

Hughes rejected in vicious campaign

It's been a long time since the ASUO elections were as nasty as last week's primaries. In addition to Andy Clark and Scott Wyckoff's surprising upset over Tim Hughes and Maureen Kirk for the ASUO executive, voters were treated to a political revolution and alleged wrong-doings, death threats and deceptions.

It is also possible the matter isn't settled yet. Hughes and Kirk are filing charges before the ASUO Constitution Court that some Greek houses withheld meals from members until they had voted. Hughes and Kirk correctly contend coercing voters is illegal.

We, too, have heard of houses doing this, but one need only look at the election results to verify that Greeks turned out in overwhelming numbers to vote: the Greek slate did unusually well this year, with Greek nominees winning all the major races.

So what accounts for those darn Greeks and their flexing of new-found political muscle? Hughes says it was a letter to the editor from sorority member Stacy Kitch (ODE, April 20) that led to his downfall.

In her letter, Kitch claimed Hughes and Kirk attended a fraternity party the weekend before the election and while there insulted the Greek system. Accusing the ticket of hypocrisy, Kitch said voters couldn't trust Hughes/Kirk.

Kitch's concern is valid — if the events she describes actually happened, which is presently a matter of debate. Hughes and Kirk deny attending the party and claim the letter is fiction. Both sides claim witnesses to verify their stories. Hughes is planning legal action against Kitch and possibly the Emerald; Kitch hasn't dropped her claim and is seeking legal advice.

We certainly want to know who's lying and if the Emerald has been used in a dirty campaign trick, but we reject the notion that one letter moved the Greeks to reject Hughes. We wish the Emerald had such power to move people — obviously not enough readers heeded our endorsement of Hughes/Kirk (ODE, April 18).

The fact is that the Greeks were mobilizing weeks earlier. There were far more Greek candidates on the ballot this year; at their hearings, the Greek Endorsement Committee clearly snubbed Hughes, whom they endorsed last year for the Incidental Fee Committee.

The Greek mobilization was only the most visible element in a large-scale uprising against Hughes. This was an ugly election. The resounding rejection of Hughes was personal. Nobody ever denied the experience offered by the SPA platform, or Kirk's efficacy.

The antagonistic Hughes can be described as either just crusader or loose cannon, depending on who's talking. Hughes' IFC voting record, his bellicosity, and yes — as the recorded death threats show — his homosexuality led voters against him.

The Greek starvation tactics, allegations of lies and personal attacks on Hughes and Kirk (she says she was knocked down while handing out SPA literature) were the most discouraging aspects of an unseemly campaign. We're dismayed at the homophobia and ugly undertones permeating this election.

But we also want to note that Hughes and Kirk aren't above reproach. Their condescending treatment of the other candidates (whom they apparently misjudged) at debates and endorsement hearings is well documented. It doesn't sit well with us that Hughes/Kirk balked at placing voting booths in dorm cafeterias, a very good idea that they feared would play into the hands of Clark/Wyckoff.

Enough of this ugliness. We hope for a return to fair play this week in the general elections. We also hope the Greek machine that seems to be in control opens its ranks. Their four IFC candidates, currently the top vote-getters, are a frighteningly homogenous group that cannot represent all students. It is time to build coalitions again.

Also, as they are the winners, we want to call on Clark/Wyckoff to begin displaying what they intend to do as occupants of the ASUO executive. They need to begin formulating concrete plans to solve the problems they have identified on campus. They also need to begin deciding how they will approach the new University president.

During the campaign, Clark/Wyckoff seemed all too willing to go along with the University administration. Now, more than ever, the students need somebody who will stand for student empowerment. We still believe that Hughes/Kirk would have done so; we certainly hope that Clark/Wyckoff learn to do so.



Forum

Resources, not programs, need revision

By Jack Roberts

As the University prepares to welcome new president Myles Brand, the fate of its current president needs to be remembered.

If, as he was told, Paul Olum lost his job because he antagonized those who provide the funding for higher education

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(i.e., the governor and Legislature), his successor cannot afford to be intimidated by them.

Some members of the Legislature seem determined to establish their credentials as responsible budgeteers by forcing higher education to better prioritize its spending. The public is tired of hearing higher ed officials constantly wanting more, we're told. The battle cry heard from Salem, both from the legislative and executive branches, is that higher ed must learn to live within its means.

There is a gap between our dollars and our aspirations, these critics complain. True enough. But is the problem that we have been too ambitious in our aspirations, or too penurious with our appropriations?

Thomas Bartlett, Oregon's chancellor of higher education, recently painted a bleak but accurate picture of the funding situation when he pointed out that our state institutions are funded at only 75 percent of the level of comparable schools nationally, and that faculty salaries are in the bottom 30 percent nationally.

But even that is just half the story, for the trend is toward decline, not growth. Over the last 10 years, real (inflation-adjusted) salaries for faculty at our state institutions declined by 15 percent. Over the last five years, real spending for supplies and services has fallen by about the same amount.

Does that sound like a system that simply needs to learn to live within its means? Or is it one that is not living up to either our means or our dreams?

Critics have characterized higher ed officials as simply wanting more — more money to educate students, to offer more programs, to perform

more research. As the statistics above demonstrate, however, the problem is that we have not even appropriated sufficient resources to accomplish those tasks we have already undertaken, enough to adequately maintain current levels of programs for existing students.

No one will argue that we shouldn't prioritize government spending — for all programs. What the record shows, however, is that higher education has been too low a priority for too long, not that it has squandered abundant resources in an insatiable desire for more.

What critics ignore is the fact that it isn't just higher ed officials who are concerned over our current crisis in higher education. Those of us who have no connection with the University other than the fact that we are alumni nonetheless have a stake in maintaining its educational excellence.

After all, the reputation of your alma mater follows you throughout your life. As a graduate of both the University journalism school and the University law school, I will always be judged, in part, by the reputation of those schools. Only it won't be their reputation and standing in the academic community during the 1970s, when I was a student; its reputation in the 1990s and thereafter will be assumed by most people to reflect its level of excellence in the past.

Everyone who has graduated from the University or Oregon State thus has a real stake in maintaining — and improving — their standards of academic excellence. That's one reason I'm particularly concerned with two points that Chancellor Bartlett has made on several occasions regarding the future of higher education in this state.

On the one hand, he has stressed that Oregon can afford only the two major research universities it has in Corvallis and Eugene. In the next breath, however, he points out that nearly half the state's population is in metropolitan Portland, and that services will have to be expanded there.

What exactly does this mean?

On the one hand, he seems to be telling us that he opposes Portland State's goal of becoming a third major research university in the state. At a time when we are struggling just to maintain funding for what we have, that's good news.

On the other hand, however, he is clearly saying that, while our higher ed system as a whole must learn to live within its means and just say no to more programs and more students, Portland State can expect to play an expanded role in the future.

If resources for the system as a whole are restrained, and Portland State is going to claim a larger share of them, it isn't hard to figure out that the University and Oregon State will have to settle for less.

Then when officials at those universities complain about getting less, the governor and Legislature can simply continue to accuse them of constantly wanting more.

What they want, however, isn't "more" in the abstract and without limitation, but "enough." And since what we have now clearly is not "enough," I guess that means they do want — and deserve — "more."

Jack Roberts is a Eugene-based attorney. Last year, he waged an unsuccessful bid against incumbent David Dix for the state representative Dist. 41 seat.

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