

May 5, 1997

C-Span
444 North Capitol St. N W
Washington D.C. 20001

From: [REDACTED] Camden, Me. 04843

To Whom It May Concern:

When are we going to have Closed Captions on C-Span? I send along a copy of a letter which I wrote to the [REDACTED] Times about the paucity of closed captions on public affairs programs on PBS here in Maine. My arguments could well apply to C-Span.

I recently broke a hip and was in Rehab centers for 8 weeks. I ate my heart out when I saw the wonderful programs on C-Span all day long. And none of it had captioning. I might as well have been a foreigner.

Cordially,

[REDACTED]

S-close cap.



Editorial

Maine Times' view, written by its editor

The witch hunt

Everyone knows there are witches in Maine. We may not be able to uncover any actual evidence of witches as we search high and low, but we know they're there. Why, the very people saying they know about witches must be witches themselves.

Substitute the words "illegal drugs" and insert "schools" in the above paragraph, and you'll get an accurate picture of what's happening in Maine's high school and middle schools. Widespread, warrantless searches of students' lockers and cars are taking place despite a near total absence of any actual drugs being found, as reported in this week's cover story. Tiny amounts of marijuana, and no cocaine or heroin, are turning up, but the searches will continue, we are told, because we must "send a message" about how "concerned" we are about young people taking up bad habits.

But what kind of message is actually being sent? Young minds are undoubtedly influenced by being shut in classrooms while police and dogs roam the halls, looking for evidence that could land a student in jail. But it's doubtful that the impression that's being received is of benign societal concern for students' well-being. It is not far-fetched to compare such scenes to tyrannical governments in China, the Soviet Union and the other gulag states, where one is presumed guilty and forced to prove one's innocence.

In talking about what he called overwhelming support for searches in Calais, Principal Michael Chadwick conceded, "A few kids in our school were ticked off, but they were kids who had reason to be concerned that we did locker searches in the first place."

Exactly. We know who the guilty are; why should the innocent have any concern over the tactics we use to track them down? Or, as Ronald Reagan's attorney general, Edwin Meese, used to say, the people police arrest are generally guilty, or why would police arrest them?

The overheated rhetoric, the justification of police state tactics despite the lack of any display of danger to students or adults in school, are disturbing evidence of a conformity and self-censorship that at times seems reminiscent of the 1950s and McCarthyism. The gradual escalation of the "war on drugs" through the get-tough laws of Nelson Rockefeller's New York (later repealed because juries wouldn't convict, at least back then) to Richard Nixon's announcement of the "war," escalation under Reagan and George Bush, and even the ludicrous spectacle of Bill Clinton trying to block state referendums on medical marijuana, has created a climate of fear, cynicism and hypocrisy.

Kids, even 14-year-olds, are acute observers of the world around them. They know that in terms of intoxicating substances, it is alcohol that most often devastates families, kills people on the road and is freely available at underage parties, and that in terms of health hazards, cigarettes will kill more Mainers in a year than illegal drugs will in many decades.

We could, presumably, send "messages" by putting up police roadblocks everywhere on prom night and stopping all drivers under 21; we could put video cameras in front of every cigarette vending machine and prosecute everyone under 18 who buys a pack. We don't do these things because we see them as too extreme; education in personal responsibility is seen as the primary means of deterring smoking and excessive drinking.

Yet when it comes to a drug like marijuana, potentially hazardous, to be sure, but no more dangerous than the two legal drugs of choice, we roll out the big weapons. The school searches are "moderate," we're told, because students aren't frisked or strip-searched. Or is that next?

Most adults know in their hearts that the drug war is folly, that it is ineffective and will ultimately create rebellion among young people — if not in this generation, then the next. Yet we go on with the witch hunt anyway, silent for fear of being labeled a witch.



Reader Response

How long a wait?

I would like to add to your excellent cover story, "Who's afraid of the ADA?" [MT, 1/9].

First, some background. I am a 74-year-old woman who became disabled when I was 65. I was lucky in that I was no longer working and was on Medicare. My deterioration has paralleled the rise of the disability movement and I have watched it with gratitude and admiration. However, the adage that the "squeaky wheel gets the oil" has given me cause for worry.

We now have Christopher Reeve bringing international attention to problems of the spinal cord and long may he wave. And we have all watched the superb politics regarding AIDS. But that is not the way to mount public policy about diseases. It only creates new minorities who can't compete in this struggle for research dollars. We will not begin to solve their problems until we get a universal, publicly financed system of health insurance. It is a disgrace we have not done that.

Now as to my personal experience. I am totally deaf, and am unable to walk without a four-wheel walker. Deafness is the invisible disability. Having been a hearing person for my first 65 years, I have come to appreciate the appalling sadness of this disorder. Helen Keller said that if some magi would give her the choice as to which sense to restore she would choose hearing. Why? Because hearing is what links you to the world.

We are not talking about the hard of hearing. Great strides have been made there, although not always affordable or covered by insurance. We are talking about people like me who hear no sound — none!

If you are talented you try to lip read, but that is worse than learning a foreign language. Too many sounds look alike and most people talk too fast. If I live long enough I will get better but I don't count on it.

Next there is closed-caption TV. I have been in on this technology from the start and I am grateful for it. But there are times when only the junk is captioned. None of the programs about, for or made in Maine on PBS are captioned. They printed my complaint in a newsletter with a rejoinder that it is too expensive. Recently, Maine Public Broadcasting wrote about the additional resources it's pouring into programs about Maine. But not one is captioned. Well, we deaf can't wait forever. Do we have to wait for some millionaire to become deaf to provide further captioning?

My other disability is straightforward. It is visible and ordinary people are lovely. But I do need accessibility. I am fortunate in that the new addition to the Camden Public Library has given me this; I badly

need it as a place to hang out. But even here there is a problem. This \$2.5 million project does not include a curb slot from the sidewalk, so I must use the street, without being able to hear traffic. We need more consciousness-raising so a detail like this is not overlooked.

Invisible barriers

I am writing in regards to the impressive cover story by Constance Bloomfield about the ADA and, in particular, accessibility.

As a "person in a wheelchair," not a day goes by when I don't encounter a physical barrier to movement in downtown Portland. Congress Street appears to be the most accessible — doorways into the shops are wide and flat and staffpersons do whatever they can to accommodate those of us with impaired mobility. However, when I move into the Exchange Street and Old Port area, it is a very different story.

Beyond all of the curb cuts, automatic doors and wide entryways, the most distressing barriers of all are attitudinal. I have written poems which speak to these barriers that can't be fixed by building a ramp. Here is one:

Lost Lamb

A push
through Monument Square —
the air crisp; exhilarating.
Building up speed I send pigeons flying.
Child's play.

Noticed only by those to whom
I am not invisible,
whispers of "forbidden apples,"
"bad karma" sting my ears.

A 'minister' stands on a soap box
wearing rented garb — a microphone
discarded
on trash day.
He silences his listeners.
Approaching slowly — apologetically,
he places his hands on my head, shouting
"repent and ye shall rise."
I refuse his photocopied blueprint
for my salvation.
Sadly, he mutters something about lambs.

Barriers: more than curb cuts and
ramps.
I speak against injustice. I am labeled
— a gimp with a bad attitude. . .
It would be too kind to
'bring me to the block'
thus I am condemned to
life in a wheelchair.

The bus stop slowly fills with strangers.
"Should you be out in the cold,
dear?"
"Is there someone you'd
like us to call?"
Their offers are kind yet a chord of
anger
vibrates through my body.
"So young to be an invalid."

"How did it happen?"
"I have an illness."

When writing

Maine Times welcomes and encourages letters to the editor. Letters should be kept brief; as a rule, no more than 300 words, and must be signed with the author's name, with a full mailing address. Addresses will not be published. If you have questions about writing letters, please call 828-5432 (1-800-439-8866 toll-free in Maine) and ask for the editor. Letters can be submitted by mail, 561 Congress St., Portland, 04101; by e-mail, maine-times@maine.com; or by fax, 828-5438.