

Abortion no cause to doubt nominee

The decades-long abortion debate has resurfaced again this week, as anti-abortion groups and politicians attempt to derail the nomination of Dr. Henry Foster for surgeon general.

Anti-abortionists are calling on the new Republican majority in the Senate to reject the nomination, charging that Foster, an obstetrician and gynecologist, should not be considered for the nation's top medical post because he has performed some unknown number of abortions.

Whether Foster performed abortions should not be a consideration in the Senate's decision to confirm him. No one accuses him of performing abortions before the procedure was legal; he must not be disqualified because he did something within the law.

Some Foster opponents claim that the White House is misleading the Senate as to the number of abortions Foster has performed. He maintains he has done fewer than 12; his opposition puts the number as high as 700 or more.

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The charge of misrepresentation is a serious one that should be investigated. If Foster is lying, and his opponents can prove it, then he ought to be disqualified. But whether he performed a dozen abortions or a thousand, that fact alone should have no bearing on his confirmation.

President Clinton has so far voiced his continued support of the nominee, which is to his credit. He must remain vocal on the subject, and resist the temptation to bow to the new GOP kings of Capitol Hill.

Fortunately for Foster, it's unlikely that the majority of the Senate will embrace the abortion question in considering the nominee. Senators on both sides of the issue would rather deflect attention from the divisive abortion question to something else — something that doesn't force them to take a stand one way or another on abortion.

Senate majority leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., said it best on Sunday's Meet the Press: "We need to address jobs and welfare reform and tax cuts." Although we might add a few more items to his agenda, one thing we would not add is a contentious debate over Foster's suitability for surgeon general, as long as that debate dwells on little more than abortion.

But if that debate does occur, Clinton should stick to his guns. Foster is no Zoe Baird or Kimba Wood (attorney general nominees shot down earlier in the Clinton administration). In performing abortions, he did nothing illegal. What's more, he did nothing that the majority of Americans wouldn't support.

Foster has been an active crusader against teen pregnancy, one of the country's most pressing medical dilemmas. That is one qualification for the office that the Senate ought to weigh heavily — in Foster's favor.



■ OPINION

OSPIRG accounting procedures flawed



JOE HARWOOD

Considering the substantial volume of campus press concerning the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group lately, I can't help but add my two cents. Actually, I'll use up my \$2.75 per term OSPIRG fee instead of the two pennies.

To set the record straight before beginning, readers should know I used to support the group, naively believing the company line that OSPIRG saved the environment while fighting the evils of capitalist industry and heathen timber companies. I even voted for the organization while attending Lane Community College.

But sometime in 1993, while perusing Lexis/Nexus at the library, I came across a *Miami Herald* article examining the exile of the student public interest research group at the University of Florida.

The group wasn't kicked off campus per se, but the Florida Board of Regents decided to make the student fee for the local PIRG voluntary instead of mandatory. The leaders of the Florida Student Public Interest Group protested the move, claiming that students wouldn't voluntarily contribute enough cash to justify the chapter's existence — effectively sending it into oblivion.

Alarm bells started ringing immediately. Why would a group supposedly dedicated to the public interest, claiming wide grass-roots support, protest the switch from a mandatory fee to a voluntary fee?

Then the research on OSPIRG started. I was surprised to find out that only four post-secondary institutions statewide claimed membership, six of the eight public colleges and uni-

versities and 15 out of 16 community colleges had repeatedly rejected OSPIRG's attempts to organize local chapters.

Further investigation revealed that out of the hundreds of student PIRG chapters across the United States, Oregon stood out as one of the only states that allowed the group to charge a mandatory fee. Throughout the country, 97 percent of PIRG chapters function only with a voluntary fee, refundable to students not agreeing with the organization's political views and activities.

When I found out last year that the bulk of the funds generated here at the University made a one-way journey to Portland to support a non-student staff of lawyers and lobbyists, my faith in the organization went into the toilet.

It's not that OSPIRG is a valueless organization. The work with voter registration drives, warnings to parents about dangerous toys and the toxic awareness campaigns all focus on the aggregate public interest. Most, if not all, of the students working for OSPIRG do so for charitable reasons. The same goes for the professional staff in Portland, most could make more money in the private sector.

Instead, my problem lies with the amount of money the students of this University contribute compared the services rendered by OSPIRG. Besides a renter's hotline and the rock-a-thon, I don't recall witnessing any other local OSPIRG events throughout fall term. Of course, that has all changed now that the group is in trouble with the Senate Finance Committee. Talk about a sudden sales pitch to save funding and justify its existence.

Shannon Varney, campus chair for the group told me last year the money returned to Eugene from Portland was "a non-specific amount." Matt Rabin, this year's campus chair for OSPIRG, couldn't tell the *Emerald* how much of the \$137,755 levied from University students was recycled back to this campus. He

could only say that because the University contributes more than any of the other three schools statewide, we "get more bang for the buck."

Such frivolous answers when speaking of student money simply don't wash. Students should be able to ask the question and receive a full and specific accounting of every penny sent to Portland and every cent returned to Eugene. The problem is, the local chapter has no idea of how, where and why student cash is spent.

Accounting procedures aside, the fact that OSPIRG remains relatively invisible — excepting times when the group is up for its biannual fee reauthorization or in trouble from those holding the student fee purse strings — makes it hard to justify the \$137,755 budget.

While I don't advocate the complete abolishment of OSPIRG from this campus, I would like to see a paring down of its bloated budget. The group ranks third in total student fee expenditures behind the ASUO executive and the *Emerald*. At least with the *Emerald*, students can see tangible proof that their contribution actually produces something. I won't get into student government except to say Mark Rhinard has a cute smile. Besides, the latter two organizations are under the scrutiny of the ASUO comptroller. OSPIRG is not.

In the heat of the ideological battle, it is easy to forget that groups like OSPIRG accomplish good deeds and act to make the state a better place to live.

But non-specific accounting procedures and limited evidence of the success or failure of activist campaigns do not add up to the \$137,755 in reciprocal services paid for by students. Eliminating OSPIRG is not the solution, but making the group answerable for mandatory student funds would be a good start in reforming an organization unfamiliar with direct student oversight.

Joe Harwood is a columnist for the *Emerald*.

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