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### IN OUR OPINION

## Media payoffs undermine trust

Nationally syndicated newspaper columnist Armstrong Williams' recent admission that his family business took nearly a quarter-million dollars from the U.S. Education Department to promote the No Child Left Behind program is the latest in a line of embarrassments for professional journalism.

The graver issue, however, is that an executive branch agency engaged in the questionable practice of directing taxpayer money to a pundit with the intention of affecting public perceptions of a

**When a breach occurs on both sides of the division between media and government, citizens should be outraged.**

government program. Because individual agencies' policies reflect the presidential administration that determines the overall agenda, there is little doubt where the impetus for such a payoff program came from.

Other than outright bribery statutes, laws do not exist to prevent this from happening in a roundabout way like in Williams' case, but a journalist's acceptance of money, gifts or favors violates the basic tenets of his profession. Journalists have always been the guardians of the public's right to know what is going on in a democracy such as our own, and when a breach occurs on both sides of the division between media and government, citizens should take notice and be outraged.

In the grand scheme of policy making, the Education Department wields little institutional power and generally avoids controversy, which only raises the issue as to what other agencies with bigger ties to corporate interests and national policy have engaged in similar activities during President Bush's tenure in the White House. There are also serious implications for the outcome of democratic contests like the recent national election if the White House is essentially paying for positive coverage in the media and isolating reporters who write negatively about presidential policy.

It is essential that the situation surrounding Williams' payoff be rigorously investigated to determine if the problem is more widespread than a single incident. If so, the problem must be corrected in a way that restores public trust in the division between media and government.



CARTOON COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

## It's all right, I'm saved by the bell

### Hit sitcom reminds me of high school's warm, fuzzy feelings

I've been suspicious for quite some time now. Several of my friends — and almost all of my enemies — have pointed out the symptoms. On Christmas Eve, I was officially diagnosed.

I really don't have anything against my parents, even though they did pass their malady on to my sisters and me. True, they provide an endless source on inspiration for satirical essays. True, I often publish these hack attempts at witicism and comedy. It's not that I like making fun of my family — they just make it so easy.

So Christmas Eve comes along, and it's time to do the family gift exchange. Being the youngest, I get to see most of everyone else's presents before I have to be held accountable for the items on my own wish list.

I've gotten used to seeing my dad get excited over kitchen knives and bread makers, but when he jumped with joy upon opening a Cher concert on DVD, I drew the line. Really, I don't have anything against Cher. She's great. I do, however, have something against grown, married, gray-haired men who like Cher. Especially if they are responsible for half of my genes.

Little did I know that his Cher concert was about to look pretty good compared to my sister's request. I didn't even know it existed, but sure enough,



CHASE STOUDENMIRE

FIRST-YEAR POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENT

she opened up

the entire first season of "Wonder Woman" on DVD — yes, the wretched '70s action series featuring a scantily-clad female superhero that can turn any office supply into a deadly weapon. I was quick to share my thoughts on her gift. I spoke too soon.

My turn. Take your seats, grab some popcorn and turn on that guilty-pleasure-serving television of yours. I got the first four seasons of "Saved By The Bell" on DVD. And I like it. I really, really like it.

All diagnoses are the same, and the prognosis doesn't look good. I'm a dork, and it's highly contagious. Fortunately for me, you liked "Saved By The Bell" too, and you know it.

Life was good back in those days. I was around 6 or 7 years old — young enough to still believe in Santa Claus, old enough to have a crush on Kelly Kapowski. Sleeping in school was mandatory, not forbidden. I didn't like girls, so I was oblivious to the fact that they don't like me either. The only detention hall I was familiar with was located far, far away in the magical

kingdom of Bayside.

The world was a better place when "Saved By The Bell" was on the air. "Saturday Night Live" was still funny. The Berlin Wall came crumbling down. "Super Mario Bros. 3" was released.

The images pumped into our homes showed a world where the biggest prep, jock and nerd in your school could be best friends. In my high school, the only thing the preps, jocks and nerds had in common was that they all hated me.

"Saved By The Bell" taught us that no problem is too big to solve. A sprained ankle can easily turn into an award-winning dance. If you need tickets to the U2 concert, all you have to do is sleep in the mall. Geeks across the country take solace that somewhere in Hawaii, natives regard them as a deity.

I might be a dork, but I will gladly stand up for a TV show I believe in. Those who say TV rots our minds can choke on a spam-burger from The Max. If we truly are a product of what we watch, I'll recommend "Saved By The Bell" to anyone. If you combined Mr. Belding's enthusiasm, Lisa's fashion sense, Screech's accidental antics, Jessie's ambition and drive, Slater's immeasurable strength, Kelly's completely delicious looks and Zach's brilliantly conniving mind, you'd be left with the most attractive, well-dressed, charming, humorous and powerful teenage she-man on the planet.

Thanks, Mom, for the "Saved By The Bell" collection. I'll call you once I can get my hands on one of those awesome Zach Morris cell phones

### IN YOUR OPINION

#### Chow, newspaper lower standards

I just read a very disturbing commentary in The Gamecock ("Big-boned students clog gym's arteries," Wednesday). I couldn't believe my eyes. The moment I read the article I was shocked, to say the least. I have always thought of The Gamecock as politically correct and ethically sound, but I stand corrected. How in the world did something like this get past the editor?

As a public health professional, I would say that this kind of negative literature would definitely have a derogatory effect on those who try to lose weight. Attrition rates among the obese who try to lose weight are high, but ask any public health professional and they will tell you that even if three out of 10 people end up losing weight, it would be considered as a success. Obese individuals have issues with losing weight because of several factors. One of the most important is lack of support. This article gives the impression that our university is not "supportive" by publishing this nonsense.

After reading this article, I have come to realize two things. Curtis Chow, the poor ignorant fool, doesn't realize that everyone enrolled in USC has equal rights to use the gym. The second thing I have come to realize is that The Gamecock is no longer worth reading. The quality of journalism has dropped, ethics are at an all-time low and editorial value has plummeted.

Boo to all those who let this crap slip by, and shame on Mr. Crybaby Chow.

**ANAND NAGARAJAN**  
Graduate student in the Arnold School of Public Health

#### Writer should leave exercise to experts

Curtis Chow ("Big-boned students clog gym's arteries," Wednesday) should leave issues of behavior change and exercise to experts in the field. Chow perpetuates stereotypes about overweight and obese people. Instead of slamming individuals trying to better themselves, we would like The Gamecock to present strategies to help USC students reach their goals.

Individuals wanting to make a lifestyle change should not be intimidated by Chow's hateful comments. You do not look silly, and people do not make fun of you. Those who truly value a healthy lifestyle encourage your adoption and maintenance of physical activity, regardless of your size.

Research shows people that are sedentary benefit more than anybody else from adopting a physical-activity program. Even if weight change is not experienced immediately, positive changes in metabolism, reductions in stress and depression, and improved sleep quality can occur within days. If maintained, physical activity can significantly reduce the risk of developing diseases such as cancer and heart disease.

When starting an exercise program, consider the following:

1. Pick activities that are fun. If you have fun, you will most likely stick to your program.
2. Start low and go slow. Attempting too much at once can cause injury or burnout.
3. Set reasonable goals, and give yourself rewards.
4. Build a support system. Tell parents and friends about your goals, and invite a friend to join you at the gym.
5. Don't be discouraged if you

can't see immediate results.

You don't have to go to a gym or do structured exercise to get health benefits from activity. The Centers for Disease Control and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend adults engage in at least 30 minutes of physical activity, five days a week. Daily activity can be accumulated in short bouts such as parking at the Coliseum and walking to class or taking a walk with friends on the Horseshoe.

Kudos to everyone who made a New Year's resolution to better their health. We hope you reach your goals.

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## Save your pocket cash for relief, not reefer

### Disasters and crises should kindle instincts for empathy, assistance

I've been doing a lot of head-shaking lately. Usually, my head movements are limited to slow jams — like the white guy head nod when someone deftly drops "Take It To The Limit" onto the stereo. Otherwise, sometimes I nod off. Occasionally I look up. I rarely bob. I never tilt.

Nods are good. I did a lot of nodding before Dec. 26. The Panthers were due, my band was hitting its headbanging-best stride and that Willy Wonka movie looked like

it might not suck. I drove back home two days before Christmas to see my uncle, play with my brother's cat and fatten up on mom's cookies. Nod, nod, nod. Life is good.

Then 150,000 people got wiped out. I can't find a supercomputer that can tally all that sorrow. Every update from Paul Harvey warranted a head-shake as I ate my morning cereal. I wasn't sad, but maybe tinged with some stupid survivor's guilt. I gave \$20 to the Red Cross and felt nothing afterwards, even as casualties literally piled up. Life was still good.

Why wasn't I more affected by this? I would've given thousands of dollars, gallons of blood and internal organs if I could have, but I couldn't even put my heart into it. Try that one, Freud.

But life goes on. I started nodding my head again. The Panthers were done, but the Colts were cooking. My band's lead-singer audition fell through, but I'll be damned if my plucky bass player isn't at the top of his game. Johnny Depp makes Willy Wonka look like a child molester, but the Burton-Elfmans almost can't go wrong. You've always got to find reasons to nod, and luckily, for the first time since the Jurassic age, I'm just a stupidly happy guy.

I thought I had head-shaking out of my system Monday. Classes were gearing up to be wicked challenging, my guitars felt good in my hands and the world was a delightful 74 degrees. Sunny. Good streakin' weather. Tiny bluebirds ate seed out of my hand as I frolicked on a hillside.

Then I had to shake my head again. Ten people were killed in a California mudslide. A guy named Jimmie Wallet lost his wife and three kids in a flash. He was going out to get ice cream for them. And that's it, the rawest deal imaginable. You can see pictures of police having to restrain this guy from running into his house in disbelief hope.

But again, I'm nodding. I guess it's the way of life. We have to be robots sometimes to survive. If we soiled ourselves every time we heard about death, we'd be emotionally drained, and we'd be French.

Human beings are capable of dizzying heights of kindness and sickening lows of depravity, but some things should just come naturally. If you walk down the street and a milk truck flattens some old lady, the natural response would be, "Let me help. Oh, geez. I hate blood and old women in general, but let me help." Same thing here.

People think they have to equate emotion with giving. If they felt absolutely nothing after hearing about the tsunami or the mudslide, they thought, "It's dishonest for me to give. I shed no tears, and I knew no one in either disaster." And I shake my head again. That's scary.

The desire to give should be robotic, like clockwork, sewn right in. A light should go off, our "major daily problems" should shrink like so much petty crap and the money normally allocated for a dime bag should go to someone whose entire family was just erased.

Giving one cent one time in your entire life is better than crying about it and never doing anything constructive to help. Gasping like a smallmouth bass can't rebuild a house, but cash sure as hell can. Just smile and nod and whip out your Visa.

Give your opinion to [www.dailygamecock.com](http://www.dailygamecock.com)

Are you going to give money to tsunami relief?

**ONLINE POLL**  
Are you going to give money to tsunami relief?

Yes **44%**  
No **56%**

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### GAMECOCK CORRECTIONS

If you see an error in today's paper, we want to know. E-mail us at [gamecockopinions@gwm.sc.edu](mailto:gamecockopinions@gwm.sc.edu).

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