

Editorial

ASUO appointments are very questionable

The recent appointment of Jeff Wheeler to the Incidental Fee Committee and Katy Howard to the Health Insurance Committee once again calls into question the integrity of the ASUO Executive.

Two weeks ago, James Randall resigned his position on the IFC claiming the committee favored Students for a Progressive Agenda-associated groups. The ASUO Executive has abused its power to select Randall's replacement by manipulating the appointment process.

Although the position had been open since Feb. 10, the first advertisement in the Oregon Daily Emerald announcing the position did not run until Thursday, Feb. 19. The deadline for applications was the next day at 1 p.m. The Executive should have advertised the position for at least five days. One-and-a-half days is not enough time for interested students to apply.

It seems as if the ASUO was purposely trying to control the number of applicants. The ASUO claims to have received only one application from Wheeler. Ironically, Wheeler is in the same fraternity as ASUO President Steve Nelson and two senators who supported Wheeler at Monday's Student Senate confirmation hearing.

Wheeler's application, and the role of the Student Senate, came into question at a meeting to review appointees for the Health Insurance Committee. Not only was Wheeler's application dated the 18th — the day before the ads ran — but his application did not have any references, according to Student Sen. Tim Chase.

Apparently Nelson is the only one to have interviewed Wheeler. The Senate and other members of the ASUO Executive only had Nelson's recommendation to rely on.

Senators have the prerogative to call applicants before them if they question an applicant's competence or believe there may be a conflict of interest. When several senators asked to question Wheeler, however, the Senate's role was brought into question. Some senators feared the Senate would take on the role of a hiring body.

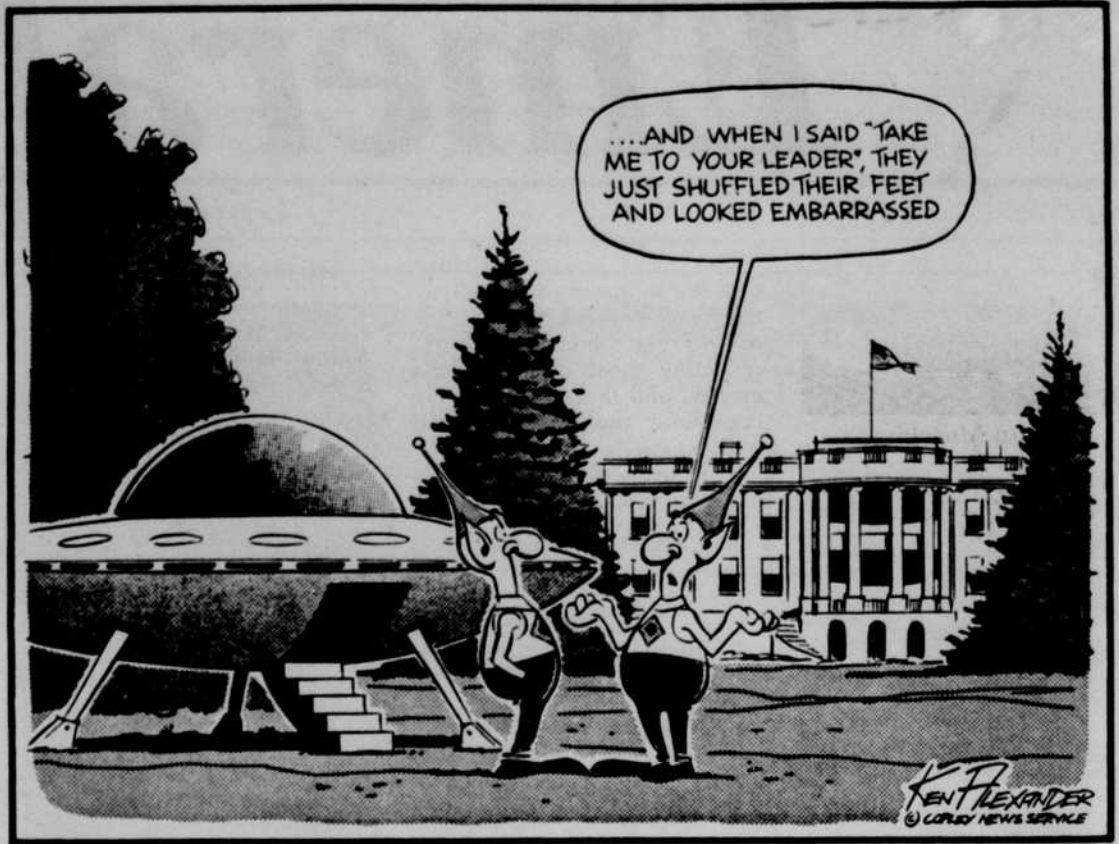
But it is the Senate's responsibility to effectively review an appointee. If it simply takes the word of the Executive, the Senate becomes a rubber-stamp committee. In Wheeler's case, both the ASUO Executive and the Senate accepted Wheeler's incomplete application and relied solely on Nelson's recommendation.

Howard's appointment to the Health Insurance Committee also raises questions about the ASUO Executive's motives. Howard is currently a member of the IFC. Section 4.2 of the ASUO Constitution says no person shall hold an elected and appointed position simultaneously unless the Constitution Court determines there is no conflict of interest.

Although the Constitution Court has not ruled on Howard's appointment, we believe there is a conflict of interest. The Health Insurance Committee is a branch of the ASUO, and the student government's system of checks and balances is jeopardized if Howard is approved.

Because Howard is an IFC member, she should not be involved in committees that may influence her decisions on allocating funds.

By appointing Howard and Wheeler, the ASUO Executive has engaged in backroom politics. It has ignored its responsibilities to appoint qualified people without conflicting interests, and by so doing, it has denied the student body a government with integrity.



Commentary

Insurance problems addressed

For the past year, I, my predecessor, the ASUO Insurance Committee, and staff have been addressing problems with Lone Star Insurance Company. Our committee provides the best possible health insurance at a reasonable rate for students.

By Steve Nelson
ASUO President

Two problems requiring different solutions have been evident: 1) Lone Star was challenged by local medical providers concerning the dollars they were paying on claims; 2) Lone Star paid some claims late and owed 1.5 percent interest (either to policy holders or providers).

Our first priority was the amount being paid to providers, causing students problems with their doctors. In most cases, the Insurance Coordinator solved the problem over the phone. When this did not work, she suggested students write the company objecting to the rate

paid on their claim. If the problem still existed, she sent them to the ASUO Legal Services Attorney to obtain his help in confronting Lone Star. In one instance, a professional negotiator was called in to assist. We are aware of only three unresolved claims cases and they are being negotiated.

The second priority was resolution of the 1.5 percent interest issue. The contract wording is ambiguous: TIME OF PAYMENT OF CLAIM: Indemnities payable under this policy for any loss will be paid upon receipt of due written proof of such loss. The Company will pay 1.5 percent interest per month on all claims not paid within 14 days of receipt of all necessary information required to determine the claim's eligibility for payment.

This leaves unclear who is to receive the 1.5 percent (the policy holder or the provider) and who initiates payment of the 1.5 percent (the policy holder, the provider, the ASUO, or Lone Star of its own initiative). In addition, this clause of the contract was left off the brochure. It has taken a great deal of time to clarify the clause and negotiate a solution with Lone Star which will be most convenient for students. Our goal was to have Lone Star pay students directly without students having to bill the company. As a result, we did not simply run ads in the paper telling students to bill the company.

Willy Bills advocates pursuit of a class-action suit or other legal action by the ASUO. A lawsuit could tie up claims payments for students, possibly for years. Suing would be an irresponsible act and potential abuse of the courts; we have other remedies at hand and are working through those processes.

The ASUO Health Insurance Attorney is working directly

with the Oregon Insurance Commissioner to resolve the three outstanding claims rate cases and any more which may surface. They have negotiated a settlement with Lone Star, and students who had 1.5 percent interest coming have been issued checks from the company without having to request reimbursement.

Health insurance for students is an important issue. The ODE's past two editorials on this issue have been prime examples of irresponsible journalism. I would like to make a clear distinction between the reporters who have been covering this issue and the editorial board. We have received accurate and fair coverage of the issue and occurrences concerning this complex issue by the reporters. The editorial board analysis, however, seems to be based on rumors rather than facts, even the facts included in ODE articles.

According to the ODE, a position for the Feb. 4 editorial was taken before consulting anyone from the insurance program. These editors have had no contact with people who have information on the issue. Analysis should be based on all of the facts, not just one side of the story. Neither of these editorials were.

The Insurance Committee and staff have made careful decisions based on past experience and current situations, always with the best interests of students as our highest priority. I take offense at many disparaging statements in the editorial, but particularly the final paragraph stating, "The irony of the situation is that Nelson could have been a hero; he could have proved himself to be an advocate of the students by taking an open and vigorous stance on their behalf from the start." I do not desire to be a hero. I only wish to make the best decisions for the management of a \$750,000 program.

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