

# VOICES



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## MY view

PAUL BERGER  
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### IN PROTEST OF THE PROTEST RALLY

It should have been my finest hour. After weeks of defending Denmark over the cartoon row in words I was going to take action at an hour-long solidarity protest in front of the Danish consulate in New York. But what started out as a laudable expression of support soon took on overtones of such vehement anti-extremism that it bordered on an extremism of its own. I left after half an hour and vowed never to protest again. I say this not because the pro-Denmark protest was so bad but because it was the latest in a string of protests over the past few years at which I have found myself standing among people I do not and cannot support. I had my first inkling of this disillusionment during an anti-war demonstration in New York just before the invasion of Iraq when I found myself walking among people who equated Israel with Nazi Germany. It was the same during the Republican National Convention in New York.

You protest to send one message yet by your very presence you lend your support to causes that make your stomach churn. Outside the Danish consulate it was no different. I was there to show Danes that despite the embassy burnings and the product boycotts, despite the endless column inches of criticism and the tepid support of world leaders, I appreciated their commitment to freedom of religion and expression. Although the people around me doubtless agreed, our views diverged from there. They implied that Muslims who demonstrated around the world against the cartoons were either extremists or following orders, as if free will was the preserve of the United States. They made cynical remarks about the media not covering their protest when in reality their movement was so small it warranted little attention.

Freedom of speech carries the responsibility to admit when you are wrong. While most of the Danish drawings were probably inoffensive to the majority of Muslims, some — particularly the one of Muhammed with a bomb-shaped turban — were clearly provocative. In 2002, the British left-wing magazine the New Statesman ran a front cover with a Star of David standing on a British flag over the headline “A Kosher Conspiracy?” The cover was lambasted as anti-Semitic. An apology was demanded and given. But what if no apology had been forthcoming? What if magazines around the world reprinted that cover in defense of freedom of speech?

I cannot help but feel that some of those who rushed to republish the cartoons did so out of spite rather than a desire for freedom of expression — the equivalent of sticking two fingers up at Muslims around the world. On the street in front of the Danish consulate there was an air of the same. I wanted to show solidarity with the Danes but I saw mainly anger at Muslims. I wanted to hear a nuanced view that would counteract the certainty of extremism but I heard only jingoism and rhetoric.

“You are either with us or against us,” an unwise man once said. I cannot agree. But for those of us with views in between, the protest rally will rarely if ever represent our opinion. I realized that after half an hour that day at the Danish consulate. And I walked away.

→ PAUL BERGER is a freelance writer living in New York. He authors the blog Englishman in New York at pdberger.com.

**QUOTED** “It is an unfortunate event, but one incident should not have a blanket effect on all the conferences. ... We all know what to do to not get our kids hurt.”

KENTUCKY CHEERLEADING COACH JOMO THOMPSON, ON THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF CHEERLEADING COACHES AND ADMINISTRATORS RECOMMENDATION THAT COLLEGE CONFERENCES BAR HIGH-FLYING STUNTS IN RESPONSE TO A RECENT CHEERLEADING ACCIDENT



**QUOTED** “He knew what he was getting into. He knew that this was a possibility.”

KRYSS CHUPP, ON THE DEATH OF FRIEND TOM FOX, THE ONLY AMERICAN IN A GROUP OF FOUR CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKERS TAKEN HOSTAGE IN IRAQ

## LETTERS

### Fathers opting out? ‘It takes two, baby’

WHITNEY EDWARDS  
• via e-mail

Regarding “Group seeks to opt out of fatherhood” (March 9): I was appalled to read that certain men would deny their financial role in cases of unwanted pregnancies. May I remind these men that “it takes two, baby?” Many women feel that they can not ethically choose any option other than raising that child, and at that point, does she have the opportunity to opt out of financial accountability? Most likely not.

This discussion raises the issue of a general lack of communication between sexual partners. It is the responsibility of both men and women to discuss the “what ifs” of the relationship before it is consummated. Not comfortable doing this? You’re not ready to be having sex. If you, as a man, are unwilling to take the necessary precautions to avoid an unwanted pregnancy, and additionally claim that you would not provide child support if the case were to arise, then I suggest that you keep it in your pants until you are mature enough to do so.

### Is this a culture of callous commuters?

CURTIS BOYD  
• via e-mail

In recent weeks, a few of the national networks have run special-interest pieces on the disappearance of manners and a sense of politeness

among the people of America. Have we become a culture of rude, self-interested or just plain obnoxious people? An example might be the morning commute, which illustrates for us daily how inhuman humans can be. Envision this: The train stops to let awaiting travelers board. The seats with three-occupant capacity have travelers seated at the window and along the aisle leaving only the middle vacant. The passenger seated on the aisle stands to allow the traveler in need access to the center seat as the window seated passenger groans and begrudgingly shifts closer to window to preserve every conceivable centimeter of space. Seemingly satisfied, the aisle seated passenger reseats him or herself. Neither realizes the hypocrisy of their actions; if only they would slide to the center themselves and not assume they had some special privilege to retain possession of the aisle seat. Daily this process repeats itself as ritual; it’s a virtual behavioral norm. Give me a break, and let’s be a more civilized citizenry, rather than a culture of callous commuters.

### We need different sources of energy

MARIANN FISHER  
• Manhattan

Regarding: “Windfall tax hurts oil industry at home” (March 8): If indeed we do continue to drill in places like Alaska for a non-renewable resource, where the Exxon Valdez oil spill killed more than 1,000 sea otters

## TODAY’S debate

### What’s more exciting: March Madness or the new season of “The Sopranos?”

SASHA NUNES

21  
Student  
Brooklyn  
My class talks non-stop about “The Sopranos,” but I’d rather watch basketball.

ASHLEY WEINSTEIN

18  
Student  
Queens  
“The Sopranos.” It’s the Mafia and it’s entertaining. Six-foot-tall people shooting hoops is not that exciting.

NICK OTERO

25  
Restaurant worker  
Lower East Side  
“The Sopranos.” With all the twists and turns, I’m always on the edge of my seat.



### HOW TO CONTACT US

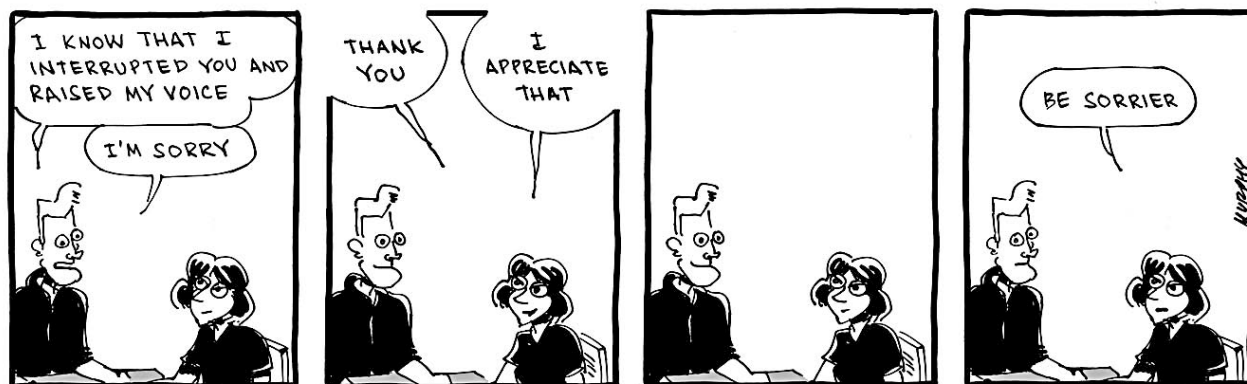
E-mail your letters to: letters@metro.us. Keep them as brief as possible, preferably under 100 words. Metro reserves the right to edit all letters. Please include your name and contact information.

— along with massive loss of seabirds, bald eagles and other life — instead of putting money toward finding other sources of renewable energy to use, we will be destroying our own futures and that of generations to come. We need to look for greater and different

sources of energy other than oil and petroleum. I believe putting money toward alternative options will not only release us from relying on other countries, but keep our own country’s soil and what it gives to us — life — protected.

## THE METRO CARTOON: IT’S ALL ABOUT YOU

TONY MURPHY



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