

RELIGION CONTROVERSY: TRUSTEES RESIGN

Former trustees took a principled stand

face the nathan



NATHAN BRADSHAW

Few things make me angrier than ingratitude and double standards. And very rarely do I have the displeasure of discovering both in the same article when reading the Perspectives page of the Davidsonian. Most disturbing of all, they come under the heading of "Staff Editorial."

The Davidsonian staff's condemnation of John Belk and Steve Smith, based on their resignations from the Board of Trustees, is ridiculous and intolerable. I am offended by the notion that standing up for one's beliefs and principles should be considered an act of "self-righteousness ... a legacy that overshadows the scholarships and buildings given in [Belk and Smith's] names." Ask the twenty-six students, soon to be forty, who experience a four-year education at Davidson courtesy of Mr. Belk, or the seventy football players who still benefit from Mr. Smith's donation of two million dollars to the program a few years back; ask them if they would prefer that Belk and Smith had never been associated with the college.

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Whether you agree with the positions of these two men or not, forgetting all that they have done to make Davidson one of the best liberal arts colleges in the country is a gross display that should be reserved for the 1930s USSR. As soon as the group goes one way and an individual goes another, then the individual is condemned as morally wrong and destructive. Sounds like Stalin's politics to me: Belk and Smith are lucky that Davidson doesn't have a Politburo to carry out executions.

I also find it almost laughable that I hear the same people

criticizing Belk and Smith who, during the 2004 election, repeatedly stated that they would move to Canada if Bush were elected. It's funny how those who are abused for their morals are also the only ones who have the intestinal fortitude to carry through with them. I pose this question to the honest reader: should everything have been reversed (the religious requirement remaining in place, but Belk and Smith resigning in protest that it should have been dropped), what would the headline of last week's editorial have read? My guess: "Resignations indicate need for change."

Whatever your opinion on the Board's decision, there are facts that show the process was more than slightly manipulated. One of Smith's major grievances was that the chair of the Committee on Campus and Religious Life was not part of the recommendation process. Belk noted, according to the Charlotte Observer, that the motion had come up for a vote twice prior to this one, and had been rejected both times. Smith also indicated that the administration did a poor job of sharing written alumni reactions with the Board prior to the vote. According to Smith in an Observer interview, the process "wasn't worthy of the way Davidson should have handled it." Again, a question for the honest reader: do the ends always justify the means, or is it only when you agree with the ends?

Additionally, my hat is off to Roland Foss '05 for making the most intelligent statement yet to come out of this whole ordeal: "The strong desire by somebody—or a group of somebodies—to produce a symbolic victory for secularists has led to an absolutely unworkable agreement." In less polite terms, the decision is a half-hearted attempt at politically correct equal opportunity. It's forty acres and a mule for the non-Christians and has accomplished little more than stirring up campus controversy and two resignations for Davidson. If secularizing the Board is in line with the Reformed tradition, as defenders of the decision repeat ad nauseum, then why is the religious requirement not entirely abolished? If the Board is to cause such controversy, then they should at least make a strong and full change. Otherwise, all this discord and schismatic action is a waste.

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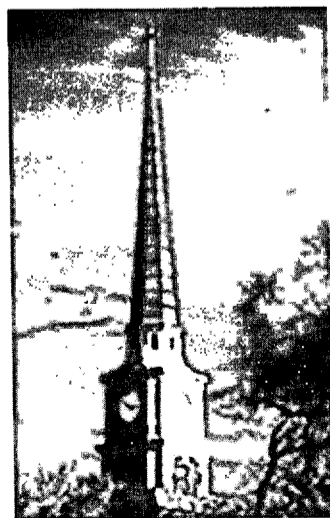
Belk's intolerance hinders true diversity

BY JOE TAYLOR
Guest Columnist

Dear Mr. John Belk '43,

As a student at Davidson I am certainly familiar with you and your family, and I think I speak for everyone here when I thank you for all of the ways in which you have contributed to the Davidson College community. You played an integral role in the establishment of our school and we are ceaselessly thankful for your precious generosity and your personal support.

It is unbearably ironic, however, that my only direct contact with one of Davidson's most important benefactors is a



letter in which I express my utter disgust and inexplicable embarrassment regarding your decision to resign from the Board of Trustees. The fact that you refuse to support Davidson College and its purpose unless it is governed exclusively by Christians is one of the most closed-minded and ignorant concepts that I have ever encountered. It is for this reason that you have hurt Davidson ideologically more than you have hurt it financially.

Perhaps the most infuriating aspect of this ordeal is your claim that allowing up to 20 percent of the Board of Trustees to be non-Christian will "weaken the school" and will detract from "what makes us unique."

What makes Davidson College unique, Mr. Belk, is the way in which people treat each other and when you imply that non-Christians are incapable of making important administrative decisions you "weaken the school" and detract from "what makes us unique." Aside from the highly respected academics and the irreplaceable faculty and staff, Davidson College is best known for an Honor Code that unites each and every single individual at this school.

Regardless of whether or not someone prays to a god he or she enters into our community contract in which ethics, personal responsibility, and morals take precedence over homogeneity of religion. Jews, Muslims, atheists, and people with various perspectives on religion reach an agreement and are bound by their honor to maintain this vibrant example of unity.

It is downright insulting that you attribute the honor and integrity of Davidson College to a homogeneous Christian Board of Trustees rather than to the individual people who now comprise this school and who once comprised this school. At a time when institutions of higher learning do anything imaginable to achieve superficial diversity via a politically-correct, kaleidoscopic student landscape of various skin pigmentation you refuse to support the truest form of diversity.

With a Board of Trustees comprised of people with various ideas about religion, Davidson College could transcend the misconception that diversity is found in corporeal rather than intellectual, emotional, and personal forms.

I'm not a Christian, Mr. Belk, and I'm certainly not one to use the word "Christian" as a synonym for "good," but from my understanding of Christianity what you have done is certainly not very Christian. In fact, your refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of other religious faiths should ironically disqualify you from your own elitist Board of Trustees because your decision does not accurately reflect the Christian idea that Reverend Spach '84 described as being "loyal to people of other faiths." I applaud President Vagt, Davidson alumni, Davidson students, and Davidson faculty and staff for upholding this insightful idea and for placing it above money in importance.

Thank you for your all of your past support, Mr. Belk, but if your particular religious bias prevents you from truly supporting the ideals of Davidson College then it is best that you part from our school.

Sincerely,
Joseph J. Taylor

Joe Taylor is a junior neuroscience major from Poland, Oh. Contact him at jotaylor@davidson.edu.

Tax cut for nation's Paris Hiltons

joe-mentum



JOE REED

Current Republican leaders have proven themselves remarkably adept at using populist rhetoric to promote elitist policies, and their drive to eliminate the estate tax is perhaps the greatest example of this. Last Wednesday the House, on an essentially party-line vote, passed a bill making permanent the 2001 repeal of this tax, termed the "death tax" by its opponents.

These opponents have argued for years that this tax on the inheritance of certain estates takes money from the children of typical, hard-working family farmers and small-business owners.

For all this argument's emotional appeal to such farmers and business-owners, it is a dishonest and reprehensible scare tactic designed to convince ordinary Americans to support ending a tax that falls on only those with extraordinary wealth.

My use of the word "only" is no exaggeration. In the estate tax's pre-2001 form, it affected only the roughly two percent of estates worth over \$1 million (\$2 million for the estate of a married couple). Under an amendment proposed by Rep. Earl Pomeroy (D-ND), this figure would have risen to \$3.5 million (\$7 million for a married couple), meaning that only the wealthiest three-tenths of one percent of American households would have had to pay any estate tax at all.

In addition, the Tax Policy Center largely disproved the

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popular claim that this tax primarily hurts the children of family farmers and small-business owners in a report finding that, under Rep. Pomeroy's plan, a grand total of 50 estates that are made up mostly of farm or small-business income would be affected by the estate tax in 2011 (the first year this permanent repeal would take effect).

Permanent repeal is also utterly unaffordable given the current budget situation—the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities puts the cost from 2011 through 2020 at \$745 billion, an amount the government can't possibly afford to spend for an initiative to benefit such a small percentage of the population.

If, however, the economic rationale for repealing the estate tax is dubious, the morality of it is absolutely appalling. The idea of giving a huge tax break to the Paris Hiltons of the world at such a difficult time for the poor and middle class, to say nothing of a time of war, seems bad enough. To do so shortly after passing a budget featuring deep cuts in funding for programs to aid the poor is simply unconscionable and serves as yet another example of the reverse-Robin-Hood agenda of those currently in power.

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Indeed, Paris Hilton and those like her are exactly who the complete repeal of this tax is designed to benefit. It would fully exempt the heirs of fabulously wealthy families from paying taxes on the fortunes they did nothing to earn.

The middle class and poor in this country are being squeezed now as they have not been for some time, with falling incomes and exploding health-care costs as just two of the many problems they face. Republicans in the House have evidently decided that a more important issue is that the government still requires the heirs of extraordinarily wealthy families to pay taxes on their unearned wealth. If anyone's still wondering whose side these members of Congress are on, or whose values they share, this bill should answer that question pretty clearly.

Joe Reed is a freshman political science major from Raleigh, N.C. Contact him at joreed@davidson.edu.