

PREJUDICIAL PRACTICES

Maryland wrong in creating student safety standards applying only to gays

The Maryland State Board of Education voted last Tuesday to include in its student-safety standards provisions that protect homosexuals from "verbal or physical assaults," according to The Washington Times.

The old wording guaranteed all public school students the right to a learning environment, "free from any form of harassment." It was a blanket statement intended to afford every student the same amount of protection.

But for many, this wasn't enough. After a four-year battle over the issue, the board concluded that homosexual students need special protection.

The new language bars discrimination based on "race, ethnicity, region, religion, gender, sexual orientation, language, socioeconomic status, age or disability," according to The Times. While most of these provisions are fairly standard, the hot button is "sexual orientation."

But the new provision doesn't specify what constitutes verbal harassment.

Nearly everyone who has attended high school in America knows that the epithet "you're gay" is said teasingly and isn't meant to insinuate something about a person's sexuality. But in the absence of any specifications, it could be considered sexual orientation harassment. So is it sexual orientation harassment, or isn't it? According to The Times, individual county school boards have been delegated the task of seeing through the semantics and will ultimately have to decide what is sexual orientation harassment on a case-by-case basis.

Philip Benzil, the MSBE member who introduced the idea of adding language protecting homosexuals, told The Times that unacceptable behavior against homosexuals included "mocking, isolation and exclusion from social groups." This is absurd. Surely the MSBE could not have intended the new provision's jurisdiction to cover who one chooses to be friends with, as this would be a civil rights violation, and an impossible rule to enforce. It does, however, shed light on the intention of the provision: to pander to the homosexual communi-



LINDSYE FORSON

ty more than to protect an at-risk class.

And just what is an at-risk class? The Times quotes MSBE Board President Marilyn Maultsby as saying, "Harassment because of their sexual orientation is more egregious than for an issue such as acne." Says who? In an age where one can be discriminated against based on his appearance, weight, height, intelligence and virtually every other distinguishable trait, what makes discrimination for sexual orientation so particularly "egregious?" Why single out one class of people for protection when myriads of other classes and sub-classes also face similar teasing?

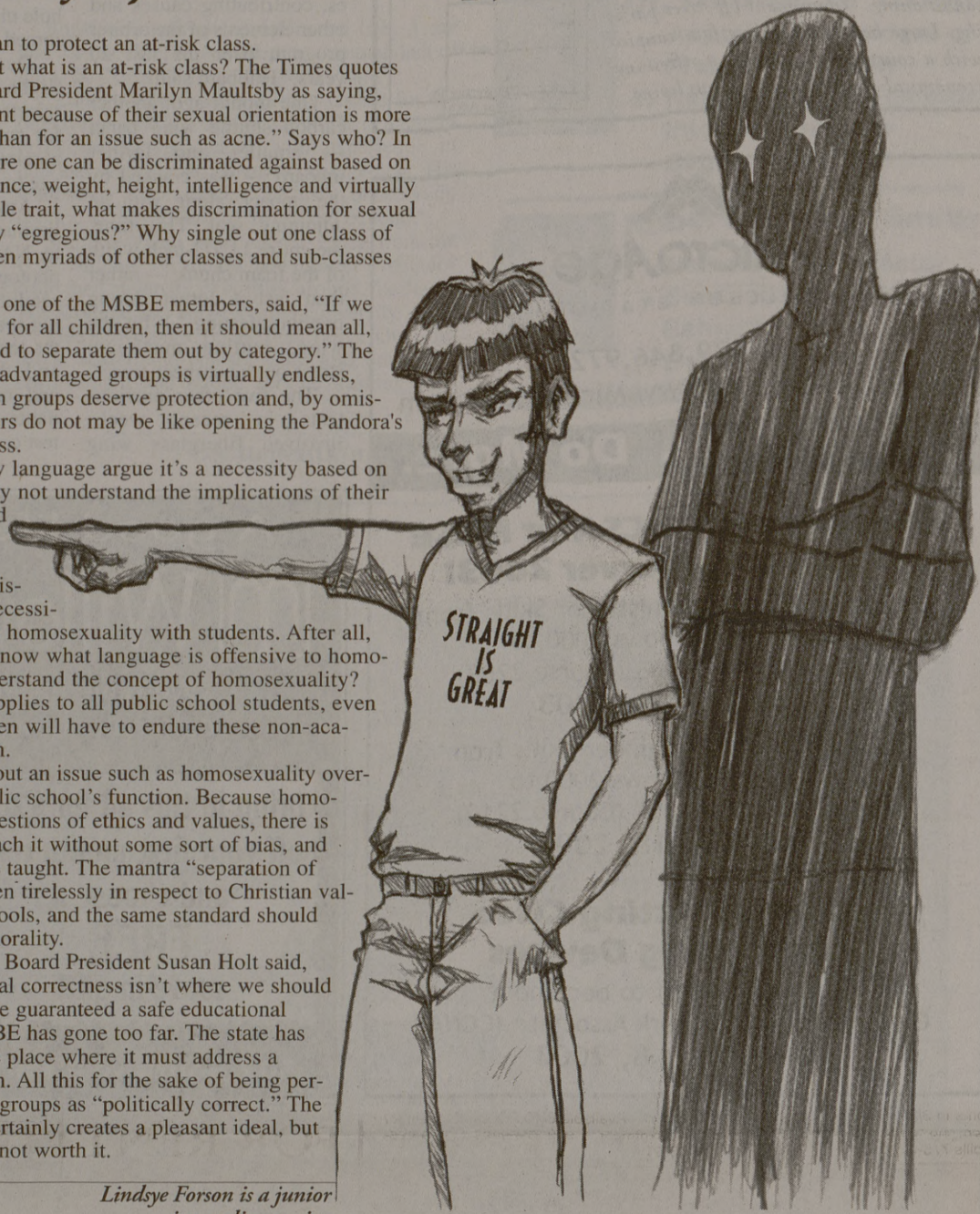
Clarence A. Hawkins, one of the MSBE members, said, "If we want safety in all schools for all children, then it should mean all, and I don't think you need to separate them out by category." The number of potentially disadvantaged groups is virtually endless, and to start naming which groups deserve protection and, by omission, suggesting that others do not may be like opening the Pandora's box of political correctness.

Proponents of the new language argue it's a necessity based on the idea that students may not understand the implications of their words and actions toward homosexuals. Which begs the question, who should tell them? The existence of this provision necessitates that schools discuss homosexuality with students. After all, how is a child going to know what language is offensive to homosexuals if they don't understand the concept of homosexuality? Because this provision applies to all public school students, even elementary school children will have to endure these non-academic forms of education.

Educating children about an issue such as homosexuality oversteps the bounds of a public school's function. Because homosexuality is laced with questions of ethics and values, there is no way for a school to teach it without some sort of bias, and therefore, it should not be taught. The mantra "separation of church and state" is spoken tirelessly in respect to Christian values infiltrating public schools, and the same standard should apply to other issues of morality.

Carroll County School Board President Susan Holt said, "Trying to get into political correctness isn't where we should be." All students should be guaranteed a safe educational environment, but the MSBE has gone too far. The state has put itself in an unenviable place where it must address a moral issue in a classroom. All this for the sake of being perceived by special interest groups as "politically correct." The phrase sounds nice and certainly creates a pleasant ideal, but in cases like this, it's just not worth it.

Lindsay Forson is a junior journalism major. Graphic by Ivan Flores.



Fed up with fundraising Bush should focus on Iraq, not re-election

President George W. Bush made a flamboyant entrance onto the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1 to announce that the United States' mission in Iraq was accomplished. What he should have said is, "My mission is accomplished."

Since his presumptuous declaration, the United States has lost 70 soldiers in combat. Faced with these mounting casualties in a mission that is supposedly "accomplished," Bush has failed America again, shifting his priorities away from the lives of U.S. soldiers to take up selfish political ventures. Instead of taking a principled stand backing the war and fulfilling his promise of peace and stability for Iraq, Bush has been busy touring the country and raising money for his 2004 presidential bid.

For the past six weeks, Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and first lady Laura Bush have toured cities from New York to San Francisco, attending high-priced dinners raising roughly \$34 million for Bush's re-election. At the same time, American soldiers have been experiencing, on average, 13 ambushes per day, according to TheStar.com.

And while the Constitution makes no mention of fundraising as a presidential duty, it does list the first duty of the president as that of commander in chief.

The fighting in Iraq was not for oil, but what was it for? If the mission is accomplished, why are soldiers still dying, and where are the weapons of mass destruction and Saddam Hussein? Right now, all the United States has to show are many lost American lives. Bush needs to focus more attention on the soldiers who he sent halfway around the world to wage a war. American soldiers are working from dusk to dawn in temperatures exceeding 100 degrees thousands of miles from home. The terrain is unforgiving and the people are unpredictable.

With a population so hostile toward the American presence and stability that is shaky at best, the president should be working to secure the region and protect the lives of Americans already in Iraq. Instead, Bush has chosen arrogance and rhetoric over tempered and meaningful action. On July 2, Bush addressed the problem of Iraqi combatants and their threat to American soldiers by saying, "Bring them



JUSTIN HILL

on." American soldiers are fighting and dying for the United States of America and their commander in chief is daring attacks. This is outrageous.

Former President Bill Clinton was rightfully blasted by conservatives in 1996 for spending too much taxpayer money and time traversing the country raising money for his re-election. That alone is reprehensible. Now, Americans have a president who has pledged to restore honor and dignity to the presidency, but is actually following in the Clinton legacy while inviting more attacks on American soldiers.

The U.S. military is the backbone of this country, but money alone will not solve the military's problems. Bush has passed massive increases in military spending, but this money does nothing for soldiers dying in Iraq. The office of the president was not set up to stage a reelection campaign, but that is what it is being used for. History will record and people will remember the president who broke fundraising records while waging war, cutting taxes and overseeing a recession. People are tired of hearing news of military casualties and political fundraising in the same breath. People are tired of knowing their president would rather trust businesses and the wealthy to provide them opportunities than the Constitution. People want democracy back.

The political landscape is digressing beyond anything resembling a commitment to the American people. It is disheartening to believe in a system and love a country so much while looking to leaders to protect your brethren at war — leaders who are busy fundraising or touting a new tax cut. Unemployment is up, homelessness is up, crime is up and U.S. soldiers are dying in a foreign land. Bush is only attempting to raise money to ensure reelection.

Presidents can and do more than one thing at a time, but they must prioritize. Bush can raise money, push legislation and make photo-ops all around the country, but he cannot forsake the reason he is in office and his commitment to the military.

Justin Hill is a junior management major.

MAIL CALL

Letter used cartoon to talk around affirmative action

In response to Bill Kibler's July 7 mail call:

By using political correctness as a bully pulpit, Vice President for Student Affairs Bill Kibler was able to avoid discussing the issue at the heart of his letter: affirmative action. The July 2 editorial cartoon made the point that a group that every person should find disgusting (the KKK) would like an admissions program based on race. The cartoon helps the reader make the connection that racism toward minorities (as personified by the KKK) is no less revolting when it is used on whites and Asians (as personified by affirmative action). It is a strong message of disgust against both forms of racism.

It is sad that Kibler disagrees with this notion, and rather than explaining why he supports affirmative action, instead brow beats the very outlet that facilitates campus debate. Kibler states "Dr. Gates clearly articulated A&M's position regarding affirmative action and the Supreme Court's recent decision." This is false; as I doubt that even VP Kibler could tell us to what extent race will be used in next year's admissions process. The "clearly articulated" position that Dr. Gates has taken on affirmative action is nothing more than a vague pro-diversity statement that does not explain what methods will be employed to achieve whatever Dr. Gates defines as "diversity."

Instead of writing to stifle campus debate on the subject of affirmative action, it would be more helpful if Dr. Kibler could inform Battalion readers as to why institutionalized discrimination against students of any race, even through affirmative action, is not morally repugnant. It is Kibler's advocacy of racial preferences, not free speech, that

"is in direct opposition to the values and principles of Texas A&M."

Mark McCaig, Class of 2005
Vice Chairman, Young Conservatives

Cartoon was insensitive to A&M's diversity needs

In response to the July 2 political cartoon:

Last Wednesday, July 2, a cartoon was published in The Battalion depicting two members of the Ku Klux Klan providing their perspective on the recent Supreme Court findings on Affirmative Action. This cartoon is yet another of its kind, published in The Battalion, that is supremely insensitive and highly offensive to those of us in our academic community who care deeply about diversity. While there are many who may wish to claim freedom of the press and the right to publish various views on important subjects, the choice of such imagery is, in my view, totally unacceptable and despicable.

Our University community deserves a newspaper that is progressive and looks ahead to be on the forefront of important issues, not one that dredges up painful memories of the past and features an organization that has its roots in hate and intolerance. As we all work together to create an intellectual environment at our University that embraces diversity, in all its forms, we must welcome the expression of differing views. But the expression of such views should at once respect those of others.

The Battalion can play an important role in our community, but only if those involved in its production use the highest standards of integrity and editorial judgment — things that were notably and regrettably absent last week.

David B. Prior
Executive Vice President and Provost

PROPOSED IRAQ WAR MEMORIAL

