi Arabia. In their marriage, they perceive each other as equals, and they believe that the inequality with which Saudi Arabian women are treated is unjust. They even venture to share that belief with Saudi friends.

This proselytic act might be undertaken without respect for Saudi culture, but it might also be undertaken with deep care for Saudi women. It should not automatically provoke resistance.

In the same way, religious people might want to change the attitudes of their society. This week, an evangelical organization has set up tables and speakers in the Pit, playing

music and preaching. Their attempts to share their religious beliefs are no more "oppressive" than the activities of any of the other student groups that have set up megaphones and speakers.

Religious people have the same right (not more, not less) to participate in public discourse, to disagree with others, to agitate for change and to have their positions fairly evaluated on the basis of their potential constitutional, legal and social merit. Other members of society have a corresponding right to continue to disagree and to respond with equal attempts at persuasion.

What corrupts this process is the growing assumption that any religious activism must work to restrict freedom, and the recent privileging of systems of secular belief over systems of religious belief.

If we eliminated the effects of religious activism or Christianity specifically on politics, we would be left without the abolition movement and without the Civil Rights Movement.

Religious conviction has tremendous potential for good and for evil, so it is right that religious motivations should be carefully evaluated.

But the careless insinuation that religious activism by nature must be extremist and dangerous has polarized discussions of faith in politics to the point that fair-minded discussion is difficult to initiate.

There is a certain self-satisfied smugness to some anti-religious rhetoric. This smugness is as presumptuous as its equivalent among conservative religious people, but it is often accepted as justifiable, even chic, in spite of its inaccuracy.

The specter of the ill-defined group called the "religious right" haunts us all, but Gary Bauer found only a tiny group of supporters, and few Christians I know, including those from the conservative seminary I attended, advocate the establishment of a theocratic state in any form.

Many, many more of them are moved to act justly and compassionately by their faith.

Tara Robbins is a graduate student in the Department of English from Millville, N.J. Reach her at trobbins@unc.edu.



TARA ROBBINS
SMALL PRINT

EDITORIAL NOTEBOOK - CAMERON MITCHELL

'Til Prop. 22 Do Us Part

On Super Tuesday in California, residents voted to pass state Sen. Pete Knight's Proposition 22. The proposition is short but not so simple, stating that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California."

Residents across the nation should be voting to recognize same-sex marriages instead of so vehemently opposing gay rights. When will our political leaders get the balls to make the logical choice of pushing for the complete legal recognition of gay marriages on a national level?

When two gay people decide to live together and make a vow of dedication to each other just as a supposedly more normal heterosexual pair would, they deserve the same legal rights and benefits that a marriage entails.

It's not about what's right according to the Bible. Not everyone subscribes to this dogmatic book in the first place, but religion simply has no place in this civil rights issue.

Knight's proposition against same-sex marriages should have never made it to the ballot Tuesday anyway. When examining his history, one can easily detect his true motive, which involves some kind of twisted score to settle with homosexuals in general.

His younger brother, who just happened to be gay, died of complications from AIDS.

And Knight no longer speaks to his own son who is also a homosexual.

One would think that Knight would be more compassionate about gays and their rights since he is so intimately linked with their world. Of course, the real radical notion here is that parents might love their children unconditionally. Obviously, Knight does not subscribe to that theory. He claims that he is only out to preserve marriage, but in reality, he obviously has a score to settle with gays in general.

After all, there are no states that do sanction gay marriages, though Hawaii and Vermont have shown progress toward making it a reality.

If same-sex marriages aren't legal in any state, why is Knight so concerned with ensuring they never will be recognized in California? I smell a big conservative rat with a homophobic personal agenda.

It's time to put an end to the crusty ideals of conservative scoundrels such as Pete Knight. Gay people have fought long and hard for the civil rights they deserve, but society mustn't let people such as Knight put that progress in reverse.

The institute of marriage isn't too stable anyway, seeing as how 50 percent of marital unions end in divorce. Just think of what a joke it became on Fox's "Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?" as more than 23 million Americans tuned in.

But even if marriage is a joke, don't gays deserve the right to laugh along as well?

READERS' FORUM

Reporter, Union 'Deskie' Both Wrong in Remark About Black People

TO THE EDITOR:

I was horrified at Jermaine Caldwell's second-to-last paragraph in what would have been an otherwise amusing article ("Strange Tales From the Union Desk Files," March 7).

To paraphrase for those who might have overlooked the piece, Caldwell was recounting strange and unusual questions received at the Student Union front desk as recorded by student employees.

It seems that a visiting teacher from an urban high school was leading a field trip and stopped in to ask, "... where are the black people?"

Most will probably agree the question lacks both tact and intelligence but, when taken in context, is fairly benign. No personal gripe so far. It turns out that Susannah Kirby, a student deskie, offered the reply, "We keep them chained up downstairs."

The author (Caldwell) then offered the

final closing remark, "Dumb questions call for dumb answers."

Wrong, my friend. Dumb questions call for smart answers.

First of all, I am horrified that Kirby would offer that comment as a retort. From the accompanying picture one can see three student employees with only two names captioned.

Two of the deskies are female and one is black and one is not. If Kirby is the black female, shame on her. If Kirby is the female that's not black, shame on her. It should be self-evident that inappropriate phrases are just that - inappropriate at all times and all places for all people.

The extreme of this double standard is the word "nigger." How can a word that is attributed to blatant bigotry and hate from the lips of a white man be tossed around so carelessly in a friendly context from the lips of a black man?

I am guessing that Kirby is the black woman in the picture for the main reason that if she isn't, there would have been an article detailing the lawsuit against the University in this article's place.

However, I don't want to fall into the

trap of assumption. Besides, it doesn't matter which female she is; shame on her. Blacks-in-chains comments are unacceptable. Period. Are you curious as to whether I am black or white? What does it matter to you?

Kirby, dumb questions call for smart answers, especially to those who are teaching our children. Caldwell, dumb statements that are racially sensitive should be should be printed with care. Shame on you both.

Jeffrey Warren
Graduate Student
Geological Sciences

The length rule was waived. Susannah Kirby is not the black woman in the picture accompanying Caldwell's story.

Pedestrians Just as Much To Blame for Accidents On Campus as Motorists

TO THE EDITOR:

I know these words will probably get a

harsh reaction from many individuals, but I need to speak my mind.

I am beginning to get increasingly frustrated with irresponsible pedestrians on the UNC campus.

Just this morning, while on Manning Drive, I observed what I would call two near-misses in the span of less than five minutes: two students ran in front of moving traffic near Hinton James and another person decided to cross against the light near Odum Village, all nearly getting hit.

We all know that there is a speeding problem on campus and a problem with vehicles failing to yield to pedestrians, but my experience this morning (and almost every day I drive on campus) points to an equally severe problem: the lack of pedestrians taking responsibility.

Pedestrians cross against signals, out of crosswalks and enter the street without looking for traffic.

We all want to see a safer campus and for that to occur, everyone must assume responsibility: cars must slow down and yield to pedestrians, but at the same time, pedestrians must obey the law and recognize that if there is an accident between a

person and a car, the car will always win.

Until this campus is pedestrian only, we all must assume responsibility to make it a safer place for everyone.

Drew Gold
Graduate Student
Kenan-Flagler Business School

Gold is co-secretary of the Graduate and Professional Student Federation's transportation committee.

Marching Band Seats Would Be Better Used By Students at Games

TO THE EDITOR:

Wouldn't the seating situation in the Smith Center be resolved if we gave the marching band's seats to students and played Kansas and the Doobie Brothers albums over the public address system?

R. Sterling Perkinson
Graduate Student
Kenan-Flagler Business School



The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticism. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 300 words. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarity. Publication is not guaranteed. Bring letters to the DTH office at Suite 104, Carolina Union, mail them to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or e-mail forum to: editdesk@unc.edu.