

Friday, May 7, 2004

Future ASUO president confesses his cigar habit

ASUO President-elect Adam Petkun and Vice President-elect Mena Ravasipour will take office May 25. Petkun, a junior political science major, sat down with the Emerald for Quick Quacks — a short question-and-answer session aimed at giving readers an expedient look at campus and community members' thoughts.

Emerald: Why ASUO President?

Adam Petkun: Since I've been here, I've seen a lot of things that I think could be better and a lot of things I would really like to get involved in, and I wanted to make an impact.

Emerald: What three words best describe your plans as ASUO president?

Adam Petkun: Communication, vision and action.

Emerald: If you had one hour of free time per day, how would you spend it?

Adam Petkun: I would probably spend it playing — next year it will be NCAA Football 2005 — and right now it's NCAA Football 2004.

Emerald: First stop at the ASUO Street Faire?

Adam Petkun: For me, it's definitely — I forget the official title — but it's the barbecue king. That's my favorite one.

Emerald: Last movie you saw?

Adam Petkun: Actually, I'm kind of embarrassed to say this, but last weekend I actually decided to indulge and watch "Bad Boys II," which I was pleasantly surprised with.

Emerald: Who is your favorite elected official and why?

Adam Petkun: I'm a really big fan of (Oregon State Sen.) Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, just because he works really well with students, and he really listens and he's really helpful, too. And kind of like a mentor as well.

Emerald: First impression of the University and how has it changed?

Adam Petkun: My first impression was that there wouldn't be very much for me here and that I was going to become bored here, but I've learned that there's so many different things that I can be involved with and that would also be stimulating academically.

Emerald: Who would win in a fight: Mandrake or Donald?

Adam Petkun: I think Donald would have to win. I think Mandrake's costume is outrageous and I think that it's really slick so I think he would probably fall at some point and then Donald would win.

Emerald: One building in Eugene you would have demolished if possible?

Adam Petkun: I would like to see improvements made to PLC. I'm not going to lobby for it, but PLC is not my favorite building on campus. I do enjoy — I really like the name though. Prince Lucien Campbell is a fantastic name.

Emerald: What was the best thing that happened to you this weekend?

Adam Petkun: The best thing that happened to me was that my expectations for "Bad Boys II" were surpassed. I was expecting absolutely nothing, and I actually enjoyed the movie.

Emerald: You were just given a yacht. What would you name it?

Adam Petkun: I would just name it the S.S.A.P. because my nickname is A.P. and it would be kind of weird to have a yacht named the S.S.A.P. because people would think it is an acronym, but it's not.

Emerald: What is your concept of a fruitful day?

Adam Petkun: For me, the concept of a fruitful day is waking up on time, which I'm getting pretty good at, attending all my classes, and then getting work done, not just sitting in front of a computer and thinking about all the things I need to do, but actually getting things checked off the list.

Emerald: What is the best reason to vote in an ASUO or other election?

Adam Petkun: I think the best reason to vote in any election is because there are so many things that affect you, whether it be in the ASUO election — something like housing standards for Eugene — really the housing standards is a actually good example because it pervades every single level of office ... Citywide offices are really important right now for working toward housing standards for Eugene. There are so many things that are important to us, be it economically or socially or just in terms of our safety.

Emerald: What happens after graduation?

Adam Petkun: After graduation I take a breath, and then hopefully I will relax for the summer and then maybe head off for law school, but we'll see how the next year pans out.

Emerald: Finally, where can we find Adam Petkun on a Friday night?

Adam Petkun: I don't know. I do a lot of different things. I think often you will find me behind my laptop reading newspapers — trying to catch up on the news I missed during the week — but, at the same time, sometimes, every once in a while, you will find me at Max's or you'll just find me out, walking around town, maybe smoking a cigar.

CONDUCT UN-AMERICAN

Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba must be having a rough couple of months. By late February, he finished penning some 53 pages of what was originally intended to be an internal report summarizing the findings of an investigation of conditions at U.S. military prisons in Iraq. The investigation, commissioned by Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez (the senior commander in Iraq), revealed a pattern of "sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses" — torture, both physical and psychological — at the Abu Ghraib prison.

The torture disturbs all but the sickest sensibilities and threatens to cloud a military campaign that already suffers from strategic ambiguity and regional unpopularity.

The revolting and inhumane behavior detailed included: "Breaking chemical lights and pouring phosphoric liquid on detainees, pouring cold water on naked detainees; beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair; threatening male detainees with rape; allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell; (and) sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick."

Taguba's report fingered the 372nd Military Police Company as chiefly responsible for the abuse, the photos and videos of which were sometimes not included in the account because of their "extremely sensitive nature." In one of these offending photos, a young private points at the genitals of an Iraqi man — naked except for a sandbag covering his head — as he masturbates. Another picture depicts the beaten face of (now dead) prisoner No. 153,399.

The conduct is — in Bush's words — abhorrent, from a human rights standpoint. But, this behavior points, at least circumstantially, to a wider problem that reaches upward into the chain of command, and at least above the rank of staff sergeant (the rank of Ivan "Chip" Frederick II, the highest ranking of the indicted officers).

For one, Special Agent Scott Bobeck, of the Army's Criminal Investigation Division, reported that Frederick said he and his colleagues had not received any "training guidelines." This clearly does not absolve the offending soldiers of the inhumane behavior, but it points to a dangerous lack of organization. Taguba found, too, that the prison was filled beyond capacity, and that the guard force was understaffed and underequipped.

At the least, inhumane treatment

seems to be the exception, rather than the rule. Hayder Sabbar Abd, one of the Iraqis depicted in the incriminating photos, told The New York Times that during his first six months as a



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prisoner, soldiers treated him well.

The revelation of the gross prisoner abuse presents a damaging philosophical challenge that doubles as a maybe irreparable public (and foreign) relations disaster in the region. These problems complicate the United States' efforts to build a rapport with the Arab and Islamic worlds, which have, since the beginning of the war, proved marginally successful at best.

Mansoor al-Jamri, editor in chief of Bahrain's Al Wasat newspaper, suggested, "This is basically a very good and useful piece of propaganda to be used by the extremist forces who are waging war right now in several countries, including Iraq and Saudi Arabia." The military has pressed charges against at least six soldiers, and — since these allegations were made public — the United States has taken the issue head-on. The Army is now delving into at least 35 cases of possible abuse or torture.

Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, the officer currently overseeing Abu Ghraib (Army Reserve Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski was relieved of command of the prison), plans to reduce the compound's population from about 3,800 to fewer than 2,000 in the coming months. Given that Taguba's report concluded that some 60 percent of the prisoners appeared to be innocent, the move is both politically and philosophically prudent.

Even the often media-shy President Bush granted interviews about the subject to Arabic-language news networks Al-Arabiya and (the U.S.-sponsored) Al Hurra, condemning the abuse as antithetical to American policy in Iraq, and more broadly, American ideology.

"The America I know has sent troops into Iraq to promote freedom; good, honorable citizens that are helping Iraqis every day," Bush said on Al Hurra. Still, seeing such inhumane acts in a prison that Hussein's

Baathist regime once used to imprison and torture Iraqis (in grossly overcrowded conditions) doesn't draw a contrast dramatic enough for many in the Arab world.

"I can't describe what I felt when I saw those scenes; they revolted me and proved the barbarity of the occupation forces," traffic policeman Mohammad Salman told Reuters. "What's the difference between them and Saddam? They are finishing what he started."

And such is the philosophical crux of this heinous disaster: If American soldiers are committing gross human rights violations in the line of duty, what ethical coherence remains in the legacy of the Iraq regime change?

Bush's Arabic network interviews, which offered a defense largely worded in generalities, evidently haven't quelled the region's man-on-the-street driven, and increasingly deserved, cynicism of the American mission in Iraq. Bush did highlight, though, the most important difference between the American occupational forces and the ousted Hussein regime: that of principle.

"We're an open society, we're a society that's going to investigate — fully investigate — in this case, what took place in that prison," Bush asserted. "That stands in stark contrast to life under Saddam Hussein. His trained torturers were never brought to justice under his regime. There were no investigations about mistreatment of people."

The Bush administration's wavering openness aside, at least the American political structure makes room for inquiry and constructive dissent. And herein lies the true, extant legacy of regime change — at least as Iraq stands at present.

Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del., the ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, suggested that the price for unsatisfactory answers from defense officials should be resignation — including, possibly, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's.

But, before the details of accountability are hashed out, any soldiers criminally involved in the abuse or torture of Iraqis — no matter the reason — should be punished to the maximum extent of the law. Not only for their gross misconduct and their negligence of the basic rights of others, but for flagrantly and myopically jeopardizing the already precarious American mission in Iraq.

Contact the editorial editor at traviswillse@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Oregonians' tax dollars must be spent wisely

As the new state senator for District 4, I want to address an issue that recently has surfaced in the Oregon Department of Human Services. I was extremely frustrated to learn last week that an additional \$120 million was "found" by DHS. I understand why voters lose their confidence in government when a fact such as this comes out AFTER the Legislative budget process, which was agonizingly long as we worked to balance the state budget in the face of shrinking income.

The Oregon State Legislature relies on data provided by state agencies to build a budget, and in this case the data originally showed that the

Legislature needed to increase revenue this session or else state services would have to be cut drastically. As both a senator and a voter I am extremely upset that the projections from DHS proved to be so far off the mark.

Since Oregon has a citizen Legislature that only meets in session about 180 days every two years, we must rely on agencies to provide sound financial information. As a member of the interim Joint Legislative Audit Committee in the Senate, I will be asking the DHS Director to explain how such a mistake could have been made and not realized until now.

It is possible that this additional money may be the direct result of fewer people receiving services. The Legislature changed the rules as to who qualifies for such services, requiring a higher co-pay from recipients. But it is

unacceptable that the agency did not alert the Legislature to this major change in its financial situation before the Measure 30 election.

With the defeat of Measure 30 causing a shortfall in state revenues, state agencies must be held to even higher standards of accountability than ever before. The Legislature must increase its oversight of agencies' budgets and how the agencies manage their resources. The Legislature must ensure that every tax dollar is properly spent on delivering essential services to Oregonians.

If you have an issue involving a state agency, please do not hesitate to call me for assistance. I look forward to serving you.

State Senator Floyd Prozanski represents District 4.