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editorial

CU speech ban was half-baked

University of Colorado administrators need to get their hearing checked.

They've made it clear that they have tin ears both on the serious issue of football recruiting abuses and on the significant issue of campus free speech.

You'd have to live in a cave to not have heard about the recruiting scandal. Less attention has been paid to the little matter of a "bake sale" in Boulder Wednesday.

The event was cooked up by two student conservative groups, the College Republicans and the Equal Opportunity Alliance, to illustrate what they feel are the inequities of affirmative action programs.

The idea was to sell baked goods at different prices - \$1 for white buyers, 50 cents for Hispanics, 25 cents for blacks and free for "other" minorities.

Administrators were not amused, and told the young rightists that the event violated civil rights laws and would be shut down. The groups threatened to take CU to court, but a compromise was reached under which there was a single price for all buyers and the tiered price list for "suggested donations."

The bake sales are the event du jour for campus conservatives and have been held at other universities, where similarly prissy deans also have cracked down.

The First Amendment doesn't protect only speech that's nice, polite and doesn't hurt anybody's feelings. Yet, in recent years, many universities have imposed politically correct codes that do infringe on free expression.

They also have been uneven in enforcement. Student chapters of the Feminist Majority Foundation are also partial to campus bake sales. They sell sweets to men for \$1 and to women for 80 cents to highlight the wage gap

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between men and women. Foundation official Crystal Lander told St. Petersburg Times columnist Robyn Blunner that none of those sales have been banned.

The sterile legalism of CU's reasoning is disheartening. Of course it's illegal for real businesses to set prices that discriminate by race, but we doubt the young Republicans are going into the bakery industry. They wanted to make a political point - just like the anti-war student who burns an American flag. Both acts should be protected speech.

Conservatives, including some in the Colorado legislature, have been making a lot of noise lately about liberal bias on campuses, and a bill pending at the statehouse would impose an "academic bill of rights" that, ironically, would chill free speech on campus.

The bake-sale bashers in Boulder don't seem to be listening.

We don't necessarily think campus conservatives are a persecuted minority, huddling in their dorm rooms for fear of overweening liberals. We definitely don't think that legislators are the right people to start meddling in what is and isn't said on campus.

But heavy-handedness like the bake- sale ban helps us understand why some conservatives are upset.

So, university administrators need to clean out - or open up - their own houses before someone else does it for them.

Cookie, anyone?

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