

## Is accountability TOO MUCH to ask for?



Why do people in positions of power make crazy decisions? By now, you may have read "Lies, unfairness alleged in the PFC" (ODE, Feb. 24). In the article, ASUO President Wylie Chen alleges that Programs Finance Committee Chairwoman Shantell Rice and PFC Vice Chairwoman Emily Sedgwick came to him during the PFC hearings and asked him to choose between two positions that the Multicultural Center and the ASUO were asking for in their respective budgets. The MCC wanted its first ever non-student coordinator position. The executive wanted the return of a long-time non-student staff position of executive coordinator.

Only one could be funded, they told Chen. And they told him to choose, he says.

While Sedgwick and Rice acknowledge a conversation between them and Chen about the coordinator positions, they deny asking him to either choose which one would be funded or to cut other budgets to make both affordable. "Maybe he misunderstood what we were trying

to ask him," Rice says.

Yet Chen says Rice lied, and he maintains — and seemingly has an old e-mail to prove — that he was asked to compromise his ethics to make a decision he shouldn't have had to make. What an impossible situation it was for Chen. He possibly held the fate of each coordinator position in his hands and was asked to choose. Incidentally he did not choose, and his reasoning was that it was intrinsically unfair. It's a conflict of interest that Rice and Sedgwick created.

And the sad thing is that it didn't have to happen.

Chen could have been invited to the actual PFC hearing for both budgets and asked for his input on the record.

The fact that a back-room deal was asked to be set up is strange when you consider that alternative. The system is supposed to take care of all the groups with pretty equal consideration, and everything should be public record. If one group has a request of if the ASUO has some suggestions in addition to its submitted ones, then everyone should be invited to hear these ideas, including the other members of the PFC who voted

on each budget.

Maybe the alleged unfairness is a testament to the idea our system doesn't work. If Sedgwick and Rice did not feel they could adequately handle or perform their jobs — and therefore had to ask Chen or try to make him choose which position to cut — then maybe the PFC system should be revamped.

But we don't think so. Rice and Sedgwick could have easily solicited Chen's opinion and others' at the actual hearing. Then all ideas and considerations would have been aired in the public light. People who disagreed or had alternative solutions could have presented them in the appropriate setting.

And there may well be alternatives. An obvious one is that instead of funding a full-time MCC coordinator and not funding an executive coordinator at all, fund each position half time. That would have been about the same amount of money as the MCC received, and the 0-percent benchmark would have been met.

Another solution would be ways to get students more involved in the MCC to collectively do what a paid non-student coordinator would do.

The ASUO Executive coordinator, which we believe to be a more fundamentally significant and important position, should have been reinstated.

And there were certainly better ways to go about making the decision on which position to fund than asking one of the people who could theoretically benefit from one or the other.

The message of much of this school year has been about accountability. Candidates in the current ASUO elections are talking about police accountability. ASUO Executive candidate Scott Austin is calling for fiscal responsibility. And Chen and Vice President Mitra Anoushiravani have tried to establish executive accountability. Now we need some in the PFC.

Two million dollars of incidental fee money is too important for back-room deals and unethical behavior to poison what is potentially a really democratic process. We demand accountability for the PFC.

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

## Incidental fees reflect student interest

As the University's chief student affairs officer, I am following with great care and concern the discussions on campus, in higher education journals and in the media regarding the challenges to student incidental fees in the pending Supreme Court Case called "the Southworth Case."

It is our understanding that the Supreme Court's decision about the Wisconsin case will be released sometime this spring. Although the facts in this case relate to a university in Wisconsin with an incidental fee process quite different from the University's, the implications of the Supreme Court ruling will be significant for all student incidental fee policies and practices. The instructions the U.S. Supreme Court gives the lower court in Wisconsin and the subsequent implication instructions to the University of Wisconsin will

inform us of legal considerations about which we must be mindful as we decide, levy and collect student incidental fees.

The University's student incidental fee process follows a carefully crafted and legally tested set of guidelines we refer to as "the Clark Document." Practitioners, challengers and legal scholars have reviewed our policies and practices and found that they represent a student-driven discussion and review process with multiple opportunities for challenge and appeal, as well as several final institutional accountability points in the form of over-all review by first the ASUO president, then the University president, the Oregon University System chancellor and the State

Board of Higher Education.

These guidelines are ones of which University students and administrators are very proud. They are guidelines that enable University students to select a wonderful array

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of campus programs and activities that enhance students' learning, leisure, cultural and physical development and community experience on our campus. The incidental fee review process is one in which University students find and speak their voice, exercise choice and manage their funds responsibly and responsively. The programs, funded through this review and allocation process, are places where students make friends, learn leadership skills, broaden their educational experi-

ences and apply learning that begins in our classrooms.

It is my conviction, as well as hope, that we have in place an institution fee process that has been carefully designed, implemented with integrity and withstood the tests of time. I am hopeful that the outcome of the U.S. Supreme Court decision this spring does not require that we make alterations in process, in scope or in outcomes from our current incidental fee process. Should this not be the case, it is also my hope that we can work together collectively and supportively with student leaders in making whatever adjustments might be needed if this court review requires any fine tuning in our process.

Anne Leavitt is the associate vice president for student affairs and dean of students. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the paper.

### THE WEEK IN THUMBS



**To helping 'taxed' students**  
Beta Alpha Psi, the accounting fraternity, is offering free tax advice for students. The workshops involve Beta Alpha Psi members and IRS experts, and they offer one-on-one help. Students will have opportunities to get tax help March 4, March 18, April 1 and April 8.

**To driving for food**  
The Oregon Food Bank and Food for Lane County are rolling up their sleeves to combat the rising shortage of food with this year's Governor's Food Drive. Twenty-four food collection barrels are scattered throughout the University and will remain on campus until March 1.



**To exempting donor information**  
The Oregon University System Board of Higher Education has passed a proposal to exempt donor information from the public record. This means that any money given to the University essentially would be anonymous. It seems secrecy is the new status quo.

**To poll booth 'mishap'**  
A controversy erupted after the South Carolina Republican primary when supporters of Sen. John McCain said that 21 polling precincts in predominantly minority areas were closed without warning by the Republican Party.