

Monday, November 10, 2003

EDITORIAL

ASUO should practice what it preaches

In the early hours of Sept. 12, two University students started arguing in Taylor's Bar and Grill. The conflict escalated, an employee kicked both students out of the bar and the quibble allegedly turned into a scuffle. During the incident, one student's cell phone was destroyed and — whether she fell or was pushed and dragged — she landed on the ground and sustained injuries. At that time, none of this was the business of anyone except a few students and potentially the authorities.

Later that morning, the injured student, senior Erica Hass, reported the incident to the Eugene Police Department. On Oct. 8, ASUO Vice President Eduardo Morales was cited for assault and criminal mischief.

At this point an official, whose role involves advocating for and representing University students, had been charged with a serious crime. Accordingly, this story became very much the business of the student body.

On Oct. 22, Morales pleaded innocent to both charges, and he now faces a maximum total penalty of \$3,000 and 200 days in jail. Later that day, ASUO spokeswoman Taraneh Foster prepared a press statement. But, local media — the Emerald included — weren't given copies of the release. The Emerald did not receive the statement until Oct. 28 when Morales agreed to an interview; however, a reporter was given the release instead.

Regrettably, many students did not learn about the incident until the Emerald published an article ("ASUO VP pleads innocent to assault charge") breaking the story Oct. 30, more than three weeks after the charges were filed.

Whether Morales is innocent or guilty, this delay reflects unfortunate violations of both the spirit of open student government and its inherently assumed responsibility to the student body.

Foster defended ASUO's actions, noting that "(ASUO) is not required to (notify media). Media are not our constituents."

While that's true, local media — again, the Emerald included — would have made an ideal pipeline to disseminate such important information. Moreover, ASUO made no efforts to notify students — its real constituents.

What's more discouraging is that, were the Emerald not to have pursued the story, the student body would not have been notified of the charges at all.

"We were never planning on issuing (the statement)," Foster told a reporter during an interview about ASUO's decision process.

Making ASUO's conduct all the more regrettable is its unrelated protest of CIA Director George Tenet's campus visit. Some student leaders said the University fell short of the requisite openness about Tenet's presence. If an important government official — presumably one whose presence could likely draw unproductive, disruptive protests itself — is visiting campus, they argued, he is visiting a student domain, and students should be notified accordingly.

"(Tenet's unannounced presence) strikes at the ideals this campus was founded on," ASUO Shared Governance Director Tim Johnson told a reporter during the rally. "Anything on this campus that seeks to neglect the input of students, faculty or staff is anti-democratic and weakens the notion that this campus is committed to collaborative government."

ASUO, it seems, believes administrators should notify the student body of the mere presence of a U.S. government official at a private meeting that happens to be at the University. Conversely, not divulging criminal charges against an ASUO official — whose very job description makes him responsible to students — is perfectly acceptable.

Ironically, as Foster told a reporter during an interview, "(ASUO representatives) are the faces, they are the people you are able to point to, you've elected them."

But ASUO feels no obligation to inform you, the student body, of criminal charges against its members.

Perhaps the organization should hold a protest outside its own office.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Focus should be on foreign policy, not border security

I am appalled that after all the steps the government went through to increase national security, people can still get weapons aboard the airlines. Mr. Heatwole even e-mailed the authorities and told them, and they still took a week to check up on it. I feel that all this emphasis that the government put on national security was for absolutely nothing. What a waste of resources, considering people can still get weapons aboard airplanes. It's absolutely ridiculous how much trouble they put travelers through and these things still happen.

This is a sign that we are approaching the situation the wrong way. Rather than trying to secure our own borders, I think we should place our resources and emphasis on improving our foreign policy. We should try to stop pissing off countries rather than pissing them off and then trying to protect yourself waiting for them to strike back. Moreover, this shows that we can never fully protect our borders. Someone will always find a way through if they want to badly enough. We should focus more on the problem at hand, and then maybe we will get somewhere.

Andy Mean
 sophomore
 psychology

Leave it to the experts

Abortion.

I realize that the vast majority of you who read that word already have firmly held opinions on the subject. My aim is not to persuade anyone that they are wrong or validate those who are certain they are right. In fact, as a rule, I avoid discussing this issue altogether. It's so emotionally charged for everyone that frank discussion is usually impossible. So why do it now? Because in the face of distorted facts, I have with difficulty been sitting idly on the sidelines.

Most know by now that there is a law passed by Congress and signed by the President that prohibits so-called "partial-birth" abortions. For many who are anti-abortion, this is being hailed as a victory.

But is it?

The bill does not prohibit abortions; it prohibits a particular type of abortion. Last time I checked, the argument of those who believe that abortion should not be legal is that the fetus has a right to life. This new bill does absolutely nothing to forward their cause.

In the wake of this bill, if a woman needs (or chooses) to have an abortion, there is nothing in the bill that would prohibit the doctor from performing a more invasive surgical procedure. There is nothing that would prohibit a doctor from administering chemicals that would cause her body to abort the fetus.

Now, whether it be by "partial-birth" or some other surgical or chemical procedure, the pregnancy will still be terminated. The fetus will be aborted. If you believe that the fetus had life, I assure you that it will now be equally dead in all three circumstances.

So, why the ban?

Well, why not? Actually, it was rather easy. It's hard to muster much support to fight a law like this when the opposition can trot out grotesque images from surgical proce-



Jessica Cole-Hodgkinson
 Huh? What? Really.

dures that involve lots of blood, gore and fetus-shaped body parts and say, "We're gonna stop that." Sadly, powerful propaganda tends to shut down the critical-thinking centers of the brain at a time when they should be most vigilant. If you believe they've saved fetal lives, color yourself duped.

On the other hand, they may well have endangered female lives. Last time I checked, very few of our esteemed legislators had medical degrees. Even fewer were gynecologists, and I don't know of a single one who freely admits to performing abortions on a regular basis. So, faced with the choice of leaving the procedure in the hands of qualified medical professionals or taking it upon themselves, our fearless leaders decided that Congress knows best.

But do they?

The text of the newly passed bill begins with two misstatements of fact.

"The Congress finds and declares the following:

(1) A moral, medical, and ethical consensus exists that the practice of performing a partial-birth abortion ... is a gruesome and inhumane procedure that is never medically necessary and should be prohibited."

First, according to my trusty dictionary, a consensus is a general agreement or unanimity, and I can assure you that there is no such

ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the results of the previous week's poll and the coming week's poll question. Visit <http://www.dailyemerald.com> to vote.

Last question: Should CIA director George Tenet's presence at the AAU meeting have been announced to the student body?

Results: 70 votes

- Yes, students should be made aware of what is taking place on their campus: 44.4 percent or 31 votes.
- No, students couldn't attend the AAU meeting anyway, so there was no point in announcing anything: 27.1 percent or 19 votes.
- George who was where? 11.4 percent or eight votes.
- No, students would have protested, threatening security: 10.0 percent or seven votes.

- Yes, it would have given students a chance to voice their opinions: 7.1 percent or five votes.

This week: Will the draft be reinstated?

Choices: Yes, if the Iraqi conflict sharply escalates; Yes, it is consistent with President Bush's agenda; No, the U.S. military is large enough to handle any future conflicts; No, it would never happen — it's too politically costly

thing on this topic. Even the National Right to Life Web site — hardly an unbiased source — will tell you that at least 25 percent of the American population does not support a ban on this procedure. The bill goes on to state that at least 27 states have attempted to ban this procedure. Who, other than a politician, would define 54 percent as a consensus?

Second, just three short years ago, in *Stenberg v. Carhart*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled "that significant medical authority supports the proposition that in some circumstances, (partial birth abortion) would be the safest procedure."

Think I'm nitpicking? Ladies and gentlemen, these misstatements are about to become the law! Is it so unreasonable to ask our lawmakers to refrain from creating reality by decree?

Let me draw a wee comparison for you. In 1897, the Indiana House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill that decreed the mathematical constant pi to be equal to several values — none of which began with 3.14. It then went on to the Senate where, to the relief of all architects and civil engineers, it died a quiet death.

A local newspaper, however, reported the following, "Although the bill was not acted on favorably, no one who spoke against it intimated that there was anything wrong with the theories it advances. All of the Senators who spoke on the bill admitted that they were ignorant of the merits of the proposition. It was simply regarded as not being a subject for legislation."

Pity their modern federal leaders haven't the same perspicacity or self-restraint.

Contact the columnist at jessicacolehodgkinson@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.