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Insurance choice may be required in fall

By Andrea LaFayette-Fisher
Emerald Contributor

Students may have to choose whether they want University-sponsored health insurance in order to complete registration next fall, in a move some Student Health Insurance Committee members say is the first step toward mandatory insurance for University students.

Jennifer Bills, ASUO president and SHIC chairwoman, said the committee and the business office are working together to iron out details of implementing the "forced answer" enrollment system. Students will either push a telephone button during Duck Call, or they will fill in a box on their tuition bills to indicate their choice.

Bobby Lee, of Associated Student Services Inc. is among those who do not approve. ASSI is a student activities group that contracts with SHIC to provide financial management of health insurance programs.

"Is this the most legitimate way to get information?" Lee asked. "The next thing you know, we'll have to answer 50 other things in order to register. Is this what students want?"

This kind of dictatorial way of getting answers may not be ethical."

Gerry Mosely, vice provost, said the most cost-effective way to implement the forced answer system would be to put it on Duck Call, but no final decision has been reached yet.

"Assuming we can come to a clear idea of how to implement it, it will go forward," Mosely said.

On Feb. 3, SHIC sent out bids to several insurance carriers, outlining the planned forced enrollment system and asking for changes in current policy benefits, such as the addition of domestic partnership/spousal equivalency coverage and vision care, as well as an increase in international student benefits to bring these up to domestic student levels.

"We think our current plan needs improvement, but we hope to go mandatory in the next three to four years," Bills said.

Meanwhile, SHIC will launch a substantial education effort designed to increase student awareness of health insurance options. Mandatory coverage would mean students would either have to show proof of outside coverage or subscribe to the University policy in order

to enroll.

U.C. Berkeley students have had mandatory coverage for about five years. Undergraduates there pay \$300 a year for coverage, compared to current voluntary University of Oregon premiums, which run \$593 per year for a single policy.

"The more people who subscribe to a policy, the more benefits you can ask for and the lower the cost," said University insurance coordinator Cathy Curran.

Bills estimates that University students would pay as little as \$200 a year for coverage if health insurance were mandatory.

Results from a recent SHIC survey indicate that students who aren't covered by their parents' policy aren't planning to subscribe to the University's policy either. But SHIC member Hilary Mosher said if students don't choose mandatory insurance coverage, the state may choose it for them.

"A lot of states have already done it," Mosher said. "They just can't handle the expense of picking up medical bills for uncovered students."

Mosely disagrees. "A state mandate was more likely a couple of years ago," he said, add-

ing that the administration doesn't want to be perceived as demanding more from students while doing less.

Bills said tuition increases resulting from Measure 5 have forced the committee to move more slowly on the plan to mandate coverage. "Students will be looking at an 18 percent tuition hike in the summer, so we don't want to add the cost of an insurance premium right away," she said.

SHIC members hope students will choose mandatory insurance when they have more information about the benefits of universal coverage.

"The only way to get a viable health insurance policy is to go mandatory," Mosher said. "Last year we saw the ASUO president go from totally anti-mandatory to realizing it was the only way to go."

But Bills and Mosely both said health insurance would not be mandated unless students decide that's what they want.

"We'll get the information out, but if there is a resounding 'no' from students when the time comes, we won't try to force it," Bills said.

Bush, Tsongas take first primary



NATIONAL

MANCHESTER, N. H. (AP) — President Bush gained grudging victory Tuesday night in the New Hampshire presidential primary, with challenger Patrick J. Buchanan claiming more than 40 percent of the Republican vote to fuel his conservative rebellion.

Former Sen. Paul E. Tsongas of Massachusetts won the five-way Democratic race, ratifying the frontrunner status even he called improbable. Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton ran second and pronounced himself "the comeback kid."

New Hampshire's blighted economy was the consuming issue in both parties' campaigns, and Bush said he got the message of discontent.

"We are going to take our party back ... and when we

take our party back, we're going to take our country back," Buchanan told a chanting rally. He repeated his economic and foreign-policy campaign theme: "There is nothing wrong with putting America First." An ecstatic crowd chanted in return: "God Bless America. God Bless Pat."

Bush did not appear to claim his victory and his written statement was sedate.

"This election was far closer than many had predicted," the Bush statement said. "I think the opponents on both sides reaped the harvest of discontent with the pace of New Hampshire's economy."

He vowed to "take my case to the voters in the next eight-and-a-half months," and said he was confident of beating Buchanan to win the GOP nomination.

In the exit polls, three in five Tsongas voters cited his specific ideas as mattering most, while 42 percent mentioned his strength and courage. Nearly one third of all voters said they wished some other candidate had been on the ballot. Write-in campaigns for New York Gov. Mario Cuomo and consumer activist Ralph Nader were gaining sparse and scattered support.

Democratic National Chairman Ronald H. Brown said the New Hampshire results put Bush "in incredible peril."

Clinton told his supporters in Merrimack that he "just can't wait to take this campaign across the country ... and I know ... in November we are going to win a great victory — against Pat Buchanan."

Network withholds leak leads

WASHINGTON (AP) — National Public Radio refused Tuesday to provide a Senate special counsel with material on Anita Hill's sexual harassment allegations against Clarence Thomas that it did not broadcast.

William E. Buzenberg, vice president for news and information at NPR, said the network was protected by the First Amendment's guarantee of press freedom.

Buzenberg was the third journalist called before Peter E. Fleming Jr.

Fleming is trying to learn who disclosed the accusations that Thomas sexually harassed Hill, a law professor.

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