

OPINION PACKETS

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Our VIEW

In the buffer zone Ordinance won't deny freedoms

There is a very fine line between free speech and harassment.

Next week, the City Council will vote on whether or not a buffer zone is necessary at the Westminster Presbyterian Church, where Rescue the Heartland has held protests every Sunday for the last 20 months.

The reason for the protest is that a member of the church's governing body, Dr. Winston Crabb, performs abortions, and Rescue for the Heartland wants him to discontinue the practice and repent.

We will not take a stance on abortion, because we're divided as an Editorial Board on that deeply personal matter. Neither will we, as the governing voices of a newspaper, place undue limits on free speech. But we support this narrowly tailored buffer zone.

In accordance with their First Amendment rights, which we support, protesters have held up large signs with very graphic images in front of children and adults in public. But the verbal assaults church members claim have occurred, including personal threats, are criminal offenses and not protected in the Bill of Rights.

Church members say they are concerned about their children and claim protesters have attacked both them and their children by physically shoving 6-foot pictures of bloody, mutilated fetuses in their faces and by yelling at them with a ferocity that has driven some churchgoers to attend other churches.

Some in Lincoln have said a buffer zone moving protesters across the street from the church's entrance would protect protesters' rights to free speech while protecting the churchgoers' well-being and their right to assemble peaceably and worship.

Others said a buffer zone would be unconstitutional, because it is directed against a particular viewpoint and wouldn't give protesters the ability to promote their message.

We support a buffer zone that prevents harassment while protecting free speech. The protesters' viewpoint is not an issue -- their tactics are. The protesters can promote their message from across the street.

Until the ordinance's fate is decided ... To the churchgoers of Westminster: If you think you are being harassed or assaulted, notify the police. While protesters do have the right to protest, you also have the right to protect yourself and your children.

To the members of the protest: While we understand your dedication to your cause, and while we support your freedom of speech, we urge you to be careful not to harass rather than protest, or to assault rather than educate.

A little wise judgment on both sides of this issue will help.

Mook's VIEW



DN LETTERS

Houses of the homeless

Finally someone has had the courage to stand up for the proposed homeless removal act that has captured the attention of the campus for the past three weeks. In his letter, printed on Wednesday, Al Koenig did a wonderful job of explaining why those who support this measure do so; and guess what? It really is a case of simple hatred and ignorance just like most of us knew all along.

In his letter Koenig actually does a fairly effective job of suggesting that there may be something to the argument that the homeless in the union are a danger to the students who attempt to use it. However, his argument is rendered impotent by his heavy use of hate-filled references to groups that range from the homeless to illegal aliens. Dr. Koenig's hate is truly alarming, and the ignorance displayed by someone responsible for the education of young minds is horrifying.

Not all homeless people are bums, and while I do not know for sure, I feel safe in saying that some of those who use the union to get out of the elements were once hard-working individuals who were dealt a rough blow by life.

I am in agreement with Bill Roby, executive director of Daywatch, that the answer to this problem lies not in making the union more homeless-friendly, but in providing them with someplace else to be, where they can receive professional assistance. I for one would love to have some of my student fees diverted to this cause, or better yet, have Koenig's salary diverted to it. These are the kind of pro-active helpful suggestions that are needed to solve this problem. The university has a choice that is simple. Either we can support small-minded hatred and pass the motion as is, or we can try to find a good compromise. I hope we do the latter, and let Koenig and the other less brave individuals who feel the same way know their hatred will not become the official policy of this university.

John Walters
first year
College of Law

Just doing my job

I am writing in response to Al Koenig's letter to the editor printed Wednesday:

As president of the Association of

Students of the University of Nebraska, I am, as Koenig pointed out, one of many elected to represent the students of the University of Nebraska -- a difficult job, I readily admit. I cannot be everywhere and see everything. No one individual person can. But that is why I am not the only member of student government. Other students are elected for the same purpose: to attempt to represent the students to the best of our ability. Collectively, we can aim to better represent the students here.

At our meeting last week, we voted to oppose the idea of restricting certain areas in the union to non-students. I am not going to speak for the rest of the representatives, but will give you my opinion on the issue at hand.

I understand the task of Union Board is a difficult one. If there are perceived safety concerns, then Union Board has to address these concerns and come up with possible solutions. Address it as such then -- a safety issue. Stereotyping any group of people and labeling it as dangerous is not the answer. Address the individuals who create the problem, and don't look to restrict a group of people because it somehow seems easier. Union Board and Director Swanson have not done this, they do not even have a motion yet to put such a policy in place. But you seem to rush hastily to judgment.

I am often at the union until closing time and by myself. I understand the desire to feel safe in the Nebraska Union. I have no way of knowing the intent of anyone to cause me harm -- student or non-student.

But I do not believe that it is limited to a safety issue. I believe it is also a discomfort issue. People at the university are uncomfortable with certain people in the union. I do not believe this is a valid reason to restrict a group of people from the union. I can be just as uncomfortable, for the same or other reasons, with a student at any given time as I can with a non-student. That is for me, personally. But many people turn to the president when they feel strongly one way or another. I get phone calls and e-mail and people dropping by to express their opinions. I have heard opinions on both sides of the issue and continue to hear these things. Nevertheless, the majority of what I am hearing is that this is not the right solution.

Obviously, I cannot talk to everyone and get their individual opinions,

and when issues are at hand, I cannot wait to act until I talk to EVERY individual on campus. I can only respond when the issue is pertinent and I have a good sense of where the students I come in contact with are coming from. If I wait, it becomes a non-issue. Then I am a contributing party to the slow-moving bureaucracy of this institution -- and that is NOT why I'm here. I am here to act, to put things in motion and to promote campuswide dialogue. And, if you want me to resign for doing my job to the best of my ability -- I won't.

Sara Russell
senior
mathematics major
ASUN president

They're our roads, too!

The young "ragtag" renegades you witnessed downtown are part of a movement called Critical Mass. The purpose of Critical Mass is not necessarily to advocate bike lanes as your editorial implied; it is to spread awareness of bicyclists and to send a message to motorists: We are not blocking traffic, we are traffic. Personally, we ride bikes as our only form of transportation; we are not riding for health or to anger motorists. Some of us cannot afford cars, and some of us see that it's not practical for each individual to drive his or her own car to campus.

In cities all over the world, including here in America, bike lanes have been incorporated into city planning. The real challenge would be to change motorists' attitudes, not the lines in the pavement. You say the answer to the problem is to simply be a better cyclist. If you have ridden in downtown Lincoln, you would know it is the motorists who are most often discourteous to bicyclists. My sister, my best friend and I have all been hit by cars while observing the rules of courtesy and caution recommended by Mr. Dockhorn. It is NOT SAFE to ride a bicycle in the streets of downtown Lincoln, and it is illegal to ride on the sidewalks. A solution must be found, and Critical Mass is working toward one.

Olivia Brown
sophomore
Spanish and education

Elizabeth Goodbrake
sophomore
international studies

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