

Presidents

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Hall beginning April 4 by students in favor of joining the WRC.

Q: What marked the beginning of the discussion of sweatshop labor issues on this campus?

A: Frohnmayer: I'd say a year and a half ago we saw this as an issue that was arising on American campuses. The Chronicle of Higher Education ... was indicating that this was an issue that was likely to be alive. Last fall we formed an ad-hoc licensing committee to take a look at a code of conduct and potential monitoring. I'd say we were aware of it for quite some period of time.

Chen: I think, initially, it was brought into the open by students over a year ago. The administration said they were working on the issue as well. But nothing was happening, so students jumped on that and pushed for some type of monitoring group.

Q: When the issue was first raised, did you ever imagine that it would become as big as it has?

A: Frohnmayer: No.

Chen: I had hoped it would be big, for the reasons that we [should be] responsible with our logo, with our apparel and sweatshop labor. But I never would have thought that Phil Knight would withdraw his donations. I never would have thought it would come up because it was never an issue just about Nike. It was an issue about all of our licenses.

...
In the first three days of the protest 14 students were arrested and charged with trespassing. The protesters were demonstrating not just in favor of the WRC, but also to change the way the University makes decisions. They wanted to give more decision-making power to more people.

Q: How did the protests and the arrests of students affect the decision to join the WRC?

A: Frohnmayer: It didn't affect it at all. I have a very long history of not caving in to pressure that I think is inappropriate, and I saw this as a way of trying to circumvent the University Senate's right to hear the issue.

Chen: I think it brought more attention to the issue of the WRC and not joining the [Fair Labor Association] and the other issues along with the protest that weren't looked at very much by the media covering it, which were shared governance and campus democracy, which was a huge aspect of the protest.

Q: Has the controversy following the WRC decision-making process that you [Frohnmayer] were adamant in adhering to and you [Chen] were trying to change?

A: Frohnmayer: I don't know that vindication is the right word. We followed a process that we thought was adequate to the task. It doesn't do a lot of good to go back and revisit it because we are already engaged in developing another process for examination of the continued status of the WRC. I think that that second process will be very inclusive, including people off campus and broader stake holders of the University.

Chen: Definitely [the process is] something that needs work because not all decisions are made in this fashion. [The WRC] went through a lot of channels [when] other decisions don't even come close to getting the same type of process and procedures. If all decisions were made in this fashion,

then yes, I could see how it would definitely be a positive change.

Q: How much has the WRC issue taken time away from your regular day-to-day duties as president?

A: Frohnmayer: It has been a significant diversion in the last several weeks anyway. There's lots that happens in the spring that has to happen anyway — it just makes the days a lot longer.

Chen: None, because I think this is a duty.

Q: How informed do you think the University community was/is about the WRC issue, and what do you feel is the administration's responsibility in informing the community?

A: Frohnmayer: I think the community as a whole is much more informed. On the other hand, judging by letters to the editor, there's not only a wide variety of opinions, but there is a disappointing amount of finger pointing as opposed to addressing underlying issues.

Chen: Not as informed as they should be, but I think a lot of people have a general sense of what's going on. ... I've gotten responses that are extremely ignorant and some that are extremely intelligent, [siding with] both sides of the issue. [The ASUO] can only do as much as we can for the students [to get information out]; those are our constituents [but] we have limited resources to do that.

Q: Did you foresee Knight's decision to cancel further contributions to the University?

A: Frohnmayer: No.

Chen: No, not at all. Because, again, there are people who are making it into a Nike versus U of O issue; it wasn't the issue whatsoever ... It wasn't an attack on any specific company.

Q: Did you consider the financial impact of joining the WRC at all?

A: Frohnmayer: It appeared to be a minuscule impact for a one-year period. That's basically the tiny percentage of our licensing fee. We assumed that Nike personnel knew about this issue because it arose after the Brown University situation. And we made the assumption, mistaken in retrospect, that there was no objection.

Chen: I think [people addressed the monetary issue] a little bit as far as membership fees.

Q: What kind of response were you receiving on the WRC issue before Knight's decision to withdraw his future support and how has it changed since then?

A: Frohnmayer: I think his announced decision vastly escalated the number of communications that came to this office and the University generally. It focused razor-sharp attention on the campus with people who previously may have cared about the issue, but had not been involved.

Chen: I have not gotten any negative e-mail from students. I've gotten phone calls of inquiry from students ... I've gotten a dozen or so negative e-mails from alumni ... [and] a few positive e-mails and phone calls from alumni. But the negatives outweigh the positives.

Q: Do you think Knight overreacted — not just with his withdrawal of his financial support, but also with the comments he made about the bonds of trust being shredded?

A: Frohnmayer: I don't want to speculate on that. That would be trying to trump a decision process that has to involve dozens if not hundreds of people.

Chen: Yes, because the FLA currently has many deficiencies and ... the WRC is a much stronger organization as far as what we want to see come out of our monitoring. And so if nothing changes between these two organizations, definitely go with the WRC because it is a stronger organization.

And by [Knight] saying that this is a personal issue was really good, but by not renewing the contract with Michigan it takes credibility from the personal issue and makes it more of a professional issue because [The University of Michigan has] no personal ties with Phil Knight.

Q: In the coming years, what long-term impact will the WRC controversy have on alumni and donor relations?

Frohnmayer: I think we do have work to do. This is an issue that hasn't stood still. ... When emotions have cooled enough for people to engage in dialogue, then it will be crucial.

Chen: I hope it doesn't affect other alumni relationships at all.

Q: What steps are planned to improve those relations?

A: Frohnmayer: We certainly have written to hundreds of donors, responded to communications. I think I've spoken about it at least once in public. ... We've had some people say they'd step up their contributions and we have others who are just waiting to see how things develop.

Chen: The steps I think that can be taken are ones that reassure the alumni this wasn't an attack, and they are just as important as they've always been. And there are proper channels to go through as an alumni to even recommend policy on our University.

...
The WRC-Nike controversy raised questions about how a public university can reconcile its need for private donations in the face of diminishing public support with its educational goals, when those two forces come into conflict.

Q: How does a public university balance its educational goals and its dependence on private donations?

A: Frohnmayer: I think we've balanced them very carefully. Part of our introspective review process ought to be very conscious of these issues, without saying anyone has bought the University. The irony is that Phil Knight never attached strings to anything. I'm sure that it's his belief that his effort has been demonized.

...
A condition of the University's membership in the WRC was a one-year review of the fledgling monitoring agency by the University Senate. University officials have raised concerns about the WRC's representation and transparency to the public.

...
Chen: We fight for more funding through our legislature. That's where we need the money and that's where we can get it. And it's sad because we vote in measures such as 5 and 47 that basically destroy our state education ... Having a donor withdraw his money pales in comparison to measures that are coming up that will have even greater effects on our University system.

Q: If today was April 12, 2001, one year after the University joined the WRC, should the University chose to join the WRC for another year?

A: Frohnmayer: I don't want to speculate on that. That would be trying to trump a decision process that has to involve dozens if not hundreds of people.

Chen: Yes, because the FLA currently has many deficiencies and ... the WRC is a much stronger organization as far as what we want to see come out of our monitoring. And so if nothing changes between these two organizations, definitely go with the WRC because it is a stronger organization.

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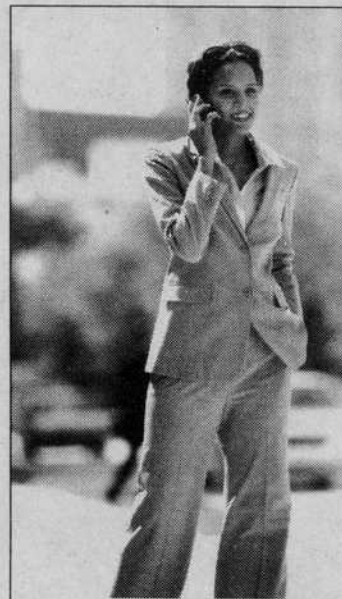
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