

Wednesday, March 3, 2004

## EDITORIAL

# ASUO officials must attend to conflicts of interest

The spirit of an open, respectable and honest student government should always be free of deceit, hypocrisy and conflicts of interest in order to ensure trust and accountability.

Unfortunately, the ASUO Executive may not be living up to the spirit of that contract, which it makes with thousands of constituents each year.

On Feb. 6, the Emerald published an article investigating whether ASUO Vice President Eddy Morales participated in the Executive budget recommendation for ASUO Legal Services. At issue was whether his potential participation in the budget would introduce a conflict of interest for Morales, who is currently being represented by the group while he faces assault and criminal mischief charges. The question: Was Morales consciously worried about the perceived conflict of interest accompanying him setting fiscal policy for a group that, at this time, is technically working for him?

ASUO spokeswoman Taraneh Foster told the Emerald that Morales had no role whatsoever in the recommendation.

"Eddy hasn't even looked at the Legal Services' budget because he wanted to make sure that there wasn't a conflict of interest," Foster told the Emerald. "There's nothing shady going on."

At the time, the Editorial Board recognized Morales' efforts as legitimate, honorable and in accordance with the imperative ethical constraints that public officials necessarily assume.

The issue recently got a bit murkier, however, pushing the Editorial Board to question whether conflicts of interest are even considered in EMU Suite 4.

At last week's ASUO Student Senate meeting, where senators approved the ASUO Programs Finance Committee's budget recommendations, Emerald Editor in Chief Brad Schmidt questioned why Morales would have no problem working on the Emerald's budget recommendation — given the extensive reporting the paper has done on his pending charges — while at the same time recusing himself from the ASUO Legal Services' budget. The Executive had already vetoed the Emerald's budget once (the only veto among more than 120 student groups) and recommended that the Senate reject the PFC budget based in part because of the Emerald's budget allocation. In the end, the Executive's arguments were overwhelmingly rejected by the Senate.

Morales responded, saying that he had not recused himself or even considered the possibility of a conflict of interest. Instead, Morales said, the Legal Services' budget was left to ASUO Controllers because he had other budgets to consider.

His statement clearly contradicts what Foster, who speaks for Morales, told the Emerald just weeks before about his decision regarding the conflict of interest. And it begs the question: Was a conflict of interest even considered as a possibility at all?

The issue may seem trite at first, but at heart is a deeper problem: the integrity of elected officials. Conflicts of interest should be zealously avoided at any level of government, and it is troubling that Morales, by his own admittance, didn't step down from any involvement in the Legal Services' budget to avoid such a conflict. If controllers needed Morales' help, what would he have done?

If Morales did, in fact, recuse himself from the budget in the face of a conflict of interest, his actions were honorable and commendable. If Morales simply ignored the issue, however, then the Editorial Board suggests that ASUO adopt a process to determine potential conflicts of interests and address them in a public forum.

Either way, somebody down there needs to get their story straight.

## EDITORIAL BOARD

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Steve Baggs Illustration

## Letters from home

Dear soldier,

Thank you for your service. Thank you for leaving your friends and family behind in an effort to protect my nation, your nation, our nation.

Thank you for hanging in there as members of your platoon, people you knew in basic training and your countrymen die next to you.

The news services tell me only 20 GIs died in Iraq in February, the lowest number since combat began. Twenty still seems like way too many to me, but hey, that's the cost of freedom, right?

Pentagon officials say the drop in death tolls is the result of a shift made by Iraqi rebels from targeting U.S. troops to targeting their fellow Iraqis who may be cooperating with U.S. troops. That must be really frustrating — going over there to help the Iraqi people only to find your presence puts them in harm's way. It must be a horrible feeling.

The officials, including Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, also said they don't believe the U.S. military death toll will continue to decline. They believe you and your fellow troops will soon face some of the greatest danger you will see during your service. This danger comes with the rotation, which will occur in the next few weeks, of more than 100,000 troops into

and out of Iraq.

The war in Iraq has been officially over for almost 10 months now, yet you're still there, and it sounds like more of your fellow soldiers are on their way to join you.

Did you hear our president just made the



**Aimee Rudin**  
Five feet of fury

decision to send troops to Haiti? Yeah, the idea is to send between 1,500 and 2,000 troops there to head an international stability force. Two hundred marines from the Marine Corps Air Station at Cherry Point, N.C. were shipped out Monday to join the approximately 200 U.S. soldiers already on the ground there. Did you know anyone at Cherry Point? I didn't, but I'm worried for their safety, just as I am for yours.

This is the second time in the last decade the United States has sent soldiers to Haiti, located 600 miles off the coast of

Florida. The last time was in 1994. Former President Bill Clinton sent more than 20,000 soldiers to the nation in order to restore President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power after he was removed by a coup.

But I guess I shouldn't worry about the situation in Haiti turning into something similar to what you are going through in Iraq. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell says this operation in Haiti will be "nothing like the 20,000 troops that went in 10 years ago." And I have no reason not to believe him. I'm sure that weapons of mass destruction thing was just a mix-up.

Anyway, I heard Iraq is on its way to a democratic government. White House spokesman Scott McClellan just announced that the interim constitution for Iraq is modeled much after the United States and was accepted by the Iraqi Governing Council. That seems like really good news. Maybe you'll get to come home soon.

I want you to know I can't wait for you to get home. I miss you and I'm proud of you. Please be safe out there.

Love, Aimee

Contact the columnist at [aimeerudin@dailyemerald.com](mailto:aimeerudin@dailyemerald.com). Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### OSPIRG isn't just 'green'

I am responding to a letter printed February 10th ("OSPIRG funding situation is worse than book prices," ODE). I have been involved in OSPIRG since the fall term 2003 and I am writing to argue that the letter printed was completely incorrect.

To be exact, OSPIRG does have other "green" interests besides working to lower the cost of textbooks.

I am involved in the Willamette Legacy Campaign. This OSPIRG campaign succeeded in getting Governor Ted Kulongoski to pledge to clean up the river

during his run for governor in 2002. OSPIRG students involved in this campaign in 2003 and 2004 are working with local businesses to urge Governor Kulongoski to keep his promise and clean up the Willamette River.

In addressing the concerns from Tuesday's letter to the editor about OSPIRG's Affordable Textbooks Campaign, I can personally vouch that this issue is a legitimate one. My Spanish packet alone cost me \$150 and it came with materials I already had. This method of bundling textbooks with unnecessary and optional materials is getting out of hand. I am sure there are other students as frustrated with these schemes as I am.

OSPIRG stands for Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group. The people working directly on the campaigns are student volunteers and interns. The interests they are working to protect include those of renters in Eugene, the awareness of consumers, environmental concerns and the hungry and homeless. I believe that OSPIRG does great things and I become deeply offended when false accusations are carelessly thrown into a newspaper making me look like I am involved in "coercive" group.

**Laura Church**  
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