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Today: March 15, 2000 at 10:24:46 PST

Letter: Bartender wrong to refuse service

I read with deep concern Susan Snyder's March 7 article, reporting that a bartender at the Mariachi Cafe restaurant in Las Vegas refused to serve beer to three blind musicians in the group Outasight. The musicians' story is, as the ACLU-Las Vegas spokesman put it, "extremely disturbing."

Consider a similar story from a couple years ago in which a Reno cabdriver refused to give a ride to a blind man. The cabbie explained that he didn't want a guide dog in his taxi. The driver's behavior in this instance was inconsiderate as well as illegal and he was subsequently fired.

But the cabdriver's refusal of service is not as contemptible as the bartender's. The cabdriver refused service because he didn't want a dog mucking up his taxi. The bartender, on the other hand, refused service for purely "paternalistic" reasons. She wouldn't serve the musicians beer for their own good.

The Mariachi bartender explained that she refused service to the blind musicians because they couldn't see what she was pouring for them. I find this explanation a bit implausible because even sighted patrons rarely see what the bartender pours. For the bartender to assume that she was a better judge of the musicians' interests than the musicians themselves is arrogant and demeaning. It profoundly insults their autonomy.

I encourage the appropriate governmental and nongovernmental institutions to carefully investigate this incident. Evidently, we still haven't learned that paternalism toward the disabled is wrong.

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