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BOARD EDITORIALS

Housing Equity

UNC needs to get with the 21st century and offer campus residents the option of rooming with someone of the opposite sex.

The University should get with the times and start giving students the option of living on campus in coed-by-bed arrangements.

Administrators at Tufts University in Boston recently denied a gay student's proposal for mixed-gender residence hall rooms.

A pilot program would have allowed 20 rising sophomores to live in 10 coed rooms on campus.

Gay students risk getting a homophobic roommate of the same gender under the current policy at UNC, which has a single-sex housing policy identical to Tufts.

In addition, gay students who are forced to live with someone of the same gender might be put in situations that become sexually uncomfortable. If students had the option of living with someone of the opposite sex, gay students wouldn't have to worry about their roommates thinking they were constantly hitting on them.

Wesleyan University, located in Middletown, Conn., has offered coed rooms to all students except freshmen for the last six years.

Mandated single-sex housing "is hetero-

sexist in nature, and we want to be inclusive of students that are gay, lesbian and bisexual," said Jeff Ederer, director of residential life at Wesleyan.

But coed housing isn't just for gay students. Heterosexual couples also could choose to live together like gay couples can already.

It's understandable that some students might feel uncomfortable living on halls that have coed rooms even if they live in a single-sex room. The bathrooms on such a hall would probably have to be coed as well.

Housing officials should start letting students check off a box on their housing contracts that says they want to live in not only a coed residence hall but also a coed room.

At the same time, the Department of University Housing should also offer students the chance to say they don't want to live on a hall or in a residence hall that contains coed rooms.

This should be easy to accommodate because students can already request single-sex residence halls or floors. It's time for UNC to get with it.

Fix the Glitches Now

SBP-elect Brad Matthews must keep the pressure on the Elections Board to make sure the transition to online voting is seamless.

Computers are no more perfect than the people who use them. That said, the Elections Board must proceed cautiously as it gears up to bring online voting to next year's student elections.

The board needs to take advantage of the next 11 months to work out all the technical and ethical kinks sure to surface.

History shows that student elections here are anything but perfect. Year in and year out, it seems, something always goes wrong.

This year, the database that supports the scantron machine responsible for counting ballots failed. Last year, the Elections Board chairwoman and candidates for Residence Hall Association president faced off in Student Supreme Court over how to count graduate students' votes. Three years ago, it took 72 hours to count Student Congress votes because the scantron machine broke.

That's not a pretty record, and bringing online voting to campus should help the board rein in some of the technical glitches.

The other problems - who can vote in what race, ensuring that poll workers check all voters' UNC ONE Cards and enforcing campaign rules - will, of course, take a big chunk of human effort. That's why it's espe-

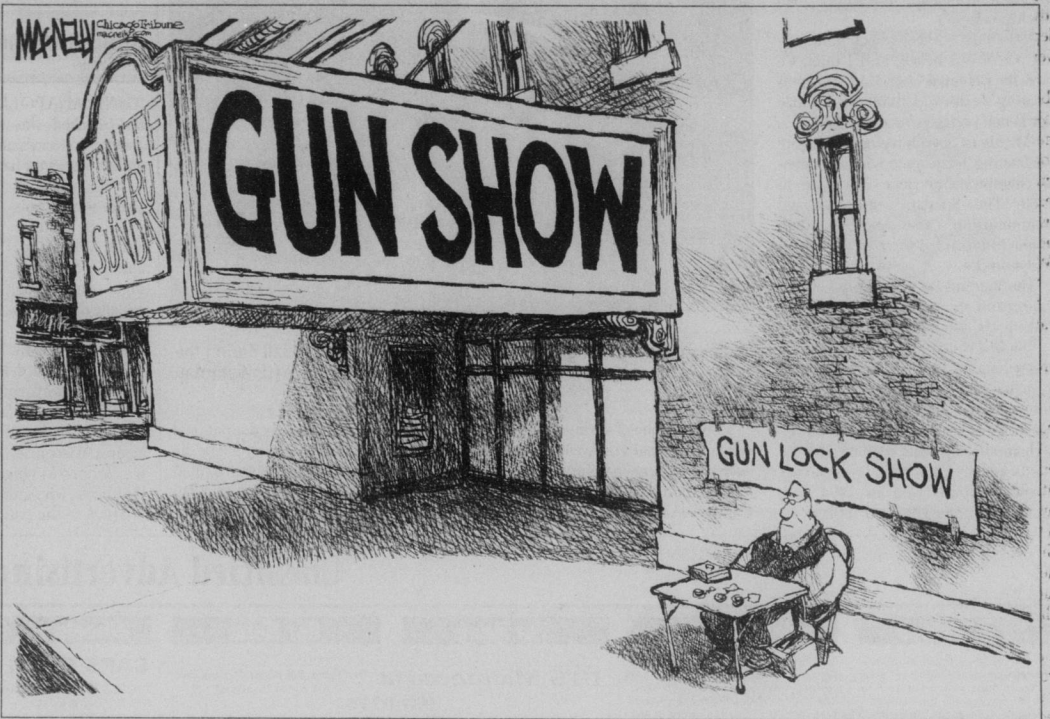
cially critical for the Elections Board and student government to use the next 11 months productively and earnestly, to cut down the chances that its bad record follows it into the cyber age.

Putting the Elections Board on the road to redemption is going to require strong leadership from Student Body President-elect Brad Matthews. He must choose a dedicated and effective board chairperson as soon as he is elected. Then, he needs to mount a major publicity and public relations effort to entice students into joining the board and then taking it seriously.

Once the board is selected, it'll be Matthews' job to make sure they stay productive throughout the year.

The board is going to have to new rules to keep candidates and voters from abusing the system. N.C. State University Student Body President Raj Mirchandani, for example, passed out fliers in campus computer labs - where potential voters were a mouse click away from voting for him.

Computers often create more problems than they fix. Here's hoping that the Elections Board keeps that in mind - and does something about it.



U.S. Needs a Dose of Gun Control

Last week, the good folks in your White House called for the return of "natural quiet" to the Grand Canyon, announcing rules that will limit the noise of sightseeing and commercial flights over the area. With ideas like that, I'd settle for "natural quiet" in the White House.

Actually, I don't mind a little noise on important topics - like President Clinton's recent assault on the National Rifle Association. The advantage of a wounded, lame duck president is that he can quack with conviction without worrying about re-election.

An ugly duckling myself, I once gave a speech calling for a ban on handguns to my eighth-grade class nearly seven years ago. Call it prophetic wisdom.

That was long before towns like Littleton, Paducah and Jonesboro became part of geographic consciousness.

In fact, later this month will mark the first anniversary of the Columbine High School massacre.

Likewise, it was prophetic wisdom that inspired the adoption of the Constitution's Second Amendment, which says roughly: A well-regulated militia being necessary for the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

Such simple language, unlike the wordy nonsense lawmakers write today. It's amazing what it takes these days just to get even a little "natural quiet."

But in that simple language, one word stands out like 7-foot Brendan Haywood in a class full of kindergartners. Militia.

I might not have a problem with the Second Amendment if every gun owner signed up with the National Guard, which does a fine job of "militarizing" for my money.

But with most gun owners not enlisted, I wonder whom these patriots plan to fight. The U.S. government? I'm afraid that Smith & Wesson won't quite match up against a Tomahawk cruise missile.

If you ask the NRA, the enemy is violent



BRANDON BRISCOE
VOICE OF REASON

crime. They'll rattle off statistics about heroic gun owners preventing crimes daily. Yet for each such tale of heroic glory, there is a matching story whose tragedy is far greater.

During my Spring Break in New Orleans, a man used a legally owned weapon to stop a carjacking. An off-duty police officer arrived on the scene to see the man firing at the bandits racing off into the night.

The officer, a 12-year veteran of the force, used his own weapon to shoot the would-be hero in the head. An awful lot of shooting because of a car.

Sadly, violence begets violence, and we have too much of both. Removing guns from our streets will leave fewer crimes that need prevention.

The president has called for more licensing and waiting periods and background checks. He even held a press conference last month to gloat when Smith & Wesson agreed to a settlement in a lawsuit filed by several cities against gun manufacturers.

Hypocritically, one mayor took part in the festivities even though his city sold confiscated guns back to a manufacturer. One gun was later used in a crime.

But while Clinton's work is all nice and good, it won't do the trick. Clearly, criminals are not buying their guns at their local hunting shop. In fact, many simply steal them from law-abiding citizens who bought a gun for protection in the first place.

More than trigger locks and paperwork, we ought to roll back the number of guns lying around the country. Handguns are destruction

and grief waiting to happen, and their sale in this country should be drastically reduced. Every handgun in an American home is a threat, not to criminals, but to innocent people.

Some will point to statistics from other countries to argue that the presence of guns doesn't necessarily yield violence, although the murder rate in France hardly seems relevant to you or me.

Others will say that this is a matter of personal liberty - that we need to keep "big brother" from infringing on our rights.

Meanwhile, to promote safety in this culture of violence, we install security cameras and metal detectors in our office buildings, courthouses and schools.

Oh, yes, we are certainly shielding ourselves from prying eyes.

Ironically, many students must pass well-paid security officers and expensive security systems to get into a school where they find un-air-conditioned classrooms, antiquated textbooks and underpaid, poorly trained teachers.

Indeed, defending the Second Amendment is not defending our rights - it's trading them. And it's a bad trade at that.

Let's not be foolish, however. Obviously, we'll never remove all the guns, and not all guns are bad.

Hunters have a legitimate right to own a rifle or shotgun, and most use them appropriately. Fire at will, Elmer Fudd.

And we will never rid ourselves of violence or crime, at least not by simply taking away guns. True, the problem runs deeper.

But guns add unnecessary fuel to the fire. Put simply, their benefits do not outweigh their cost.

We should reduce the prevalence of guns and restore some real "natural quiet" in this country.

Brandon Briscoe is a junior journalism and mass communication major from New Orleans. Send him tips and comments at brandon_briscoe@unc.edu.

READERS' FORUM

DTH Article Right On In Heralding Visibility As Priority for GLBTs

TO THE EDITOR:

I must commend The Daily Tar Heel for the March 23 article "Tearing Down the Closet."

You pinpointed the most pivotal issue within the gay movement: visibility!

As Audre Lorde said, "... the visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which is also our greatest source of strength."

The "closet" has perpetuated homophobia and discrimination for much too long. Nonetheless, "coming out" is still very difficult for many gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans-genders (GLBT). It still carries the possibility of discrimination, violence or exclusion.

This is a point in which allies can also make a difference. By actively supporting the GLBT community and condemning discrimination, allies serve as a catalyst for increased visibility by making it safer for those who are "out."

So GLBT and allies, let your pres-

ence be known!

Celebrities are increasing visibility on the national level; now it's our responsibility to promote the personal connections which spread acceptance.

A great opportunity for this is coming up during Celebration Week, today through April 7, sponsored by Queer Network for Change.

The National Day of Silence will be recognized Wednesday to protest the oppressive silence forced on GLBT in the form of the closet, as well sexual assault and domestic violence survivors and numerous other oppressed groups.

Then on Thursday, a Visibility March will be held between classes, a perfect opportunity for GLBT and allies to make their presence known.

We will congregated at 12:10 p.m. in the Pit and march at 12:20 p.m. There will be tons of Pride and Allied posters provided.

So come out and show your support!

Shannon Graham
Senior
Women's Studies and Political
Science

Area Lucky to Have Chapel Hill Transit's Quality Bus System

TO THE EDITOR:

In response to Thursday's "Mass Transit Gift," I would like to comment that experimenting with free transit over the holiday season is a good idea. However, the editorial seemed to undermine the quality of the existing transit system. I think every student at this University, as well as every Chapel Hill and Carrboro resident, should be grateful for the system we have.

Other college towns do not benefit from such a service. For example, students at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Va., must rely on a yellow and green painted school bus to take them around campus.

Whereas I would not complain if mass transit in the area were free, I would rather pay 75 cents to ride than not to be able to ride at all.

Dawne Howard
Junior
Journalism and Mass
Communication and History



The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticism. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 300 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. 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.

The Daily Tar Heel welcomes submissions from its readers for its Viewpoints page every Monday. Guest columns should be about 800 words, written by no more than two people and discuss an issue relevant to DTH readers. Submissions should be e-mailed to editdesk@unc.edu and are due by 6 p.m. the Wednesday before the column will appear. Publication is not guaranteed. For more information, contact Editorial Page Editor Scott Hicks at 962-0245.

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