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Student programs, students' pockets

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

The Emerald editorial board struggled to find a balance between controlling fees and maintaining services when deciding on its ASUO ballot measure recommendations

Twice a week, the Emerald editorial board meets to decide upon the official position of the newspaper. These meetings are usually calm — a list of topics is presented, ideas are tossed out and the board reaches a consensus.

Not Sunday. On Sunday, the board tackled the measures on the ASUO general election ballot. We shouted, squabbled and formed an opinion by vote rather than by consensus.

This is not an indication that it was a particularly bad day. Rather, it suggested these were especially important issues. We all agree incidental fees need to be brought under control. Unfortunately, we don't all agree on how. Depending on how you vote, your ballot could help perpetuate the rising cost of college or it could take a stand against spending — at the cost of worthwhile programs.

After much contemplation and a small amount of contempt, here are the Emerald recommendations for the 10 ballot measures:

1) OSPIRG funding: No recommendation.

As a whole, we support many of the programs that OSPIRG is associated with and think the group represents a vital opportunity for many students. We also have concerns about the amount of money OSPIRG receives — almost \$150,000 — and the places that money goes. (A story about the OSPIRG budget and the group's on-campus opponents will run Tuesday in the Emerald.)

Complaints have centered on OSPIRG's failure to issue a line-item budget. We worry that, while legitimate, these complaints would not be addressed by a "no" vote on the OSPIRG measure. Instead, our belief is that your vote should be decided by whether you think OSPIRG provides necessary services to

students and the community, in light of their large budget.

Those who support OSPIRG note the importance of many of the group's causes and the educational benefit for students that comes from participating in a public interest group. Opponents suggest the large percentage of money that goes to pay salaries of professional, non-student personnel is troublesome. Additionally, they note that, while admirable, OSPIRG's programs do not seem especially important to students compared to other campus groups that receive a fraction of the organization's funding.

2) Continue current funding for United States Student Association: Yes.

3) Increase funding for USSA: Yes.

For 83 cents a term, increased funding for USSA would allow the group to help train ASUO officials to work with local, state and national legislators on behalf of students as well as continue to support national pro-student efforts. Given that next year is an Oregon legislative session and that national and local efforts to cut financial aid and freeze tuition have been important issues recently, the need for USSA support is clear.

We would like to see this issue reconsidered next year, however, when there will be no upcoming session. The ASUO should have to demonstrate that the increased funding proved useful and that

training did allow student officials to help fee-paying students.

4) LTD service: No recommendation.

While bus service is vital for many students, it is irrelevant for many more. The cost — almost \$7 per term — is high for a service some of us will use no more than once or twice per year. Of course, some students rely on bus service to get to work, campus or home and cannot afford a regular bus pass. The cost of student bus service used to be optional; students could receive a fee refund if they did not want the bus pass. That option was eliminated, however, creating the current situation in which LTD and the students who ride it are subsidized by student fees. If you think that service is important to you or the University community, you should vote yes. If you don't want to spend the money, vote no.

5) Seven-day Designated Driver Shuttle service: Yes.

10) Additional DDS van: No. Both of these are difficult choices. We certainly support the concept of DDS — the safety of all students and the Eugene community is threatened if drunk students drive themselves home. Therefore, it makes sense to run the service seven days a week. Unfortunately, as this service becomes increasingly popular the fee associated with it will inevitably rise, leaving University students helping to pay for the partying habits of a few.

Our suggestion, therefore, is that rejection of the new van would be an important step in forcing DDS to rely more on fundraising and donations from passengers and less upon the incidental fee. The group has already managed to successfully raise some money for earlier purchases.

6) EMU elevator: Yes.

This is a no-brainer, but it still makes us angry. As we have stated in earlier editorials, this issue should have been addressed a long time ago, when building renovation was first being considered and the ASUO Executive was pushing for amphitheater construction. Nevertheless, the elevator is necessary in order to comply with federal law.

This issue is a good example of why controlling incidental fees is not as simple as slashing wasteful student programs. Students will be forced to pay \$7.35 per term to prevent lawsuits under the American Disabilities Act — expensive, yes; avoidable, yes; but probably not the fault of this year's Executive.

7) Extend EMU lower level hours: No.

The primary purpose of this measure is to allow access to the EMU Computing Center later at night. While this is an admirable goal, the center has said it will not be able to guarantee extended hours unless the state legislature passes an education technology funding measure. As this is hard-

ly guaranteed given the political tendencies of Oregon's legislature, we cannot endorse spending student money on what might be a wasted effort.

8) Prevent EMU board from placing measures on the ballot: Yes.

There is no reason a board with a large administrative component should have the power to create ballot measures. The Student Senate and signature-collecting individuals both, rightly, have this power. It is only by a quirk of the ASUO constitution that the board was ever granted this ability — the board doesn't need it and shouldn't have it.

9) Block multiple-year incidental fee authorization except by ballot; prevent multiple-year funding that exceeds two years: No.

It makes sense to reject funding allocations that allow groups and services to function for multiple years without ongoing student or ASUO approval. This would prevent wasteful practices from going unchecked. The problem with this measure is that it would make funding of building and renovation projects impossible. For example, the ongoing changes to Esslinger Hall required a multiple-year ballot measure that exceeded two years.

Securing loans, hiring contractors and making plans for nearly any construction project would be almost impossible if funding for the project relied upon ongoing student approval. This measure would either prevent such projects or require students to pay a massive one-time fee for the project — something that probably wouldn't receive student approval.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu

DRAWING BOARD

