

Foster sacrificed in political game

Pawn: The chessman of lowest value and the piece most often sacrificed to win the game. See Dr. Henry Foster Jr.

In the always-think-two-moves-ahead world of pre-election-year politics, elected officials from both parties sacrificed a qualified candidate for the position of U.S. surgeon general last week in preparation for a much bigger move: the presidency.

After five-months of intense confirmation hearings and congressional scrutiny, Foster's nomination was withdrawn from the Republican-controlled Senate without a vote because 43 Republican senators refused to halt the debate. At issue for Republicans was the 39 abortions that Foster performed during his 38 years as a gynecologist-obstetrician. As if setting the stage for next year's political comedy of errors, presidential hopefuls Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole and Sen. Phil Gramm led the opposition.

But abortion and Foster's qualifications never were the real reasons for the opposition. Foster's nomination and confirmation denial were little more than an opportunity to establish agendas and exercise strategies.

While Dole and Gramm used Foster's nomination to publicize their anti-abortion platforms and entrench themselves with powerful conservative lobbying groups, Democratic senators and President Clinton manipulated Foster's rejection into a 12-tissue appeal for relief from Republican bullies. With Foster out of the way, both parties got to focus on the real enemy: each other.

Phil Gramm told the Associated Press that if Clinton nominated people with "radical ideas" (i.e., abortion is legal), he should expect confrontation. Clinton countered that Republicans had chosen to "side with extremists" who oppose a woman's right to choose.

And the game continues.

Each side accuses the other of using Foster to its advantage, while both claim they are acting in the best interest of their constituents. Contrary to what they say, Dole, Gramm and Clinton will all benefit from this incident, and all three have placed their quest for power above the interests of the American people.

In the months ahead, with this fortuitous event behind them, Dole and Gramm will use the pro-life/pro-family rhetoric to garner support from the widening Bible belt, while Clinton will position himself as a reasonable, moderate leader in the face of freedom-crushing conservatives.

The only losers are Foster and the American people.

More than a year before the election, the players have already established the rules and set up the board. So as we sit down to watch this spectator sport we call representative democracy, it's easy to forget that we have already been excluded from the most important aspect: deciding which game to play.

This election will explore the never-ending debates over abortion, affirmative action and "family values." We'll hear about flag-burning and mandatory school prayer. They'll all agree that we need smaller government and disagree on which parts to be cut. The right moves to check the left, and the left counters.

And in the end, we will still be arguing over these issues rather than finding common ground and moving forward. By deciding for the people what is important, the candidates ensure us that regardless of who wins, the most we can expect in the next year is a scattering of pawns and ultimately, a stalemate.



THE FOSTER CHILD

■ OPINION

'Dave's great' but policy isn't



KEITH CUNNINGHAM

Given Dave Frohnmayer's current popularity within the University community, an editorial attack on his credibility would be tantamount to making fun of tofu at a vegetarian convention — it's one of those things you just don't do.

Lucky for me, I have no intention of attacking our new president. It would be journalistic suicide to claim that Frohnmayer is not qualified for the challenges of his office.

It's difficult not to salivate on a resume that includes education at Harvard, Berkeley and a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford. Lest I forget Frohnmayer's 11 years as Oregon attorney general, where he successfully argued six of seven cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. It's hard to imagine a person who could be more qualified.

However, the decision made by the State Board of Higher Education to eliminate the interim status from Frohnmayer's presidency is troubling in the rationale the Board cited for not undertaking a national search. Chancellor Joseph Cox referred to the "high confidence" the University community has in Frohnmayer and qualities like "openness" and "frankness" as reasons for appointing Frohnmayer to an indefinite tenure as University president. Although these qualities make Frohnmayer an excellent candidate, they do not justify ignoring a search process that should be the benchmark of any appointment to the University's highest post.

Twelve months ago Frohnmayer accepted the position of interim president with the understanding that he was to govern the University for two years while a search was conducted for a permanent presi-

dent. Neither Frohnmayer, Cox nor any member of the Board claimed at that time that the appointment could become permanent if Frohnmayer passed a status-check 12 months into his term.

This might be a non-issue if Frohnmayer's earlier appointment to the interim post had itself been the result of a national search. However, the interim decision was based primarily on the recommendation of then-Chancellor Thomas Bartlett, without the creation of any official search committee. Thus, in both the interim and permanent appointments, Frohnmayer never faced the due process of a national hunt.

If there simply were no better person to be found, then Frohnmayer could have easily proved his superiority within the competition of a complete search. One possible argument for not undertaking a national exploration is the high financial burden involved. However, the Board never cited this as a reason for the permanent appointment. Instead, the company line was simply "Dave is great." Albeit true, not even Frohnmayer's strengths should have superseded the need for a search that would have provided him the opportunity to prove his excellence.

While the discrepancies are subtle, the idea of disregarding a democratic search has much greater implications. Only a few weeks ago the University was honored by the presence of Corazon Aquino at the commencement ceremony. Among the topics she addressed was the importance of democracy and rational analysis in determining public policy.

What if after her tenure had ended as the Philippines' president, Aquino declared "Cori is great"? She could have simply stated (a la Castro) that elections were unnecessary because she was certain that the Filipinos knew she was the best candidate for the job. Americans, being the lovers of democracy that we are, would have been outraged by Aquino's action.

Just as we demand that democratic elections govern the rulers of the Philippine government, the state Board should have endured the tedium of a search despite how "obvious" the Frohnmayer choice appeared.

What is particularly troubling about this situation is the timing and rushed nature of the appointment. Chancellor Cox stated that before he could decide whether or not to recommend Frohnmayer to the Board, he wanted to understand the perceptions that the University community and student body had toward Frohnmayer. To achieve this, a forum took place on the Wednesday night of finals week.

Let's see now — if I wanted to listen to the voices of University students, I don't think I could imagine a more effective time to do this than the Wednesday night of finals week. *Warning: parts of this column may contain levels of sarcasm that are dangerous to your health.* Again, maybe the students' love of Frohnmayer was just too obvious to seek out affirmation.

To top off that awkward timing, the actual announcement of Frohnmayer's appointment was made on the Friday of the week after finals. Again, why choose to announce this momentous appointment during the quietest week of the year when there are practically no faculty, staff or students on campus?

However, like a Hollywood movie, this story has a happy ending. We are now lucky enough to have an abundantly qualified president. I am positive President Frohnmayer will attack the \$54 million shortfall the University faces over the next two years with the same vigor and talent that he has used in all his life's achievements. To put it succinctly, Frohnmayer is a man with unquestionable capabilities who regrettably was appointed under questionable circumstances.

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