

OPINION

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Daily
Nebraskan
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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Obscene on-line

Don't let traffic cops on this highway

The specter of censorship is haunting America once again. And once again, Sen. James Exon is behind it. Exon, a Nebraska Democrat, has been pushing his Communications Decency Act of 1995. It is remarkably similar to legislation Exon tried and failed to pass last year, the Communications Decency Act of 1994.

The proposal would punish people who distribute obscene material on computer networks with up to two years in jail and \$100,000 in fines.

Exon says he wants to protect children from pornographic material on the Internet.

That is a laudable goal. One distinction that must be made, however, is between obscenity and pornography. The two are often equated, but before the law, they are two different things.

Obscenity is something that does not receive any First Amendment protection, while pornography is merely sexually explicit material. So, what Exon may call obscene actually may be a protected form of speech.

Regardless, the federal government is not charged with baby-sitting American children. And the government's role is not to arbitrarily judge what is acceptable and what is not. That's what parents are for.

If parents do not wish their children to see pornographic images or sexually explicit messages from the Internet, they should supervise their children's computer use.

The telecommunications reform bill, with Exon's amendment attached, passed the Senate Commerce Committee March 23. The bill is on the Senate's agenda and could be discussed this week.

Organizations from the American Civil Liberties Union to Morality in Media are gearing up for the next round of debate on the Decency Act.

But it would be unwise to rely upon them alone to fight the battle against censorship. Each citizen who values his or her First Amendment right of free expression must be vigilant against any legislation that threatens it.

The Daily Nebraskan encourages University of Nebraska-Lincoln faculty and staff to educate themselves on Exon's amendment and speak out. One source of information is the Voters Telecommunications Watch, which periodically posts an update on the amendment on the Internet.

The Internet is a vast web of interconnected computer networks that spans the globe. It connects literally thousands of diverse communities — all with different standards of what is acceptable and what is not.

Since it was formed, the Internet has been an invaluable resource for the academic community.

Now more than ever, though, the Internet is an invaluable resource for everyone — from businessmen to artists, from mayors of small Nebraska towns to the President of the United States.

The Internet's greatest strength lies in its anarchical organization. No one party has control over it.

And none should.

The Daily Nebraskan is grateful that, with retirement looming, Exon will have no more chances to endanger free expression on the Internet.

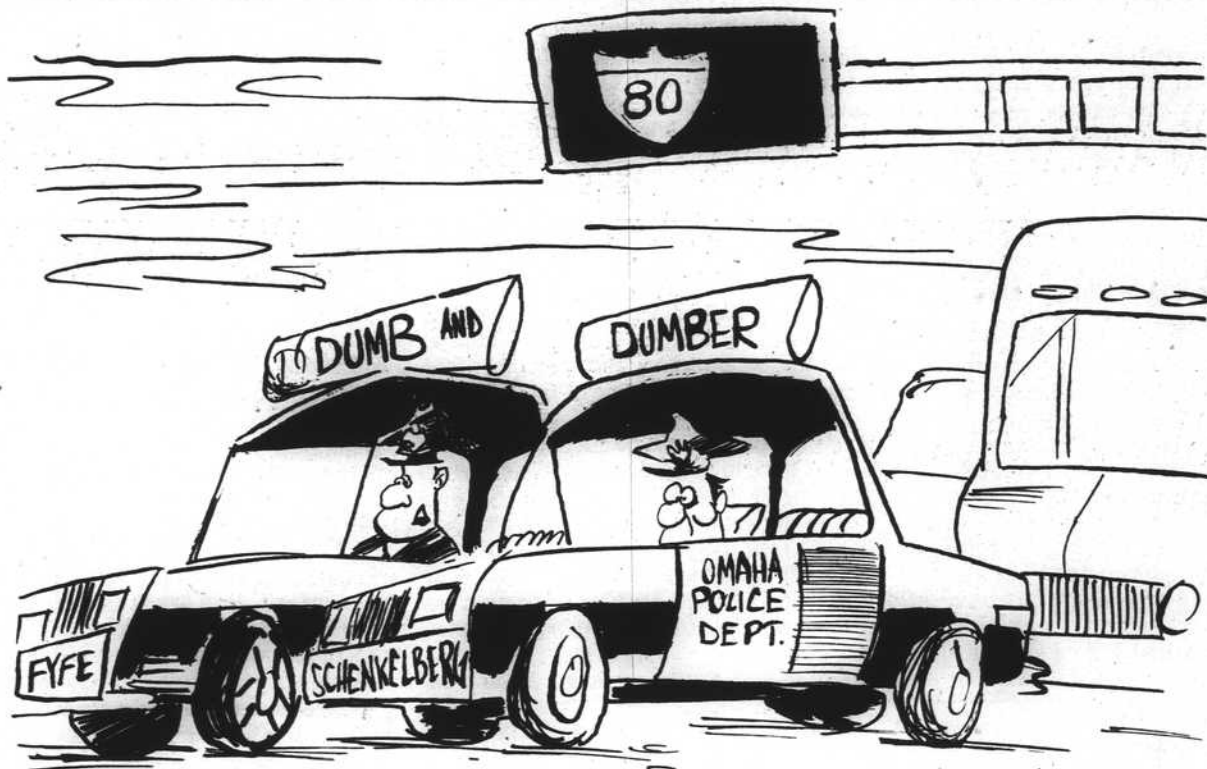
Hopefully, the bad idea of curbing free speech will accompany Exon when he leaves office.

Editorial policy

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Spring 1995. Daily Nebraskan. Policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. Editorials do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, its employees, the students or the NU Board of Regents. Editorial columns represent the opinion of the author. The regents publish the Daily Nebraskan. They establish the UNL Publications Board to supervise the daily production of the paper. According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its students.

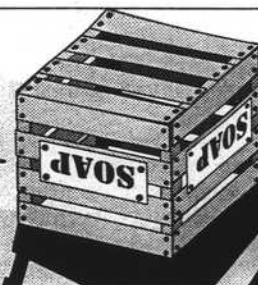
Letter policy

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor from all readers and interested others. Letters will be selected for publication on the basis of clarity, originality, timeliness and space available. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit or reject all material submitted. Readers also are welcome to submit material as guest opinions. The editor decides whether material should run as a guest opinion. Letters and guest opinions sent to the newspaper become the property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned. Anonymous submissions will not be published. Letters should include the author's name, year in school, major and group affiliation, if any. Requests to withhold names will not be granted. Submit material to the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448.



JIM MEHSLING 015
DAILY NEBRASKAN

Daily Nebraskan readers say:



Send your brief letters to:
Daily Nebraskan, 34
Nebraska Union, 1400 R St.,
Lincoln, Neb. 68588. Or fax
to: (402) 472-1761. Letters
must be signed and include a
phone number for
verification.

Victims

How many ridiculous talk shows are out there? But the real issue is what these shows carry, and that is the victim.

Today's society has more victims than ever. Victims of parents, victims of children, victims of friends, victims of gender, victims of race. We are all crying and sobbing and asking why.

The worst part of this victim culture is that it diffuses the true problems of society. There are victims in the world — women who are repeatedly beaten by husbands, men who are harassed by the police because of the color of their skin, children who starve because their parents will not care for them.

When I look at students in the classes I teach and know that tonight they will be sleeping in a tent, I cannot help but feel disgust at the "victim culture" of our society, which complains it was given love, but not enough. It was harassed, once; it was abused, once.

Yet we as a public feed on this, encourage it, embrace it. We shout, "I'm a victim, too — fix me!"

There are too many real problems in the world to deal with, and I have learned that complaining goes nowhere. Action does.

Stephanie Call
junior
secondary education

'Audacity and gall'

On the evening of March 29, ASUN Republicans visited Barrymore's for a celebration of recent elections. We welcomed their patronage as we have in the past; however, their actions on the above-mentioned date left very much to be desired.

On no occasion have I or anyone in my employment been so disgusted, repulsed and astonished at their behavior (or anyone else) while in this establishment. If their actions on that evening are any indication of their maturity and ability to serve and represent, both



Bret Gottschall/DN

the University of Nebraska and the people they represent should take a close look at with whom they are associated.

On that Wednesday we entertained, or rather the members entertained us and our customers, for several hours. Unfortunately, during that time the actions of several reflected on the group as a whole.

Someone had the audacity and gall to chew tobacco and spit it on the carpet repeatedly. Only when the waitress presented him with a cup and demanded he use it did he curtail his well-reasoned activity.

To further add to their impression that evening, a group of them ventured upstairs to our meeting room and proceeded to rip two pictures (secured with screws) off of the wall. They were found the next day under some tables at the back of the lounge.

If that was not enough, they took the time to stop on their way upstairs to unwrap a present, left there for someone not in their group, and strew the contents over the floor. Nice class for politically aspiring students.

To say the least, their rudeness and juvenile attitudes left much to be desired. It also drew many negative comments from other customers, who likewise found the actions and manners of this group

to be less than exemplary and often repulsive.

Perhaps in the future, the ASUN Republicans would like to carry on these actions in the company of those who elected them along with members of the UNL faculty and administration. I'm sure they would make a great impression; maybe even better than they did with us and the other customers around them on March 29.

Laird Haberlan
manager
Barrymore's Lounge

Marlene Beyke, ASUN's adviser, told the Daily Nebraskan that she received a similar letter from Haberlan. She said she was looking into the matter. — Editor

Protest

I had a chance to protest the master of homophobic rhetoric, Pastor Fred W. Phelps, and I didn't go.

I had been asked to go and didn't because I expected there were mixed motives for the protest. I am certain I was right.

The U.S. military kicks a man out for being gay and what do Nebraska homosexuals do? Not much. When Nebraska Social Services banned homosexuals from being foster parents, why wasn't there a sit-in at the governor's place? When the Omaha Police confiscated homosexual art from an Omaha bar and when homosexuals were arrested in the parks, where were the protests?

I am certain that many of those who protested Phelps did so because he is a pastor. Once again, this makes homosexuals look irreligious in the eyes of the public, no matter how many people are willing to dismiss Phelps as a lunatic.

Protesting Phelps, while it is the right thing to do, will not do much to help homosexuals achieve the goal of full citizenship, for he does not have the power to deny homosexuals citizenship.

Andrew Sullivan
Omaha