

Portland protests show what Penn State lacks

by Suzan Erem

Penn State's audacity continues to amaze me. In April officials hid behind an opaque process and ignored student demands, forcing them to protest. Then PSU officials claimed the students were acting like a "mob."

Penn State is a public (yes, millions in state and federal funding means it's public) institution that shrouds itself in secrecy and locks its doors when a few concerned citizens show up outside. University officials refuse to adhere to due process, from Philosophy to Phys Ed and everything in between, showing their disdain for democracy.

Penn State's internal investigation of Rene Portland's behavior finally proved she violated the anti-discrimination policy on sexual orientation. President Graham Spanier reprimanded her with a \$10,000 fine, a last-chance warning and diversity training. Oooooohhh. That last one must have hurt! Will she have to sit next to a lesbian? What if one of them touches her?

You don't reprimand people for something they didn't do. So there isn't any argument over Portland's guilt: She discriminated against a player whom she thought was

lesbian. (Thanks to PSU's secrecy, we have no way of knowing if there were more violations made evident during the investigation.) The only argument is over the appropriate response. And since Graham Spanier has spoken, that's settled too ... or is it?

The protesting students are bright people. I know some of them. They are responsible citizens. They work hard. They take the time off from their studies to be active members of our community, more active than most of us twice their age. And Bill Mahon, PSU spokesperson, rewards them with mind games that show nothing but disrespect for their intelligence. They shouldn't demand that Portland be fired because they don't have all the information, he says in a Centre Daily Times report. But he won't give them all the information.

The students have Spanier's finding, just one more notch in Portland's long career. The protests of 1990 and 1991 over Portland's behavior caused the university to institute the policy in the first place. Then there are those pesky little recurring published reports from former players claiming to have had similar issues with her. How many decades will have to pass before the next player has the guts to say something? How long will it be before Portland's next

violation sees the light of day? Maybe some folks are hoping she'll retire before that.

The solution is as radical as our own American flag and what it stands for: A democratic, transparent process, which allows regular people to see the evidence and decide for themselves. If that requires too much trust, how about an arbitrator not on PSU's payroll who could consider the case confidentially, instead of a university president with his own vested interests? (Does anyone here think Spanier might be somehow connected to Portland's and PSU's guardian angel, Joe Pa?)

Come to think of it, if Penn State faculty and staff had a union, all of this could have stayed within the grievance resolution process, and Portland would have enjoyed more privacy than she has. But there is no faculty and staff union at Penn State, so public protests and very public lawsuits are the only avenues to resolve problems. The head of philosophy protects students from the racist or sexist remarks of his colleagues? Demote him and let him sue. A qualified professor doesn't get tenure and no one can tell him why? Deny him and let him sue. A star basketball player gets thrown off the team because someone thinks she's a lesbian? Let her sue, if she

dares ...

No one will ever know the dirty details because PSU's attorneys won't let the cases ever get to court where the facts would become public. Let the defendants name the price for their dignity, their career or their integrity; negotiate them down a bit; settle; and keep it all secret, like everything else at PSU.

It can't work in the long run. Administrators, locking your doors against the demands of citizens does not make them go away; it makes them come back stronger. You cannot continue to praise the exercise of democratic rights but refuse to respond to legitimate demands. You cannot keep your procedures, your investigations or even your salaries secret, then hope for public support. You can only squeeze democracy dry for so long before good people like those students force you to stop.

Call these students a mob if you will; I consider them the best of the next generation.

Suzan Erem is a former high school and college athlete. A lesbian friend once referred to her as her "favorite straight dyke." She lives in Harris Township with her husband Paul Durrenberger. Their 13-year-old daughter Ayshe is a soccer player.

Critics of renovation missed their chance to debate

by Dagmar Wilson

There certainly are various sides to the debate over the proposed renovation of the State College Area High School, as the April 2 editorial in the Centre Daily Times proclaimed. However, there is only one group, State High Vision, that has the others' throats in its sights.

Citizens for Constructive Progress formed because a number of residents realized that the dialogue had become unproductive and disruptive to any progress. CCP's primary goal is to redirect the public dialogue in order that the Board of School Directors may once again solicit community input about the high school project without inviting personal attacks and the rehashing of issues already voted upon. CCP supports good process, to which the Board of School Directors has indeed adhered.

Civic responsibility in a democracy dictates that the public heed the issues of government and invoke its influence through the available channels. Many State College

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citizens participated in the dialogue regarding the future of the high school's physical facilities. The input was extensive, the personal views varied, the discussions inclusive and the research constant. Finally, the elected directors weighed all the testimony, reviewed the research, considered the tax base and voted unanimously on a resolution: the current high school renovation and addition design. Some members of the community seem to feel that because they did not personally participate in the process it is not valid, but their failure to engage when the time was at hand is not justification to call for repeal. The irony is that the arguments and options presented by detractors are the same as they were at the start, which demonstrates that a review would most likely result in the same resolution, albeit with much greater cost and wasted resources for the effort.

The sentiment that the community is greatly divided is misleading. The dissidents are certainly speaking loudly, to say the least, and the populace is not inclined to dance in the streets and yell in glee about a renovation that directly serves 25 percent of the community. Yet most accept collective responsibility and the value of investing in physical space conducive to the educational opportunities the district desires for its students. Most trust the directors they elected to consider all the information and come to a consensus that is best for the community as a whole. Most don't consider it necessary to speak again when the charge is being carried out and the right decision has been made. Most don't see the value of responding to a disjointed group with conflicting views and contradictory statements, who yet represent themselves as aligned.

The time has arrived for proactive partic-

ipation and constructive progress. The newly rallied voices need to redirect their energy to positively addressing innovative solutions to their concerns within the parameters of the voted-upon plan. The Board of School Directors should trust that they do have the support of the majority of the constituents. The lesson for individuals is to participate and actively engage in public forums when input is solicited, rather than leaving it to others and then objecting to the outcome. The Board of School Directors and the high school administration should be commended for their service and commitment to our community. They have consistently responded to the endless queries by providing information, updates, and thoughtful, direct answers, and their sustained composure is a testament to their professionalism and dedication to the children, current and future, of the State College Area School District.

A member of Citizens for Constructive Progress, Dagmar Wilson is the mother of three State College area students.