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## Group Claims Biased Campus Officials Bankrolled Protest of Student Play

By Jim Brown  
July 26, 2005

(AgapePress) - Washington State University is being accused of funding "vigilante censorship" of a controversial student play on campus. Student playwright Chris Lee's production, *Passion of the Musical*, had to shut down after 40 hecklers kept interrupting, shouting about its being offensive and allegedly issuing threats against cast members. And now an academic freedom advocate is charging that a university administrator used school money to pay for the hecklers' tickets.

WSU's president, Lane Rawlins, has defended the disruptive behavior of the 40 protesters, calling it a responsible exercise of their free-speech rights. And Raul Sanchez, director of the Center for Human Rights at Washington State, claims the hecklers' response was appropriate because the playwright incited the crowd with his provocative rhetoric. "In effect, what the playwright did," Sanchez asserts, "was to create circumstances in which, one could arguably say, he created a public forum in a private theater showing."

But David French, president of the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE), calls these arguments "ludicrous." He says, "The university continues to be under the illusion that somehow disrupting a play is an exercise of free speech in and of itself, and it's not."

And French notes that, ironically, the university's Office for Campus Involvement has played host to other controversial and potentially offensive plays. "Not only have they allowed *The Vagina Monologues*," he says, but "they also allowed another play where there was a sexual act with the American flag. So they've definitely allowed provocative expression."

Apparently, there is one notable difference, the FIRE spokesman points out. "I guess *Passion of the Musical* just offended the wrong people, whereas *The Vagina Monologues* offends people that the university doesn't care if they get offended," he says.

French believes Washington State University officials need to declare definitively that no one is permitted to heckle or disrupt a campus event. Then, he adds, the school's administration should apologize for purchasing the protesters' tickets.

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Jim Brown, a regular contributor to *AgapePress*, is a reporter for [American Family Radio News](#), which can be heard online.

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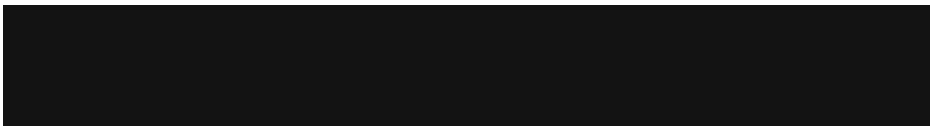
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