

Opinion

Housing weighed student opinion, chose best option

I have read with great interest the comments made by student leaders ("Housing disregards student opinion, needs," Jan. 19) and letters to the editor concerning the Department of University Housing's decision to guarantee sophomore housing. While I accept that disagreement among reasonable people can, and does, occur concerning this issue, I am particularly disturbed by comments attributed to individuals for whom I have developed a strong personal and professional regard. I also wish to emphasize that I speak on my own behalf, and not for the Housing Advisory Board.

The housing department has proposed implementing guaranteed sophomore housing for the past three years. These proposals were opposed by student representatives and by many faculty and staff members familiar with the issues. As a member of the committee established by the Residence Hall Association in 1986, which evolved into the University Housing Advisory Board, I opposed the proposal when it was first presented. As a member of the Housing Advisory Board in 1987-1988, I also opposed the recommendation. Contrary to the interpretation reached by many (for instance, Roni Harbert's letter "Housing results fail students," Jan. 19), the fact that such a proposal was not implemented seems to me illustrative of the serious considera-

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Guest Writer

tion granted to student opinion. The Housing Advisory Board recommended overwhelmingly to Dr. Kuncel that the proposal under consideration not be pursued. To Dr. Kuncel's credit, I think, he accepted that recommendation.

At the same time, however, the board stated explicitly that the Department of University Housing should, if the need seemed persistent, examine the issue and resubmit the same, or a similar, proposal the next year. That action was indeed taken by Dr. Kuncel and his staff, and the recommendation was presented to the Housing Advisory Board on Nov. 10, 1988.

At that meeting, student members (students comprise nearly half of the board) expressed concern about the proposal. After spirited discussion, the board requested that student members solicit response from other students in University housing; and that they provide a statement concerning the new proposal to the chair of the board by Dec. 5 for distribution. As chair of the board, I received notice that a revised proposal from RHA was forthcoming and that copies of the proposal would be

forwarded to members of the board before the meeting of Dec. 8, at which time a vote on the housing department's recommendation was scheduled.

On Dec. 8, Jimmy Randolph, president of RHA, presented to the Housing Advisory Board a proposal that was subsequently endorsed by the DTH. Following spirited discussion again, it was moved and seconded that "the Housing Advisory Board endorse the recommendation presented by the Department of University Housing." The motion failed with two voting for, six opposing and one abstaining. As chair, I did not vote. After further discussion, it was moved and seconded that "the Housing Advisory Board endorse the proposal presented by RHA." The motion passed with four voting in support, one opposing and two abstaining. It seems important to note, however, that all those supporting the RHA recommendation were students and that many faculty and staff members were unable to attend the meeting because of unexpected conflicts. Further, both the current and former chairs of the board, while not voting for procedural reasons, supported the Department of University Housing's proposal.

Strong arguments can be marshalled in support of either proposal. Both the RHA and the Department

of University Housing presented well-documented, strongly defended recommendations. At the time of presentation, both acknowledged the speculative nature of benefits and costs associated with their respective proposals, although some student responses seem now to have turned speculation into certainty in recent DTH columns.

Since Dr. Kuncel and his staff decided to implement their initial proposal, the response from student leaders has been disappointing. The housing department has been accused of "disregarding" student opinion, of making "no effort to respond" to the RHA proposal and of making a "farce of the whole process" ("No money back on this guarantee," Jan. 17). Student leaders alleged that factors influenced the decision "without regard to . . . student needs" and that a "mockery" was made of the "students' ability to govern themselves and decide their own priorities." I believe that an awareness of the events over the past three years demonstrates quite clearly that rather than ignoring student input, it was assiduously solicited and seriously evaluated.

Even more dispiriting than the perceptions expressed is the tone that seems to characterize this student response. The column written by student leaders described the decision-making process as "con-

temptible," and a letter to the editor described it as a "railroad." I do not believe that these terms accurately describe the process that I observed and in which I participated.

Most unfortunate of all, perhaps, was the statement made by student leaders that the Housing Advisory Board was in some way an entity of the Department of University Housing. The Housing Advisory Board has been actively involved in serving as a valuable liaison between all elements of the University community. It was revived from nonexistence, in fact, by RHA; it contains elements of the University faculty, staff and student populations; and it has worked without fail to maintain its independence and to fulfill its advisory function. I find it confusing that the board itself is both praised for supporting the RHA proposal while simultaneously condemned as participating in a process that excludes the student voice, particularly when the student body president, the president of RHA and a representative of the Black Student Movement (along with five other students) sit on the board.

After opposing the Department of University Housing's recommendation for two years, I finally supported the proposal because I found the arguments, most of which had not been presented in previous years, more persuasive. I did not discount the comments of student members;

they were, I believe, given great weight by all who attended, including University housing staff members.

My experience on this board and its predecessor for the past three years demonstrates that students, faculty and staff members can discuss areas of joint concern productively and to the benefit of all. When disagreements do arise, however, it seems both irresponsible and shortsighted to find fault with the motives of those who must make decisions when virtually all evidence seems to indicate good will and concern with providing the best housing environment possible. All who have served on the Housing Advisory Board — Wayne Kuncel, Jimmy Randolph and others — have given of their time under tremendous pressure, and all have worked diligently to understand complicated issues and to strive for Solomon-like decisions. To indict the process in which they work is to diminish their contributions. To transform legitimate differences of policy into attacks upon individuals and the process is to discount the value of participation itself. The entire University community, and students in particular, deserve better.

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License to hassle: A day at the DMV

Laura Pearlman
Associate Editor

My driver's license expired on my 21st birthday back in December. With exams and everything, it really never occurred to me to do anything about it until some bartender refused to serve me. Apparently, the state of North Carolina says I'm 21 only if my license is current. Otherwise I'm cast into some kind of chronological limbo.

So near the end of Christmas break, I broke down and headed for the Buncombe County Driver's Licensing Bureau. During the 25 minutes it takes to get from my house to the bureau, I inexplicably became bound so tightly in red tape that I was unable to liberate myself from the shackles for an entire terrifying afternoon. Obviously, the kind folks at the Department of Transportation have taken lessons from the Office of the University Registrar.

I got there and dutifully handed the receptionist/photographer my summons that had arrived in the mail months before. She handed it back to me, tonelessly explaining that I would need form DL-125 or something. DL-125 proves that I am financially responsible for any reckless and careless driving my car might undertake while I am behind the wheel. DL-125 can only be obtained from the insurance agency back in downtown Asheville. Of course.

So off I went, returning an hour later and proudly offering the fruits of my journey to the receptionist/photographer. Clearly unimpressed with my perseverance and tenacity, she handed me a written examination and, yes, a number-two pencil, as well as an organ donor application.

Armed with exam, pencil, organ donor application, old driver's license, the initial summons and DL-125, I took a seat. Gazing forlornly at the exam, I realized I couldn't answer the first five questions; so I put the exam aside and gazed forlornly at the next best thing — the organ donor application. You could check off one of five ways in which your remains could be divvied up following a catastrophe on the Dangerous Curve of I-40 in Winston Salem. The options included A) eyes only; B) vital organs only; C) kidney or liver only; D) any organs needed; or E) I wish to donate my whole body to medical science. Considering my family never misses an opportunity to get together and eat, I ruled "E" out immediately. What kind of funeral can you have with no body? I put the application away and recast my forlorn gaze on the examination.

It was just as I'd remembered it from five years ago. Irrelevant. One question I remember in particular: A

cloverleaf segment of highway is one in which I) all turns are left ones, II) a bridge carries one highway over another one. Then the answers: A) I only, B) II only, C) I and II, and D) neither. I wrote, "E) there are no cloverleaf segments in western North Carolina."

When I was done with the SAT of driving, Officer Wilson invited me to his desk. He quickly graded the exam and informed me that I had passed. Barely.

Next came the eye examination. The logic behind the cloverleaf question was obviously applied to the eye exam. The road sign part I understand — it is helpful to know that a red octagon is a stop sign, but when are you going to have to read numbers that tiny by the side of the road? I read one set of numbers, and Officer Wilson asked me to close my left eye and read the same set. Well, with my left eye closed, some of the numbers disappeared altogether. I figured if I told him I couldn't see it at all, he'd fail me. So I recited the invisible numbers from memory.

"Miss Pearlman, if your left eye is closed, you can't see those numbers!" Officer Wilson bellowed. He failed me. He asked me if I wore corrective lenses, and I said yes, but they were at home. Sure enough I found myself back on the road with number-two pencil, an organ donor application and DL-125, but no license. I returned an hour later with the corrective lenses. At this point, Officer Wilson knew me by name. I passed the eye exam, corrective lenses firmly planted on my nose.

He asked me if I had contacts, to which I wittily replied: "Of course not. If I did, I wouldn't be sitting here." Cracking nary a smile, he charged me \$10 and informed me I'd have to wear my corrective lenses whenever I drive. After the mandatory photographic record of my day at the licensing bureau (this time with the coveted red background), I stalked out of the office, the lamination still warm in my hand and corrective lenses in place. Approaching the car, I reached a decision. I'd check "A" on the organ donor card — they sure as hell aren't doing me any good.

Laura Pearlman is a junior English major from Asheville.

Seven days could have saved five lives

Last week Patrick Purdy walked to the edge of a crowded schoolyard in Stockton, Calif. and opened fire on a group of children playing during recess. Five children were killed; many more were injured.

When the police searched the gunman's hotel room, they found over 100 war toys, miniature soldiers and all the miniature armaments that go with them. They were all over the room, even in the refrigerator, set up to play some kind of war game. Unfortunately, this wasn't a game, for along with his toy-guns Patrick Purdy had a real AK-47 assault rifle. He drove to the elementary school he had gone to as a child, set his car on fire with a real Molotov cocktail and murdered children with real bullets. Then he killed himself.

My first reaction to this story was one of horror, followed closely by outrage. I wished Purdy had not turned a pistol on himself after he had finished killing the children. I wanted him alive so that he could be slowly tortured. In a few senseless moments, he had single-handedly erased five lives.

My anger has started to fade. An eye-for-an-eye mentality rarely solves anything. However, the anger has not left a vacuum in its absence. It has been replaced by hard questions that demand answers.

Bill Yelverton
Staff Columnist

Twenty-six-year-old Patrick Purdy had a record of at least five arrests in California since 1980, including drug and weapons violations. And yet somehow, he managed to get hold of what has been referred to as the "killer's weapon," a Soviet-designed AK-47 military assault rifle. On a visit to an aunt's house in Sandy, Ore., Purdy walked into a store and bought the rifle for \$349.95.

The system for buying guns needs to be changed. All that is required for a gun purchase is to fill out a federal form and show some form of I.D. On the form the purchaser affirms that he is not under indictment, a convicted criminal, a drug addict or mentally ill. These forms are never checked. Purdy simply used a fake I.D. and lied about his past.

One proposed change in the system — establishing a mandatory seven-day waiting period before customers can pick up guns — could have helped in this case. If authorities had been given more time, they could have checked Purdy's background and refused the sale. Twenty-two states now have such a waiting period for

handguns. The waiting period should be extended to all states and cover all guns, not just handguns. Last fall, a measure to require a handgun waiting period nationwide was narrowly defeated in the House of Representatives after intense lobbying by the National Rifle Association.

The NRA has traditionally portrayed itself as an organization of sportsmen and hunters who are committed to defending the right for citizens to bear arms. They have enjoyed Republican support and maintain pressure on Congress with ample PAC monies. However, this year the NRA changed its advertising to play on the fear of the American people. In one ad, a picture of a high-heeled shoe with the heel ripped off is shown above a sentence which reads, "He's followed you for two weeks. He'll rape you in two minutes." In another a close-up of a shattered pair of glasses is accompanied by the words, "You were beaten to death last night. Who cares?" The ads imply that in an increasingly dangerous world, a gun will protect you. However, studies have shown, and police concur, that pulling a handgun in a dangerous situation is more likely to get you killed than to save you.

In 1986 alone, 22,000 people were killed with handguns. Roughly 12,000

of these deaths were suicides, 1,000 were fatal accidents and 9,345 were intentional shootings.

Despite these figures, the NRA continues to oppose a waiting period for any gun on the grounds that it might inconvenience legitimate users and drive criminals to the black market. In California, 1,500 felons were caught trying to buy guns in 1986, largely due to a waiting period that is in effect. These people may have eventually acquired a gun, but at least it was harder to get. A waiting period would substantially reduce the number of impulse killings and suicides by giving the purchaser a chance to cool down before he picked up a gun.

Unfortunately, there is no easy solution to the problem of guns getting into the wrong hands in our country. A federally mandated waiting period for all guns purchased would be a positive step. A waiting period may have stopped Patrick Purdy. As long as we sit back and do nothing, we must be prepared to mourn the deaths of innocent victims sacrificed in a sick game.

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Inaugurating the kinder, gentler nation with a handshake and a happy face

The hangovers from those Washington inaugural galas have passed, and with them go the last excuses — by now we should all be feeling kinder and gentler, right? Should I feel guilty for feeling bitchy this morning? There's a new president in the White House and things are supposed to be peachy, even for those of us who didn't make our first million in the last eight years. There's a new breeze blowing in America: Bush has promised to be nice to us.

I thought the "kinder and gentler" line was a stroke of genius during the campaign, far better than the "thou-

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sand points of light" schtick, which didn't sound all that sincere and reminded one of a beer commercial ("one thousand pints of light on the wall, one thousand pints of light . . ."). Kinder and gentler was something we could all relate to in our own separate ways. That's the beautiful thing about a good line.

To hear Jesse Jackson talk, you would have thought George Bush was

a closet liberal. Jackson, speaking on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, said we ought to give George a chance to make good on his promise of humane treatment for poor people. That was nice of Jesse. He's acting kinder and gentler, too.

Jackson's message was clear, though. "Wait, watch and remember what the hell this Republican said last fall." Seems reasonable.

But the real question remains: What in the world does "kinder and gentler" mean, for crying out loud? Kinder and gentler than what? When Bush says he wants to be kinder and gentler, is he referring to Mother

Teresa or Joel Steinberg? Whom you intend to beat at the kinder and gentler game has a great deal to do with the outcome. And if Bush meant he wants to be kinder and gentler than his predecessor, well, some would say that Attila the Hun was kinder than Ronald Reagan. Not I, of course. I'm no radical rabble-rouser.

My guess is "kinder and gentler" are merely code words for "more polite." In Bush's America we'll say "Good morning!" to the homeless family sleeping on the grate as we pass them on our way to work; under Reagan we told 'em to get a job.

To the woman who can't get off

welfare because she can't get a job because she can't get day care for her children because the private programs cost more than she would earn at a minimum wage job which is all she can get because she doesn't have an education because she got pregnant and dropped out of a high school that didn't teach immoral things like birth control: "Have a nice day. Care to see some pictures of George with the grandchildren?"

To those working class families who can't afford health insurance, who live with the fear that an expensive chronic illness will wipe out everything they've worked so hard to

save: "Don't worry! Be happy! Everybody sing along!"

Forgive me, but until the new president gets his hands dirty in the act of solving these problems, I am not going to be feeling any kinder and gentler toward the Washington brass. All this public relations happy talk just makes me grouchy and crotchety.

But who knows? Maybe Barbara and I will do lunch. And I won't even mention her cross-eyed, stupid-looking daughter.

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