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Our VIEW

Don't get physical

Law should consider society's concerns

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that people infected with HIV but who do not show symptoms of AIDS will be protected under the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act.

And a recent case in Nebraska shows exactly why people with HIV need this protection.

Two men from Elm Creek say they have been evicted from a public housing project because one of them is HIV-positive.

They have filed a lawsuit in U.S. Federal Court against Maple Manor apartments, alleging that the manager told them several times she did not want the apartment complex or the city "contaminated with AIDS."

Anyone with even a little AIDS education knows sharing an apartment building with someone who is HIV-positive poses virtually no health risks, which is exactly why the case needs to fall under the Americans With Disabilities Act — the threat isn't real.

We need to start addressing disability in terms of the fears and stereotypes of society, rather than the physical state of people's bodies.

The Americans With Disabilities Act was designed to protect people with disabilities from discrimination in work, housing and public facilities.

However, opponents of the Supreme Court's recent decision argue that labeling people with HIV who appear "healthy" as disabled is a violation of the original intent of the act. They said the purpose was to guarantee that public buildings had wheelchair ramps and elevators. In other words, people who appeared to have a disability would not be discriminated against.

The problem is appearance always seems to be the first step in defining "disability," and maybe it should be looked at as a societal construct instead.

A so-called "normal, healthy" person is one who stands up straight and can climb stairs. Light switches and door handles are built with this person in mind.

Then "accommodations" are made for people with disabilities. A wide bathroom stall and a ramp are added, and "able-bodied" people everywhere get to pat themselves on the back for being so inclusive.

But when the definition of disability is challenged, solutions aren't that simple. Suddenly, we need to ask why people were excluded in the first place.

And in the cases of people who have HIV but appear healthy, no physical barriers can be blamed for discrimination, and we have to start questioning ideas.

Mook's VIEW



Share ware

Computers not safe from government



CLIFF HICKS is a senior news-editorial and English major and the Daily Nebraskan opinion editor.

"What interesting e-mail," Jonathan Laffette said, sitting behind his computer terminal, deep in the offices of the National Security Headquarters.

"Let's see. ... He's having an affair, she's stealing from her employer, their son is a porn freak and their daughter, hmm, well, it looks like she's about to run away with her boyfriend, whom she affectionately calls 'Fang.' How wonderfully defective. Let's see what their neighbors, the Hendersons, are up to ..."

Don't laugh. It's not that unlikely, the way we're heading.

I've always found it funny how technology stories get buried on Page 7, even though the ramifications of them affect the majority of people.

This time, it's cryptography — that's code-work for the technophobes out there — and the government's opinion on who should and should not use it.

The government claims that cryptography is a military technology and, therefore, exportation of it needs to be regulated.

Weapon: any instrument used to injure or kill.

Codes are used for privacy. They're used to keep what's your business, well, your business.

The government doesn't think so, though. They say they're "protecting the nation from terrorism."

It's for our own good, they say. We'll thank them, they say. Trust them, they say.

As the Information Age rapidly approaches the Disinformation Age, I don't even trust my best friend. (Editor's note: Sorry Chris.)

In about five years, the Internet will be directly plugged into many people's houses. The technology rush is either going to level off or cause a major crash in the near future.

Then, pretty soon, the computer will become the center of the house, like the television was before it, and the radio before that.

We'll make phone calls via computer, we'll watch TV on our computer monitor (which will be huge by then, trust me), and the world will center on them.

There will even be more than one in many houses. Kids will want one for themselves.

Welcome to tomorrow. The thing is, though, that the government couldn't watch your house through your television, it couldn't listen in on your life through your radio.

It will know about you through your computer — the only question is, how much and how soon?

Computers will have cameras on them. Should the government have the ability to look in on those cameras, just to be sure you aren't doing anything illegal?

Many people keep their finances on their computers. Should the Internal Revenue Service be able to look into those files, just to be sure you aren't trying to stiff it out of a few dollars?

Corporate secrets and novels, life stories and personal matters — it'll all be there for the government's perusal.

What are your options? Sorry to say, they aren't plentiful.

The first is to oppose the government's attempts to try and make all of your information "free" and its information "protected."

It wants to dictate what can and cannot go up on the Internet. The Communications Decency Act,

which was struck down earlier this year, has spawned a sequel.

It isn't any more legal than its predecessor, but what the heck, Congress figures it can keep passing bills like this until either we tell it to stop or the Supreme Court gets tired of hearing these kinds of cases.

What the government finds indecent, it can fine you for. Or arrest you for. And no, to answer the unspoken question, "indecent" is never defined.

The word "indecent" is part of the problem. The government wants to play watchdog for the morals of the American people.

I'll tell 'em where it can stick its morals.

And if I catch the government in my computer, I can practically guarantee I'll take it all the way to the big boys at the Supreme Court.

The Internet, as it should be, is the world's largest forum. The right to free speech is not to be restricted, so don't tell me what you find indecent and tell me I can't say it.

Otherwise, sooner or later, the word "freedom" will be indecent.

We don't all want to be alike — it's our differences that make us strong. What you think is indecent, I think is information, or even more likely, art.

An outline for a fiction story about overthrowing the government isn't sedition, but a government official looking at it sure might think so.

The government is playing knee-jerk reaction to something it's making no effort to understand.

Rule technology — don't let it rule.

This is our government. It listens to us. It answers to us. To paraphrase Bill Cosby: we brought them into office, we can take them out again just as quickly.

Information can't be regulated. It shouldn't be. Otherwise, there will be underground hacker movements, and there will come a day, when one 14-year-old kid says "the line has been crossed."

And the world will fall black at the push of a button.

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