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Get active against poor protesting



JONN
KMECH

"We'll dress up in cowboy chaps, gigantic foam ten-gallon hats, aviators, and fake handlebar mustaches. Just for kicks, we'll throw in a guy in a Spiderman costume and give him a road sign. What his purpose is I'm not sure, but he'll at least look dignified compared to the rest of us."

After Mike Hudema's ridiculous cheerleading antics last week, I've come to a realization that protesting just isn't what it used to be. Sure, we might be able to disrupt corporate events, but whatever happened to the Tiananmen Squares, the Kent States, the self-immolations?

As students, we protest everything and anything these days, in every way, shape, and form. But we should exercise some restraint when doing so, so that the act of protest still means something. Put bluntly, we need to kick our protesting addiction.

I feel so strongly about this that it's almost like I need to share my opinions on the subject, in a vocal manner, while wielding a brush and steadfast tone. Perhaps some sort of demonstration would be in order, where I audibly make my views heard—maybe even while marching or holding signs with righteous slogans and chanting. But what the hell would I call it?

All I know is that I can see it working. First of all, I need a message—something that gets my point across easily but doesn't make anyone educated or enlightened about the actual issue of protest reform. If that happens, who knows what side of the debate they'd end up choosing.

The most important part in all of this is that the general public becomes completely informed on my opinions of the topic, so they can make a decision free of bias or the shackles of independent thought.

My message is an easy one. Protesting oil addiction (or, as I like to call it, "Excess Drilling For Change") is bad. It takes a complex matter—which undoubtedly has a major impact on the democratic environment—and yields a shallow answer.

By simply proclaiming that the issue is bad, the message only manages to scratch the surface of the topic so that nobody has to concern themselves with any of the political or economic ramifications of the idea. Plus, it's easily shoutable, so that people with more rational, legitimate concerns about the matter are soon drowned out by the legions of chanting followers.

I have to balance the desire to be taken seriously with the need to grab attention. In this aspect, I think I know where the emphasis should be placed. We'll dress up in cowboy chaps, gigantic foam ten-gallon hats, aviators, and fake handlebar mustaches. Just for kicks, we'll throw in a guy in a Spiderman costume and give him a road sign. What his purpose is I'm not

sure, but he'll at least look dignified compared to the rest of us.

When we receive word of an on-campus protest, we'll grab our picket signs—which will feature droll *bon mots* such as "Protest Protests!" and "Contesting Protesting!"—and we'll then march down to their demonstration and make our collective voice heard. Of course, being the anti-corporate fat-cats that they are, the protestors holding the privately organized rally will probably ignore what I'm saying and continue advocating the downfall of big business while decrying windfall profits.

And why shouldn't they? It's in their best interests to do so, and until the general public is legitimately informed enough to demand greater accountability, they won't change their ideals.

Since nobody is getting any more informed from their protests, my movement should be seeing lots of action. Perhaps campus 5-0 will even show up, overreact, and kick members of both our sides off campus indefinitely. But they'll first have to ask themselves: is the disrupter of the disruption your friend?

But in the end, it will all be worth it because we'll be making a scene, which is synonymous with making a point.

Social conformity robs you of your voice

You've got freedom of speech—so long as you say what everyone wants to hear



CARL
PERSSUN

I wrote a letter to the Gateway recently. In my pride, I showed it off to all my friends and colleagues after sending it in. At that point, I was told this letter could damage future negotiations, and that it was wholly inaccurate. Phrases such as "I respect your freedom of speech" were uttered, but I was kindly asked by the University of Alberta Anthropology Undergraduates to pull the letter.

Their reasoning was faulty, and they ignored the fact that I am an unknown and have no power. However, I didn't feel all that strongly about the topic, and my colleagues asked nicely, so I voluntarily withdrew it. But the entire process got me thinking—and after three bottles of fine Belgian thinking, I had an epiphany: freedom of speech can't exist outside of a social vacuum.

Freedom of speech is considered the most basic and essential of all the freedoms. It's the wellspring of democracy, the font of creativity, the flag-bearer of truth, and the vanguard of liberty. This is the ideal our society supposedly strives for, and it's a good one. Unfortunately, this gap is miles apart and filled with millions of people. These people, with their relationships and influence, prevent the idea from being implemented properly.

Human beings are social animals, and any theoretical freedom that ignores this fact is deficient and should be disregarded. As members of this species, each one of us exerts social pressure on our surrounding fellows as these same fellows exert pressure on us. This pressure can take several forms, though I'm only writing about the pressure to conform and coercive pressure.

People like being liked, and the desire to fit into a group is a very powerful motivation—just look at high school. This motivation doesn't stop once a person reaches the age of majority, because being in a group provides validation, companionship, and safety. The downside to belonging is that there's always a cost—and in my case, it was my freedom of speech.

At the risk of sounding like Tolstoy, each group develops norms, and these norms govern group behavior. In order to conform to these norms, an individual will often follow along with the group in order to fit in.

This same pressure to conform stifles free speech. Take my example as evidence. I chose to conform even though I thought the group was wrong. My reasoning had little to do with a sense of belonging—but outcomes are what matter, not motivations. The only way to achieve the freedom to speak your mind is isolation, the aforementioned social vacuum.

Proof that social pressures limit individual free speech is just a mouse-click away: everyone's an asshole on the Internet. I've spent more than my fair share of time perusing various message boards and online games, and I can attest to the fact that the Web is a hive of scum and villainy. Anonymity emboldens a person to say whatever dipshit thought pops into his or her head, and since there are no social repercussions, there's no limits to the things people will say.

With just a little stretch, another example arises: driving. People are jerks on the road because the four walls of the car comprise a universe where the driver reigns supreme. Hell, the only thing keeping me from donning assless leather chaps and marauding around in my Stratus à la "The Road Warrior" is the coercive pressure the police exert.

Coercive pressure is the ultimate trump card when it comes to silencing your voice. Someone somewhere isn't going to like what you're saying, and they're going to do what it takes to shut you up, whether the method is imprisonment or something as simple as monetary loss. China's good at liquidating loudmouths, and that student at the University of Florida got tasered. When you say something that somebody with power doesn't like, they mute you. Nothing works quite as good as the fear of jack-booted thugs, and there's no shortage of people willing to use them to shut you up. Even here, in Canada we're being stifled, as a pro-life organization discovered recently when they were denied group status at another campus.

It'd be nice if we could speak our minds without repercussions, and some people do speak their minds regardless of the effect on others, ignoring the fact that their opinions offend everyone around them. We call these people assholes. If the choice is between discretion and being a dick, most people—myself included—choose discretion.



Celebrating the achievements of University of Alberta alumni

The University of Alberta Alumni Association is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2007 Alumni Recognition Awards. The awards will be presented at a gala ceremony on September 27 at the Winspear Centre for Music.

The **Distinguished Alumni Award** recognizes the truly outstanding accomplishments of living U of A alumni who have earned national and international prominence as a result of their achievements.



B. Brett Finlay, '81 BSc, '86 PhD, is at the forefront of the emerging field of cellular microbiology, making several fundamental discoveries and publishing more than 300 papers.

Joseph B. Martin, '62 MD, '98 DSc (Honorary), former Dean of Harvard's Medical School, is a renowned neurologist, researcher, and administrator who has demonstrated keen foresight and leadership in medicine and academia.



Donna Jean Martinson, '71 BA, '72 LLB, has left an indelible mark on the Canadian legal system as a champion of judicial education programs and family law issues.

Nathaniel W. Rutter, '66 PhD, internationally regarded as a leader in his field, has helped put Canada on the map as a leader in Quaternary scientific research.



Grant Strate, '49 BA, '50 LLB, a pioneering dance educator, has significantly contributed to the art and teaching of dance in higher education in Canada and around the world.

ALUMNI HORIZON AWARD recognizes the outstanding and notable achievements of U of A alumni early in their careers.

Christopher Barton, '00 BSc, '03 MSc
Catherine M. Biggs, '91 BPE,
'96 BSc(Pharm)

Chris M. Blanchard, '97 MA, '01 PhD
Diane H. Conrad, '01 Med, '04 PhD
Pamela Marie Cunningham, '01
BA(Native St), '06 MA
Andrew J. Hirsch, '93 MSc, '98 PhD
Jana M. Rieger, '91 BSc(SpCh&Aud),
'01 PhD

ALUMNI AWARD OF EXCELLENCE celebrates specific, recent accomplishments of U of A alumni.

Joe Couture, '72 PhD
Howie Draper, '91 BPE
Robert Hedley, '60 BEd
Jan Reimer, '73 BA
Ellen Schoeck, '72 BA, '77 MA
Matthew Skelton, '93 BA, '95 MA

ALUMNI HONOUR AWARD recognizes the significant contributions made over a number of years by U of A alumni in their local communities and beyond.

June M.S. Anonson, '84 BSc(Nu),
'93 Med, '02 PhD
Jeanne F. Besner, '77 BSc(Nu), '85
MHA, '99 PhD
Anne Brailford, '72 BEd, '81 Med,
'85 PhD

Judah Bushelkin, '74 BA, '79 LLB
Robert L. Duke, '69 BA, '70 LLB
Julian N. Falconer, '87 LLB
R. Leighton Fisk, '63 BSc, '65 MD,
'72 PhD

Roman Paul Fodchuk, '54 BSc(Ag)
Kenneth J. Fyke, '71 MHA
Ray B. Hansen, '78 BA, '81 LLB
Andrew J. Hladyshevsky, '76 BSc,
'79 LLB, '87 MBA

Hugh S.D. Hoyles, '66 BPE
Connie Kaldor, '75 BFA
Deborah Kully-Martens, '80
BSc(SpCh&Aud)

Robert J. Porzini, '64 BSc(Pharm)
Robert W. Rosen, '67 BA
Paul G. Sorenson, '67 BSc, '69 MSc
Don Trembath, '88 BA
Edward R. Wachowich, '53 BA, '54 LLB

The Honourable Dr. Lois E. Hole
STUDENT SPIRIT AWARD celebrates student contributions to the University community and beyond
Ashish Mahajan, '07 MD

For tickets to the awards ceremony call 492-3224 by Sept. 26, at noon.