

Love the Jehovah's Witness defense

Jehovah's Witnesses are defending the Constitution. At their urging, the Supreme Court has agreed to examine an ordinance from the village of Stratton, Ohio. This ordinance, passed three years ago, requires anyone soliciting door-to-door, from political activists to cookie-wielding Girl Scouts, to religious zealots, to obtain a permit from the mayor before starting their door knocking.



TODD MACEK

On the surface, this requirement seems innocent enough. However, on deeper reflection, the ramifications of allowing such a law to stand are broad-ranging. Since its inception, no one has been denied a permit. The ordinance is meant to be a means of protecting the privacy of the homeowner. Most people do not relish the thought of being disturbed at home by peddlers of goods — especially not by peddlers of religion — and therefore, no local opposition to the ordinance has emerged.

Siding with Stratton is easy. To the casual observer, the ordinance poses no threat to the Constitution. The only ones threatened are the people knocking door-to-door. At best, this law is unnecessary. But the reality of it is that it violates the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech and violates the concept of separation of church and state.

The problems with such a law begin with its intent. When someone knocks on your door, there is no law saying one must answer it. If someone is giving a sales pitch about Kirby vacuums or God's everlasting love, and one does not want to buy, close the door. It is that easy.

No government intervention is required. Instead, individual citizens dealing with an ordinary problem through ordinary means, this power has been relinquished by citizens and deposited in the hands of the mayor. He now has the power to determine who gets a permit. This is a substantial amount of power in one person's hands, considering this is a society that embraces the free distribution of ideas. Say a person wants to go door-to-door, building up grass-roots support for a noble campaign, such as increasing mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenders. Or perhaps they wish to gather support for an ordinance requiring the mayor to wear a bunny suit to work three days a week.

Pick any hypothetical situation, crazy or not. If the mayor is opposed, there is no guarantee a permit will be given. Now one man at the pinnacle of power decides what ideas come door to door. One man has the power to limit the exposure of people to ideas that might oppose his own. Power in America ideally runs from the bottom up. Limiting the actions of grass-roots political activists undermines this premise. Under the current law, the mayor has the power to halt a petition by the people before it even begins, thus stockpiling power at the top.

The other and more easily seen manner in which this ordinance violates the constitution is the separation of church and state. Again, the

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restriction of ideas is the sticking point. The Constitution ensures its citizens the right to practice whatever religion they like, however socially unpopular they might be. The ordinance allows for discrimination based on religious practice. If the mayor finds a particular religion unsavory, no permit will be given. Permits also violate the right to practice religion anonymously. To obtain a permit, one must divulge his or her name. Divulging such information to the government serves no purpose and benefits the public in no way.

Jehovah's Witnesses are pursuing Supreme Court intervention for the purpose of preserving their religious practices. You may not like Jehovah's Witnesses on your doorstep, but they have a right to knock. In pursuing such action, they have done all Americans a favor. While not their initial intent, they are defending the Constitution for all. For this, they deserve American support. The next time you open your door to find a door-to-door evangelist, thank them for standing up against an ill-thought-out law that would cost all a piece of freedom. Then if someone is not interested in buying the message being sold, politely shut the door. No government intervention required.

Todd Macek is a senior history major.

CARTOON OF THE DAY

CHiPs



THE UN-CARTOONIST ©

Keep prayer private

Gov. Perry should not reinstate prayer in public schools

Two weeks ago, Texas Gov. Rick Perry decided that because he does not "understand the logic" of the 1963 Supreme Court ruling that bans organized school prayer, he should have the power to ignore it completely. Perhaps he was sick the



CHRISTY RUTH

day that his government professor taught the lesson that state governors are not endowed with the power to overturn Supreme Court decisions.

Evidently, Perry failed to recognize that he blatantly disregarded the law in front of hundreds of students when he brought a Protestant minister to lead a prayer at Palestine Middle School.

While Perry might not see the logic in the principle of separation of church and state, the Supreme Court is clear. Taking advantage of the nation's need for consolation, Perry has been championing the cause of prayer in schools, and he drove the point home with a prayer at an official, mandatory school assembly.

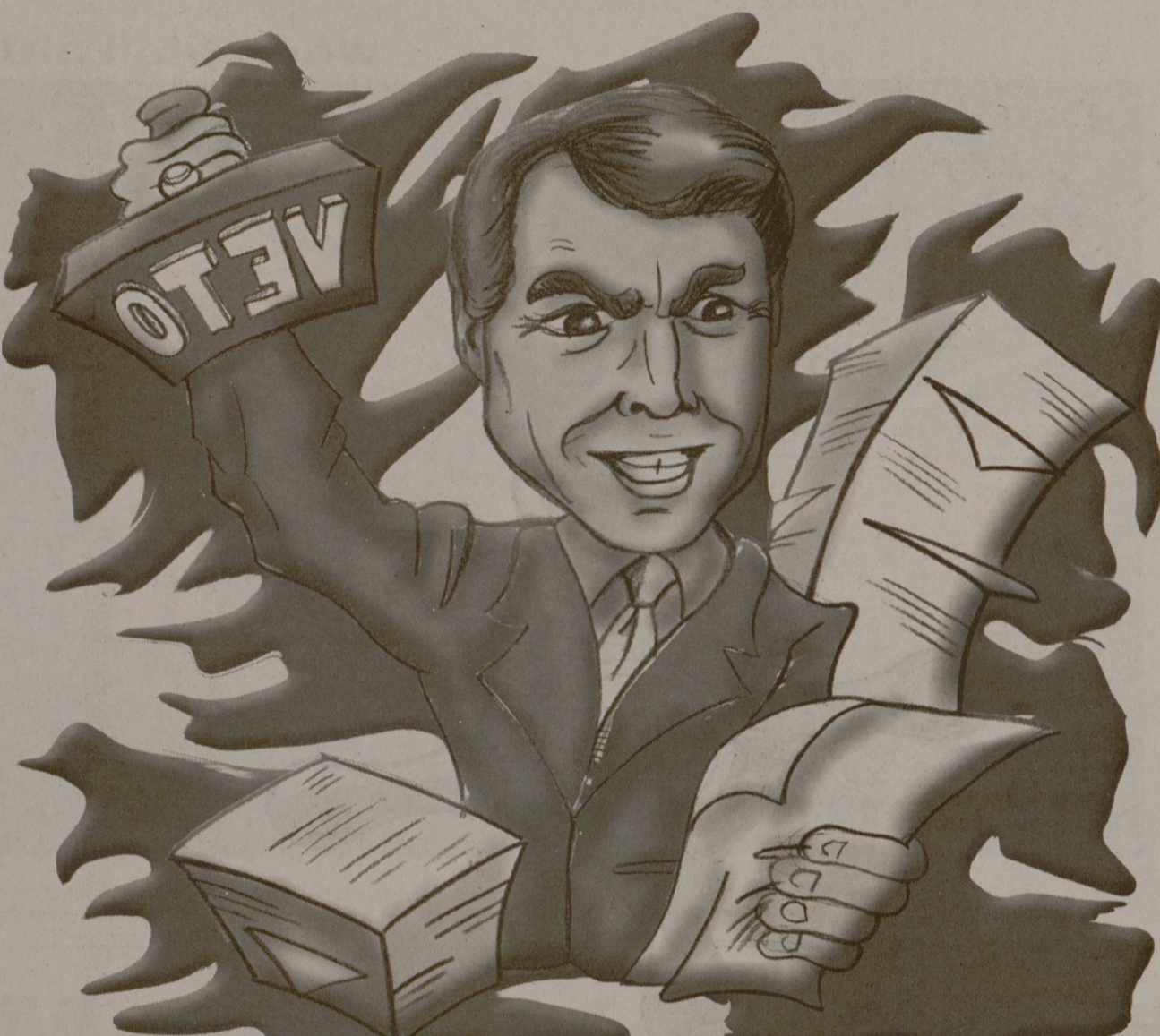
Defending the prayer, which ended with the phrase, "in Jesus' name we pray," Perry expressed concern that the majority of students are ultimately being ignored because of a "small minority" of students who do not believe in the same God.

While it has not been established how small of a minority all the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, agnostic and atheist students in America actually are, Perry has decided that their numbers are few enough to consider their opinions a bother.

In a time of national crisis, students who wish to pray should feel free to do so. That is why there are independently sponsored organizations such as Young Life that meet voluntarily and advertise on school property.

In addition to sponsored organizations, some students actually know how to pray by themselves, during school, without microphones and without an adult present.

Opponents of separation of church and state rarely imagine how they would feel if their religion were not the majority. No one can be sure Christianity will



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always be a majority religion in America. Perry should choose his words more carefully, considering that, one day, his grandchildren could be forced to pull out prayer mats and bow to Muslim prayer tapes at an official school function.

Even generic prayers that do not mention Jesus or Allah violate the Supreme Court ruling.

This country was founded on the principle that everyone should have equal freedom to exercise their beliefs, so long as they are within the law. Until the day comes that there are school administrators monitoring students to make sure they do not bow their heads or meet after school to pray, the argument that praying students are being persecuted holds little merit. Schools today are rightfully

free of religious doctrine. Some see this as a bad thing because they think students should not be trusted to decide for themselves what they will and will not believe. It is not the job of public schools, however, to instruct students in any kind of religion.

The purpose of public school is to educate students in the arts and sciences and help them learn how to function in society. Many public schools attempt to teach proven, modern scientific findings, even if they contradict religious beliefs.

Parents who want religion fed to their children have several options. They can pray with their children at home, go to church as a family or send them to private schools.

These are not such radical solutions — plenty of people choose to do all of these things. Yet many

argue that private schools are too expensive. Perhaps these people fail to notice that church is free.

Regardless of what route parents choose to take, no realistic solution involves politicians. Even World magazine, a conservative Christian publication, featured an article this year regarding separation of church and state that asked the question, "How many souls has Congress ever saved?"

Despite this, the governor likely sees a chance to score religious brownie points for his upcoming election campaign. Hopefully, he has weighed the long-term implications of the words he speaks while exploiting the nation's time of crisis.

Christy Ruth is a sophomore journalism major.

MAIL CALL

Tech students offer apologies

The football game last Saturday proved to be exciting and truly an experience for all those in attendance. I am proud of both football teams and of their growing abilities.

One thing that I am not proud of is the after-game activities that included vandalism and disrespect on both sides of the Texas stands. As major universities, both A&M and Texas Tech must encourage better ways of showing school spirit and sportsmanship. I am confident that Texas Tech will make the changes necessary to ensure greater success in these areas while not doing anything to harm the pride we feel for our Red Raiders. On a personal level, it is my hope that those injured on both sides of the altercation recover quickly and that those responsible for the brawl see the error in their ways.

Indeed, both Texas Tech and Texas A & M are schools dedicated to tradition, pride and spirit. It would be a shame for those few misguided individuals on both sides to tarnish the image of our schools. I know that we can reach a positive solution and work toward another truly fantastic game next season.

John D. Steinmetz
Student Body President
Texas Tech University

On behalf of the Texas Tech student body, I would like to send my deepest apologies to the Aggies that traveled to Lubbock this past weekend only to receive a dose of "West-Texas Hospitality."

The behavior displayed by those who stormed the field after the game was totally inappropriate. These "fans" (at A&M they would be called Two-Percenter because they are the first ones to give up and leave when we fall behind) acted without an ounce of dignity or class. I assure you that the actions of this minority do not accurately represent the feelings of the majority of the Texas Tech student body.

We are as appalled by their actions as you are. An investigation is already under way to find and punish those responsible for these inappropriate acts. Hopefully those students who embarrassed Texas Tech will learn what real school spirit and true sportsmanship is so that when you travel to Lubbock in 2003, you will receive a much more friendly welcome and will be treated with the respect you deserve.

Chris Carr
Texas Tech University
Class of 2004

Discrimination is reason to ban ROTC

In response to Jonathan Jones' Nov. 6 column:

Harvard and other Ivy League universities are right to protest the U.S. military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy by banning ROTC programs from their campuses. Jones calls the move "ungrateful" and "intolerant," but what is truly ungrateful and intolerant is the way the military and the United States treat homosexuals. Homosexuals participate in every facet of our society and helped found this country.

Homosexuals have been loyal American citizens since day one, and have certainly done their best for "duty, honor and country."

Despite these facts, homosexuals are still treated, in many ways, like second-class citizens — not permitted to have legal recognition of their romantic partnerships nor given the right to serve their country in the armed forces.

This is intolerance; this is ungratefulness. Universities such as Harvard have a policy stating that they do not allow organizations that discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation to operate on campus.

The simple fact is that ROTC does discriminate on these grounds. Harvard obviously feels it can do more good by throwing its institutional weight behind homosexual rights than by allowing a handful of preppy Ivy Leaguers to run around playing soldier once a week.

Josh Lee
Class of 2002

SBP should speak for students

In response to The Battalion's editorial on Nov. 1:

Thank you for holding the elected student leaders to their responsibilities and for holding the administrators to their commitments. Schuyler Houser's silence on the Bonfire issue has left many students wondering about her commitment to a successful Bonfire.

As student body president, she has a responsibility to inform the students on her stances and actions regarding issues that affect us all.

After all, she said in *The Battalion* on March 22, "As a student, I am making a commitment to fellow students in running for office that I will not lose that commitment, nor my relationship to the student body, as SBP." Thank you for your editorial stating the need for immediate action to save Bonfire.

It is unacceptable that certain student leaders do not engage with their constituents, find out their views, and express those views to the administration. They are not performing their jobs.

Tyler Dunman
Class of 2003
Accompanied by 75 signatures