

## Columnist's opinion based on distortion of facts

I don't know if there is a code of ethics for newspaper columnists, but there should be and it should have one indispensable rule. You see, columnists can spout the most outrageous opinions — and that's the way it should be. That's what they do: share their opinions.

For example, there's nothing wrong with a columnist quoting a senator as saying such-and-such, and then castigating him for it, like this: "That senator is a disgrace and a degenerate, with a twisted mind and a warped sense of values; a selfish, self-centered, self-serving, suck-it-up; a menace to morality, a traitor to his country, and a threat to civilization itself. Besides that, he's ugly and smells bad."

These opinions may be wrong-headed, but a columnist has every right to express them. Except, what if the senator never said what the columnist quoted him as saying? What if the columnist just made up the quotation — or guessed what the senator said — to give him an excuse for his tirade?

This is the one rule all columnists should follow — say whatever you want to about the facts, but tell the

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truth about the facts themselves.

On Sept. 25, columnist Jim Gillis castigated Gov. Donald L. Carcieri for planning to speak before the Massachusetts Family Institute, "an outfit that believes gays and lesbians can be 'cured' and 'normalized.'" Then Gillis expanded upon this statement of fact, saying, "This family institute is ready to 'retrain' about 10 percent of the American population to straighten up ..."

Is that so? Here's what I found on the institute's Web site ([www.mafamily.org](http://www.mafamily.org)). The organization does support traditional marriage, but it has many other concerns as well, including casino gambling; pornography and Internet safety; childhood sexual abuse; abortion, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide; religious freedom; public

schools, charter schools and home-schooling; and helping fathers support their children.

Its mission statement says the institute is dedicated to strengthening families in Massachusetts. It engages in research and education on family-related public policy issues, although it acknowledges that the issues are complex.

What about its belief that gays can be cured and its program to cure or "retrain" gays?

In the extensive Massachusetts Family Institute Web site, containing 23 separate Web pages, I could not find a single sentence supporting these "facts" that Gillis alleged. The closest thing I could find was an isolated expression of support for "the healing of those (homosexuals) who wish to change their behavior."

Many years ago, Sen. Joe McCarthy earned his infamy by taking words out of context and using them to smear public officials with charges of being "soft on Communism." I would hate to think that today a Daily News columnist has about the same respect for facts as Sen. McCarthy.

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