

Greed alone prompts Letterman switch

Well, the battle is over: David Letterman is going to CBS.

Good riddance, I say.

The past year has exposed Letterman as not quite the "Mr. Nice Guy" he would appear to be on "Late Night." After a vitriolic tantrum for not getting the "Tonight Show" gig, he left NBC for a \$16 million lure from CBS.

What else does Letterman get from his switch? The 11:30 p.m. slot, which has been the cause of so much stress for him, as well as ownership of the show and production rights for a second show.

The dust has now cleared, and everyone seems happy, but there is still something foul in the air; something seems tainted.

Apparently, Letterman has felt slighted because he was passed up to replace Johnny Carson, and Jay Leno was given the job instead. There is a reason for that: while Letterman is an effective clown, he is not a particularly insightful interviewer, nor does he have a "Tonight Show"-worthy sense of class and taste.

The entire appeal of "Late Night" is just what the name would imply: it is on late — too late to be watching television. But that's the fun, and Letterman has always played it to the hilt with his unusual gags and, more importantly, his "Guy Next Door" sense of fun.

Well, the guy next door to me would never sell out his loyalty for \$16 million, especially when he was not exactly poor in the first place — NBC has already been paying him \$7 million annually.

The unfortunate fact is the only reason for the switch seems to be greed.

NBC pays Letterman more in a working day than I will probably make on any given year before I am 30.

With his current salary at NBC, Letterman makes roughly \$35,000 per episode, generously assuming 200 shows per year. Under his new contract, he will make \$80,000 per episode. His demand from NBC was either the 11:30 p.m. time slot or a mammoth \$50 million. Greed indeed.

Letterman's desire for the "Tonight Show's" time slot has been consistent and unwavering, but why? His ratings are as good as they are primarily because his chief audience — insomniacs and college students — do not start watch-

ing television until after midnight.

It is difficult to decide who has less class: Letterman for running away from the network that has nurtured his antics for the past decade or NBC's inability to decide whether or not to fire Leno.

The network, for once, did the right thing in letting him

go. Many have criticized Jay Leno for revamping "The Tonight Show's" set and surroundings. Why? Did anyone think that Leno, who seems to be in this for the long run, would really want to keep such relics as Doc Severinon and Ed McMahon around?

At least Leno is not afraid to take a few risks. True, he has yet to find the show's ideal flow, but he will. He wants to.

On the other hand, Letterman wants the CBS version of his show to be as similar as possible to the present show, despite his newly granted ownership. For all his complaints about moving to a new time slot, he does not want to change anything for fear of losing his audience. If that is the case, why change the time slot at all?

What will this do for the young market which normally watches "The Arsenio Hall Show" before switching over to "Late Night"? It remains to be seen how Hall's show will fare, but it is likely that many will ditch the outspoken, unpleasant Hall in favor of "Not-so-Late Night" with Letterman.

To give a sense of scale, Hall makes an unbelievable \$20 million annually. Letterman will make \$16 million. Even Whoopi Goldberg's confused show earns her \$5 million a year.

Jay Leno, Johnny Carson's successor and host of the most revered talk show ever produced, makes a meager \$3 million.

On his show, Letterman has always appeared to be an overgrown child, spending an hour a day in a playground of his own creation. He toys with remote-controlled trucks, plays with monkeys and sits in front of a cardboard city.

It would appear that the child's tantrum got him what he wanted. I hope Letterman finds what he is looking for at CBS. A lot of cardboard buildings can be bought with \$16 million. It might even buy a soul.



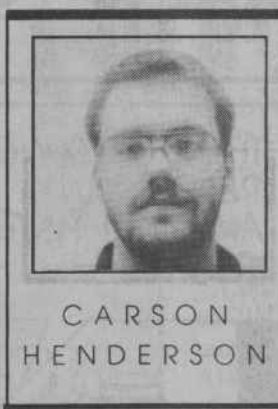
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Video poker ruling a poor gamble

The opinion filed Jan. 11 by the S.C. Supreme Court in the case of Berkebile v. Outen was misguided.

To offer a summary of the facts, William Outen, the respondent, had several video poker machines in his Lancaster County service station. Carol Ann Berkebile, the appellant, lost \$4,000 playing these machines. Outen initiated criminal proceedings against Berkebile because the checks she wrote to pay her gambling debts bounced. Outen received \$1,000 as a result of these proceedings.

Berkebile then filed a lawsuit against Outen alleging she "suffered lost time from her normal pursuits, mental injury and damage to her reputation," and she was entitled to be repaid the money she had gambled away because of provisions in a law passed by the state legislature in 1991.



CARSON
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The trial judge, Paul E. Short Jr., dismissed Berkebile's argument and claimed the law only applied to illegal gambling.

The Supreme Court said in its ruling, "the sole issue on appeal is whether the 1991 law requires the playing of an illegal game as a prerequisite to the recovery of a gambling loss."

The law, directly based upon an English law first accepted in South Carolina in 1712, was written so that anyone who lost 50 dollars or more while gambling could sue to recover monetary losses within three months. The law appears only to mention illegal forms of gambling, while in South Carolina video poker machines are legal.

The Supreme Court, however, as best as it could interpret the legislature's intentions, said the 1991 law did "not require a showing of illegal gambling as an element for recovery."

Berkebile successfully argued the "statute has the effect of protecting a gambler, regardless of the legality of the game, from abusing the vice and exceeding limits which bring harm to the gambler and his or her family."

This is an extremely liberal idea in a very conservative state. When did the conservative coalition begin worrying about the misfortunes of addicts, much less broke gambling addicts?

When did free enterprise, which video poker most certainly is, get passed over in favor of morality? Don't conservatives want less government interference?

The Supreme Court's ruling only allows an individual to sue to collect monetary losses of 50 dollars or more; the ruling is by no means an assurance the appellant will win. An individual, however, would have to be financially punished by a video poker machine to even make the idea of a lawsuit economically feasible, considering attorney fees and such.

Video poker machine owners may be forced out of business

because of these burdensome costs. What good is there in winning a lawsuit if you end up broke?

The state should limit making judgment calls about an individual's private life; one must recognize there is a significant difference between video poker machines and, for example, drunk driving.

Shouldn't the state be using valuable taxpayer dollars to fight criminals? Courtrooms should not be occupied by appellants who waste their own money of their own accord and then sue to get it back.

By the way, the state collects \$1,500 per machine in licensing fees each year. Has someone informed the state that there is a severe money shortage?

As a final thought, could this ruling have been favored by Attorney General Travis Medlock to enhance his race for governor in 1994? Sadly enough, this type of political manipulation of the law helps elect many public officials.

Broken promises: a sign of things to come?

Bill Clinton is under fire. Saddam Hussein fails to comply with U.N. resolutions, and the United States threatens military action. War in Bosnia rages on. Instability in Russia threatens the newly formed Commonwealth of Independent States.

Do these headlines sound familiar? They were from various papers during January 1992, yet a year later they still ring true. Considering all the "need for dramatic change" spoken by our newly elected president, you might have thought the world was about to witness something as dramatic as the Second Coming.

But we haven't. So when will we?

To guess when change will occur, we should first study Clinton's actions since winning the election.

Many people have said his choice to send Chelsea Clinton to a private school, after supporting public education, is hypocritical. On the surface, this argument cannot be refuted. However, Washington D.C. has some of the most violent schools in the nation.

Although she would be protected by the Secret Service, Chelsea would be entering an environment as hostile as a terrorist training camp. Even though Clinton is president, he still is a parent. Is risking the safety of one's daughter more important than scoring a few political points?

Clinton is fairly criticized for backing away from his middle-class tax cut, the cornerstone of his economic plan. However, the American public seems to suffer from glaucoma and only

focus on lower taxes. Because he is "backing away" does not mean he will not offer it.

Figures released last week by the Congressional Budget Office show the deficit has grown by about \$60 billion because of higher health care costs, which throws a monkey wrench into Clinton's economic plan. Clinton now must reconsider the tax pledge so he can raise the revenue to make up for the shortfall.

Conservative commentators from Rush Limbaugh to George Will have said it can mean only one thing, higher taxes. While this may be true, more likely it means Clinton will cut spending and delay initiating some of his plans. He is also considering a short-term stimulus package to get people back to work and spark economic growth.

So, even though he appears to be "waffling" on the middle class tax cut, he is at least considering its long-term impact on the economy.

And the man who stressed the need for PAC reform has done anything but separate himself from his old friends. Commerce Secretary designate Ron Brown, the ultimate Washington insider, is under fire for a recently cancelled inaugural gala to be funded by PAC contributors such as Pepsi, Sony and J.C. Penney. In addition to this, Brown's law firm once represented Haitian dictator "Baby Doc" Duvalier, who has been known to violate the human rights of his citizens.

These ethical dilemmas are not unlike ones experienced by Bush's former Chief of Staff John Sununu, which eventually led to his dis-

missal. It leads people to unfairly question Clinton's decisions and motives even before he has been inaugurated.

Congress was aware of many of the allegations facing Brown and other nominees. Yet, rather than rake these people over the coals, Congress overwhelmingly approved them.

Why? What warped logic allows unqualified people to hold high offices? Politics, pure and simple.

The Republicans are allowing these people in, hoping they screw up. They can then sit on the sidelines and chastise Clinton and say if Bush were re-elected the errors would have never happened. This is the ugly reality of Washington politics. So, Clinton is not wholly to blame.

However, Clinton's most blatant negation of a campaign promise dealt with Haitian refugees seeking entrance into our country. Last week, he reversed his decision and backed the Bush policy of deportation.

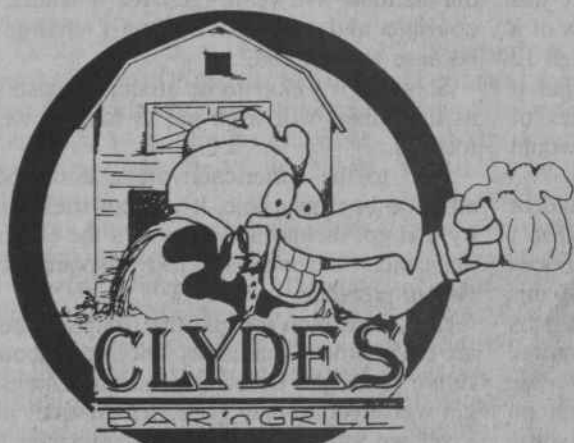
He has authorized the U.S. Coast Guard to blockade Haiti to prevent a last-minute influx of refugees. Could this be the beginning of his "flip-flopping" which Bush and Quayle warned us about?

Based upon his actions, it appears we are not destined for dramatic change, but for more politics as usual. He is already backing out of his promises. Let us hope he won't betray our trust. Clinton is mortal, and he is prone to make mistakes, but can we afford to pay for them?

Perhaps, when Clinton takes the oath, we will see the dramatic changes he spoke of. Instead of being a politician worrying about re-election, he will become a man of integrity who will bite the bullet and do what is right.



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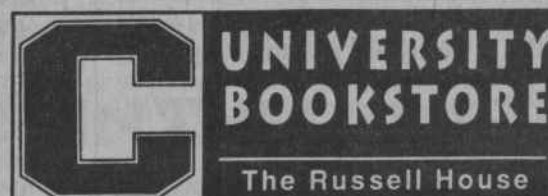
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