

# OPINION PAGES

## Our VIEW

### Just say no

#### School code violations don't justify reaction

The clothes we wear, the way we style our hair, and the way we decorate our bodies are symbols.

Symbols of who we are and what we like.

Statements of what we believe in.

And now they're symbols of repression.

Last week the principal of Pound Middle School banned wallets attached to chains and bandannas of all colors, even though only blue ones were reportedly causing a problem.

Some students were allegedly wearing the wallets and bandannas to identify themselves as belonging to certain groups — possibly gangs.

He even considered banning blue and white hair scrunchies because they were being worn by some girls as means of identification.

The principal later decided too many girls wore the scrunchies for legitimate reasons to institute such a ban.

Nationally, in the last several months we've seen a 6-year-old expelled because he kissed a girl and a high school student expelled for giving Midol to a friend — the school has a zero-tolerance policy for drug use.

More recently, a girl was suspended for wearing "distracting" black lipstick and an elementary student was suspended for bringing a 1-and-a-half inch GI JOE toy gun to school — his school has a zero tolerance policy on weapons.

The problem here is that no zero-tolerance rule or school suspension will address the real problems. Nor will they teach children useful life lessons.

"In the real world" society may have across-the-board rules, but not across-the-board penalties. The justice system handles infractions case-by-case.

We don't live in a zero-tolerance society. If that's what we teach in our schools, then we're giving students a misguided view of the world.

Administrators are using inappropriate punishments for inappropriate behaviors.

There are problems in schools.

We can't deny that, but school administrators should address the problems with real solutions.

If administrators think their schools have a gang problem, address the problem, not the symbols.

For example, appropriate alternatives to suspensions would be curriculum that includes anti-violence and gun safety messages.

Educators are hired to teach students and prepare them for life. Bogus policies produce bogus perceptions of reality.

We are not advocating student free-for-alls in public schools. Most rules have reasons.

But schools should use common sense when administering justice.

Let the punishment fit the crime.

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## Mehsling's VIEW



MEHSLING ©96 DAILY NEBRASKAN

## Mike KLUCK

### Volunteer shares holiday spirit

Over the years I have had the privilege to be a part of many different sporting events and contests.

At these events, I've also witnessed many courageous feats. To be on hand when a little 10-year-old scores his first basket, or be in Tempe, Ariz., and watch Tommie Frazier run through the Gator defense are things I'll always remember.

But no matter how much strength I've observed at any of these athletic contests, nothing will ever match the strength and courage I observed over my winter break.

During the break, I volunteered at the Mission Distribution Center here in Lincoln. I originally started by helping sort clothes and items that they had received over the holidays.

But after a couple of days, I started interviewing clients for food orders.

The interviews weren't that extensive — the candidates just had to tell me the basics about themselves: names, age, number of children living at home, etc.

But to sit there and watch people, complete strangers, muster up the strength and tell me why they weren't able to do the most basic thing in life — provide for their family — is the strongest feat I have or will ever witness.

These aren't people who are lazy, hooked on drugs or alcohol, or have some mental disability preventing them from working or providing for themselves.

They aren't the rejects of society, people you turn your backs on, or people you avoid by walking down the other side of the street.

They are people who have faced setbacks in their lives and need help getting back on the right track.

They are people who have wanted to make a change in their lives for he's lucky, will be able to go back to work in February.

Since the accident didn't happen at work, he doesn't qualify for



“These aren't people who are lazy, hooked on drugs or alcohol, or have some mental disability preventing them from working or providing for themselves.”

disability or time off. He is lucky because his job will still be waiting for him when he is healthy again. Unfortunately, that doesn't feed his three children right now.

“Sarah” had a difficult time sitting for her appointment — her 2-the better and need a little aid to get back on their feet.

One man, call him Bill, injured his back while helping a friend. It happened before Christmas, and if year-old son “Ryan” wouldn't let her.

There was no evidence the father had taken off when the child was 6 months old, leaving the mother with all the bills and no support. Her son was vibrant and full of energy.

Then there was “Emily.” Emily didn't want to talk, but her 5-year-old daughter “Jenny” enjoyed showing me how she could write her name and had fun playing with the things on my desk. Like Ryan, Emily didn't show any of the outward effects of living for many years with an abusive man.

Young and just out of high school when she got pregnant and married, but now on her own, Emily wants to raise enough money to move to Fremont — where family there can help her take care of her two daughters. Her plans are to work during the day and attend school at night.

But with a broken-down car, and not much work over the holidays, times are tough right now.

I sat and listened to their stories, praised them for trying to do the right thing in raising their children. And since the Mission is a Christian organization, I provided them with a pamphlet of Bible verses.

Then I agreed to get them a food basket.

Another organization puts the food baskets together based on the size of family, but most baskets contain the basics of pasta, toilet paper, canned goods, etc.

What impressed me even more was that although these families were struggling through a difficult time, they were still willing to make donations to help other families.

I helped carry the baskets to their cars (once I even delivered the box to a family's home personally because they didn't own a vehicle), and after about 10 or 20 thank-yous they would drive away.

And I would go back and listen to another story, thankful that I could help.

**Kluck is a journalism graduate student and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.**

### PS. Write Back

Send letters to: Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 "R" St., Lincoln, NE 68588, or fax to (402) 472-1761, or e-mail <letters@unlinfo.unl.edu>. Letters must be signed and include a phone number for verification