

Wednesday, April 14, 2003

## EDITORIAL

### Student Senate could be new reality TV show

Students who care about how the student government conducts itself and spends student fees should be a tad bit concerned about last week's ASUO Student Senate meeting. The nearly four-hour-long circus was fraught with troubling goings-on, shady accounting practices and, just for kicks, a little bit of old-fashioned allegations of racism to boot.

It all started with a bit of good ol' capitalism: an American pastime we like to call "charge it!" Fifteen members of the United States Student Association, of which ASUO President Maddy Melton is a member, charged \$2,250 to ASUO Accounting Coordinator Jennifer Creighton-Neiwert's credit card for a trip to Washington, D.C.

But apparently, the credit card charge was only a loan! So, Wednesday night, the ASUO Executive came begging Senate for more student money to pay Creighton-Neiwert back.

Melton said the request for money came after the group already paid, because she didn't want to go before the Senate during Finals Week; we think it was a political ploy designed to make the senators feel sorry for Creighton-Neiwert's quandary and thus approve the funding.

Despite the obvious issue with handing over student money, regardless of the reason, to an employee of the ASUO Executive, it technically isn't against the rules. But the Senate should use greater scrutiny in analyzing such irresponsible funding procedures in the future. The whole debacle is reminiscent of a MasterCard commercial. It plays out something like this:

- Trip to Washington, D.C. funded on the backs of students: \$2,250

- Chance of USSA students bringing meaningful, tangible benefits to the University: 1 percent

- Ripping off your constituents: Priceless!

Well, it's water under the bridge, right? A few students got to lobby, and everybody had to pay. Forgive and forget, right?

You racists! Oh, sorry, just emulating the next fascinating portion of Wednesday night's meeting. See, the next order of business before the Senate was to consider forming a special "student issues" committee. The committee would have the sole purpose of deciding whether the International Student Association should get money from the President's Fund. Sen. Rodrigo Moreno-Villamar liked the idea, and he made a motion to create the committee.

But then Sen. Joe Jenkins pointed out, rightfully, that it would be unfair to all student groups to create a whole committee for the benefit of one particular student group. So Sen. Jesse Harding proposed an interim student-issues committee be formed while the rules committee looked into whether the whole idea was breaking any rules. That motion was seconded.

Then the fun really began because ASUO Vice President Eddy Morales wasn't having any of that! He implied that the senators were discriminating against Moreno-Villamar and stealing his ideas, saying "Rodrigo presented the idea, but now with two white males supporting the motion," it's being supported.

As might be expected, nobody agreed with Morales, and even Moreno-Villamar himself defended the second motion, saying his ideas weren't being stolen. The second motion later passed.

Racism is an ugly element in society that must be combated, but throwing the concept around as a political weapon where it clearly doesn't apply demeans those who have fought more legitimate battles. We would venture to guess that not one senator is motivated by race, and Morales should give them some credit as leaders, students and people.

Until some evidence of overt racism materializes in the Senate's proceedings, Morales should just keep his mouth shut.

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Eric Layton Illustration

## Forced religion

"The criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism." — Karl Marx

Michael Newdow may be the latest American hero. The California physician stood before the U.S. Supreme Court last month and argued that his 5-year-old daughter should not be pressured into reciting the Pledge of Allegiance at school.

Newdow should be applauded for standing up for his daughter's constitutional rights. The separation of church and state as embodied in the First Amendment is a vital constitutional concept that should not be sold out to right-wing interests, as it was 50 years ago.

Supporters of the pledge often appeal to tradition to make their case, but few realize the phrase "under God" was added to the pledge in 1954 — 62 years after the pledge was written — in response to Cold War anti-Communist hysteria. The phrase is the result of a disgraceful period in American history that we should stop honoring.

The pledge seeks to enforce conformity of belief, and that concept runs counter to the idea of a nation kept vital by vigorous debate. There is something Orwellian about 30 youths standing up in class and chanting their affirmations of loyalty to the state.

Newdow is an atheist, and he has every right to be concerned about the influence on his daughter of religious beliefs he doesn't subscribe to. It's especially ridiculous for a bunch of adults to be telling a 5-year-old what to think when they are most likely wrong.

It's considered impolite in America to point out the absurdity and foolishness of religious belief. Religion is, and always has been, a rather poor attempt to explain where we came from and to comfort us when we cringe at the thought of mortality.

When we die, our bodies rot in the ground, and within a couple of generations our lives are forgotten. When people can't handle this truth, they grasp at the straws of the faithful.



**Chuck Slothower**  
 Taking issue

They go to a building where a preacher tells them how to think and act. Those who are too weak of conscience to have their own moral code are fed one.

As the brilliant essayist Christopher Hitchens said in an interview, "They say that a first-century execution gives me a reason to live and was conducted so that I wouldn't have to answer for my actions. I haven't the faintest idea what it would feel like to believe that. It's a belief so absurd that it can't even be justified by its own rationale."

Religion is an easy way out. Whatever

problems exist, you don't have to worry about them because it's all part of God's plan. You can strangle puppies and hack babies to little bits as long as you let God know you believe in him and you're really, really sorry.

That being said, religion is not entirely malevolent. I admire the role of churches in galvanizing the faithful to help the poor and the hungry, and I bask in the kindness displayed to me by friends who profess a belief in God.

But you can help the poor without a man of the cloth telling you to do so, and you can greet people with a smile and a kind word because it's the right thing to do.

I am an agnostic because it's the philosophy of "I don't know, and you don't either." I find it extremely unlikely that God exists, but not impossible. Atheism also is therefore a form of faith that can't entirely be justified.

Reciting the phrase "under God" implies both a belief in God and that religious belief is a necessary prerequisite for patriotism. That isn't right.

If you want to believe in God, fine by me. However, the founders of the United States were incredibly wise and forward-thinking in insisting on a secular state, and religious activists need to keep their hands off of it.

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

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Student votes should go to Petkun, Ravassipour

I am writing to give my highest endorsement to Adam Petkun and Mena Ravassipour for ASUO Executive. Being the ASUO president and vice president requires a wide variety of skills and platform issues that will speak directly to the student body as a whole, as well as to

underrepresented students on campus.

Student parents, students of color, graduate students, members of the greek system, low-income and non-traditional students would all benefit from having Adam and Mena in office. Their plans and experience would create concrete changes to make education more affordable, to ensure that students' rights aren't being violated on campus and in the surrounding community and to create respect for student interests in the Oregon Legislature.

I have carefully considered the qualifications of the other candidates for the Executive office and, while they all would serve well in different positions in student government, not one individual or ticket has the combined experience or good intentions that Adam and Mena have. I urge you to vote for Adam and Mena.

**Rachel Pilliod**  
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 former ASUO President