

# OUR VIEW: Libraries need to disable Internet filters without penalty

By Sandra Kelly, for the editorial board

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Libraries have always been a haven of knowledge.

They've also been places that have to fight to keep certain books and magazines on their shelves.

It comes as no surprise that libraries once again have to fight to keep information available, but this time the fight is an electronic one.

Right now the fight concerning Washington libraries has to do with the Internet.

The Washington state Supreme Court heard arguments June 23 from the American Civil Liberties Union on whether it's constitutional for public libraries to refuse to disable their Internet filters for adults who want access to sites that have been blocked.

The plaintiffs include a woman who wanted to do research on tobacco use by youth, a professional photographer blocked from using YouTube and from researching art galleries and health issues, a man unable to access his blog, and information relating to gun use by hunters.

All of the sites the people were trying to access are legal, but it really doesn't matter what sites are blocked - the fight is centered on blocking information.

Libraries that receive money for Internet access under two specific federal programs are required to have the ability to block minors from seeing pornography.

That's a good thing.

We all want to protect our children. The thought of kids going into the library and watching pornography or gambling away their money is sickening, but that doesn't mean libraries should ban or disable sites. That's right up there with banning books, and that's flat-out wrong.

We understand the knee-jerk reaction of keeping children away from inappropriate sites, but we must think long and hard before actually banning sites.

It may be necessary to put a library computer in a slow-traffic part of the building that's designated for adult use only. That way children won't be able to look over the shoulder of an adult who's on a site deemed inappropriate for underage viewers. This shouldn't be a problem because librarians have been doing this with books for years.

There's a fine line between protecting and limiting. Keeping adults off legal sites is wrong, even if it's being done with good intentions.