Why is Freedom of Speech a burning issue?

Cartoonist Doug Marlette says author Kurt Vonnegut once compared the artist to the canary in the coal mine, a hypersensitive creature who alerts harder life forms to toxic gases by kindly dropping dead. If political cartoonists seem awfully sensitive when it comes to issues involving Freedom of Speech, maybe they’re just trying to warn us before it’s too late. Cartoonists rely on their First Amendment rights to be able to freely do their jobs -- to inform, to criticize, to persuade, to take our public figures to task for what they do. An issue like prohibiting flag burning certainly has the canary choking on the threat to the First Amendment.

Talking points

1. Cartoonist Randy Bish suggests that public paranoia is what’s fueling the campaign to ban flag burning at the expense of one of our First Amendment rights. Define what he means by paranoia.

2. According to the Freedom Forum website, First Amendment experts regard flag desecration as a form of political expression that should be protected. What argument can you pose refuting that stance? Doesn’t the flag deserve protection?

3. On what grounds can you defend flag burning?

Additional resources

Association of American Editorial Cartoonists
http://editorialcartoonists.com/

More by Randy Bish
http://aaeonline.org/cartoon/browse.cfm/BishR/

More on the Flag Burning Amendment
http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/