

Policy jeopardizes groups' funding

The funding foundation for many student groups may require some shoring up, as student government attempts to grapple with a 1985 Oregon attorney general's opinion that may severely limit the kinds of groups that may receive funding through mandatory incidental fees.

Students For Choice, the University's abortion rights group, had its funding put in jeopardy last week as the ASUO Programs Finance Committee rejected the group's goal statement. A goal statement must be approved for the organization to receive any student incidental fees.

The committee's decision may be a bellwether for other groups that espouse a particular political or ideological view. The First Amendment rights of students may be implicated, according to the attorney general's opinion, when they are required to pay incidental fees to support groups with which they don't agree.

The opinion makes logical sense, particularly in the abstract. Of course a student shouldn't be forced to finance a group that disagrees with his or her personal point of view.

It's in specific applications that the opinion becomes worrisome, particularly for groups such as Students For Choice.

The opinion, which carries the weight of law, states that a student group must meet several criteria to receive mandatorily assessed student fees. Among these is the requirement that the group "will serve to enhance the ability of its students as a whole to express themselves, or that it will otherwise serve the collective interests of students as a class."

This is a reasonable restriction. If a group cannot meet this requirement, it ought to seek funding only from those who support the group's ideas. This is entirely possible; fund raising already provides a chunk of the financial support for many groups.

If the logistics could be worked out, an optional fee could be included on tuition bills, so that only interested and approving students would be charged.

It may be possible for Students For Choice to salvage its funding, if it alters its goal statement. If it is a group primarily concerned with contributing to the exchange of ideas on campus, rather than pursuing a particular political end, then it may escape the budget axe.

But it's hard to imagine how a group so plainly connected to one side of an issue, such as Students For Choice, could refrain from pushing its one point of view.

It is encouraging to see that at least some committee members are taking the attorney general's opinion seriously, now that it has been brought to their attention.

Let's hope groups prepare their goal statements and budget requests with the new guidelines in mind, so that the committee won't have to send them back to the drawing board.



■ OPINION

Student groups face possible cuts



PRIMO A. J. FONTANA

In 1985, Dave Frohnmayer, then-attorney general of our state, wrote an opinion to which we should all take heed, especially considering that we are in the midst of budget hearings.

Frohnmayer wrote that, "First Amendment interests in free expression and association are implicated when an individual is compelled to provide financial support to an organization that advocates viewpoints with which that individual disagrees."

He did make some exceptions to his opinion, and stated if a group could somehow, "serve the collective interests of students as a class," the distribution of student monies could be justified.

Last week, this came to the forefront of campus politics when Students for Choice went before the ASUO Programs Finance Committee to present its goals statement in order to receive its funding for next year.

Matt McGinnis, a member of the committee, told Students for Choice that in regard to the above opinion, "to tax all the students to fund a political organization becomes difficult," and the body proceeded, by a 3-3 vote, to deny the group funding.

This could lead to a momentous shift of power on our campus. A large portion of the groups which receive our fees are at least slightly, if not completely, politically oriented. If this opinion is brought forth again when these organizations bring their goal statements to the committee, many may face the same fate as Students for Choice.

There are three groups which immediately come to mind that would seem especially susceptible to such cuts. They are the

United States Student Association, the Oregon Student Lobby and the Oregon Student Public Interest Group.

The USSA constitution describes the group as a "representative body" composed of "student activists and advocates dedicated to the principles of expanding access to higher education for all persons."

Last year's budget gave the USSA \$10,927 of our fees. It is an inherently political organization, due to the fact that it is basically a lobbying group whose goal is to represent the students under its banner.

Although its views are almost exclusively from the far left of the ideological spectrum, the group should not have a problem proving that they provide for our "collective interests," or at least attempt to do so.

The OSPIG is basically a USSA which works at the state level. Last year it was allocated \$34,299. Like USSA, it is a lobby for the benefit of students, and by the same token should have little trouble in holding its financial position on this campus.

The previous two groups were easy, but OSPIG is a different story. The environmental watchdog group received a whopping \$112,750 last year, making it one of the richest groups in last year's budget. This year may be different.

Unlike USSA and OSPIG, OSPIG's main purpose is not to directly serve students, but the environment. This makes it much more difficult for them to prove that the use of student fees towards their support does not violate the First Amendment.

Last week, a representative from OSPIG spoke to us briefly before class. She told us that among other things they were a "good government" group.

For them to support "good government" means they must form their own definition of what this means. This is a political activity if there ever was one, and all of us are supporting it, whether we agree with them

or not. She proceeded to inform us that "this new Congress is terrible, they are going to do horrible things to the environment."

This is an even more political statement than the previous one. The group believes the new members of Congress (translation: Republicans) are not to be trusted, and their type of environmental regulation, or perhaps to be more precise the lack thereof, is not the appropriate one.

A group with such views, whether right or wrong, has a constitutional right to assemble. That is what makes America great.

But, by the same token we must remember the words of President Frohnmayer in regard to the First Amendment. Some students, as a matter of fact probably most, do not follow the party-line green stance of OSPIG. There have been people who have questioned the scientific validity of many of the principles, which radical groups such as OSPIG embrace. There are others who do not agree with the movement's apparent disregard to the sanctity of the free market and the rights of businesses over the environment, and some on this campus, believe it or not, are actually Republicans.

For people in any of these groups, or for those who simply think their money should be in their own pockets rather than in those of the radical elites of the environmental movement, support of OSPIG with student fees clearly violates Frohnmayer's opinion.

Our "collective interests" are not served by this organization. It serves solely those who believe in the precepts of the movement.

For such a group to be supported by our collective fees is not only a violation of the ideals of Jeffersonian Democracy upon which our nation is built, but is simply unfair.

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