

Political pork should be vetoed, line by line

■ OUR OPINION: The line-item veto will empower President Clinton and cut federal budget waste

In a year of almost endless wrangling over federal spending, there were times when the president and Congress couldn't seem to agree on much of anything. That pattern is due for a change very soon, however, if President Clinton acts as expected and approves the line-item veto, passed by the House of Representatives last Thursday.

The bill gives the president the power to cut the pork from federal legislation, by allowing him to veto specific spending items without requiring him to reject an entire bill. Thus, when a low-priority project that the president opposes — say, funding for a new dam in Wyoming — is inserted into a major piece of legislation the president supports — say, a defense appropriations bill — he may cut what he doesn't like and keep the rest.

As such, the line-item veto represents a significant change in the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches, and because of that, it is unknown whether the law could withstand Constitutional scrutiny. Although concerns about concentrating too much power in the hands of the president are worth considering, the time has come for a new approach like the line-item veto to be tried.

Members of Congress are often measured by the amount of federal money they bring home to their districts. Although Americans hate the idea of pork barrel

politics, they usually do little to punish their own legislators for practicing it — in fact, such legislators usually get re-elected. It's always the other state's Congress member that's causing the problem.

But the president enjoys the relative immunity of a truly national office, partially insulating him from the pressure to please a small constituency. It might be political suicide for a Nebraska senator to block farm subsidies, but the president can afford to lose such a small proportion of voters.

Forty-three states have already given line-item veto power to their governors, and it appears to have caused little harm, although admittedly the tool isn't always utilized to the fullest extent. Why would it be any different at the federal level?

Some opponents of a federal line-item veto fear that a vindictive president could threaten to veto items in a given representative's district, if he or she doesn't support the president's other proposals. That is a possibility, but only experience will tell if it actually happens.

And besides, if the line-item veto ends up causing serious problems, Congress can just take it away. This isn't the balanced budget amendment, which would have made its limits on Congressional spending power a part of the Constitution.

The line-item veto is just a statute, and it will last only so long as the majority of Congress wants it to.

That's not much of a risk — especially if means easing the budget crisis, and cutting some of the spending that has made Washing-



OPS policy raises student's bad memories

When I opened a copy of the *Emerald* on Tuesday (ODE, April 2), I was stricken with a combination of anger and fear as I read the headline "Policy lets security stop, frisk." The story went on to explain the new frisking powers the Office of Public Safety now has.

According to the story, OPS officers now have the power to stop suspected criminals and search them under "reasonable suspicion." The article also stated that one of the guidelines for reasonable suspicion is that "officials must be aware that a crime has been committed."

This terrifies me because of a painful experience that I had back in 1989 at a university in the Southeast.

One chilly winter evening at about 6:30, I was trekking across the campus on my way to see some friends in a dormitory. As I reached the parking lot of a housing complex, I suddenly found myself surrounded by four university police cruisers with flashing blue lights.

As officers leaped out of their cars with their hands on their pistols, I was ordered to freeze and to raise my hands above my head. As one would imagine, I was in a state of shock, but not enough to disobey the officers' very loud orders.

As the other officers surrounded me, I was ordered to slowly open my coat and then reposition my hands above my head. Then, another officer came over and frisked me by pounding my coat pockets to see if I had any concealed items.

When they finished frisking me, the officers' told me I could rest my arms at my side and show them my identification.

By this time, a number of students were staring out their windows to see what was going on. I remember looking up to see the faces of those students as they peered down on me. I remember thinking I wanted to scream something like "I didn't do it!" to them, but that would have been unwise and probably quite dangerous.

I overheard the police radio as one of the officers described me to the dispatcher. After the officers ran a check of my identification, they told me to continue standing there.

Two officers repeatedly asked me questions like: "What is your name? Where do you live? Who are you going to see? Where did you just come from?"

By now, quite an audience of window-watchers had developed.

After answering their questions, I had one of my own. As calmly as I possibly could, I asked one of the officers why I had been stopped. A female officer told me that a student in another dorm had called the campus police about a rape that had occurred just minutes prior to my being stopped.

I calmly told her I was "nowhere near that dorm." The officer told me to be quiet while they continued to investigate the situation and

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Lee P. Jones

other parts of the campus.

I was really scared by this time because I was trying to recall if I had talked to anyone or been seen by anyone around the time the alleged rape had occurred. I was really concerned over the possibility of getting arrested and having to come up with witnesses to establish an alibi at the time of the rape. I couldn't think of anybody.

After about 15 more minutes of standing there as the center of this spectacle — virtually motionless save for a racing heart and beads of sweat — I was finally told I could go. But this was only after I overheard the radio dispatcher say that another suspect had been caught and identified by the victim.

As the officers all began climbing back into their cars, one of them said, "Sorry to disturb you, have a good evening."

I'm telling this story for the first time because I know what it feels like to be stopped by campus police based on an occurrence of crime and being a possible suspect.

I was innocent, but given the fact that I was surrounded by police cars and made to stand in near freezing temperatures for more than 15 minutes, I felt I was treated as though I had committed a crime. Who knows what was going through the minds of the students who were looking out their windows down at me.

After the incident I went home. I was so disoriented that I was in no mood to visit anyone. I was too embarrassed and shaken to be social. For several days I thought about what might have happened if that other suspect had not been caught. I might have gone to jail or at least been questioned further.

For more than a year after the encounter, memories of the incident popped into my head when I went out at night. I made a conscious effort to make eye contact and be seen by someone wherever I went.

I strongly urge the University to reject this sanctioned version of vigilante justice in which anyone under suspicion is subject to the embarrassment of being frisked at anytime. I'm not speaking for criminals, I'm speaking for those of us who have been wrongly detained.

Do not allow this form of intrusion on the lives of students and others in the community.

If this misguided and potentially dangerous policy is adopted, I strongly urge the OPS to use this new power with extreme caution.

Take the time to visualize yourself in my shoes on that winter evening. How would you react? What would you have felt?

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