With open discussion, no protests necessary

"Why fear ideas?" Rich Oppel asked a good question in reporting on the speech he heard Henry Kissinger deliver in Boston during a "thoughtful discussion of whether to conduct foreign policy on human rights or realpolitik, politics based on practical and material factors rather than theoretical or ethical reasons."

The title of his column, "No need to fear ideas," gives an equally good answer. But is Oppel right in claiming that those who planned to disrupt a similar speech by Kissinger in Austin put forward the "smart advocates on each side of the human rights vs. realpolitik debate."

The Kissinger speech in Boston was delivered at the International Press Institute's World Congress. Without such a guarantee, those whose strongly held views are effectively marginalized will necessarily resort to the kinds of tactics associated with movements in the 20th century that asserted rights for workers, women and minorities, that spoke strongly against the Vietnam War and that speak strongly now on volatile issues such as abortion and the World Trade Organization.

It is easy to use images of WTO protesters in Seattle to sensationalize the issue. But such images cut both ways: Pictures of dead fetuses and murdered doctors and nurses don't add up to the kind of civilized debate we need to resolve our crucial disagreements as a united people.

I have heard it argued in lofty quarters that Kissinger has put in his service to the nation, deserves our respect and should be allowed now to say what he wants to say without having to answer questions about his past policy decisions. Most of us would agree. Without such a guarantee, those whose strongly held views are effectively marginalized will necessarily resort to the kinds of tactics associated with movements in the 20th century that asserted rights for workers, women and minorities, that spoke strongly against the Vietnam War and that speak strongly now on volatile issues such as abortion and the World Trade Organization.

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