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■ In my opinion

DeLay-ing ethics

The 109th Congress convened for the first time Tuesday, but the usual partisan horseplay was already ahead of schedule — and this time for the better: Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, asked fellow House Republicans at a Monday night meeting for a reversal of an (ethically dubious) rule passed late last year that strips an 11-year-old party ethics rule from the books, permitting indicted congressmen to continue holding chamber leadership positions.

Why were legislators so interested in rewriting guidelines at the end of a session? Well, DeLay is presently under investigation in Travis County, Texas, for illegal use of some \$2.5 million in corporate money to help Republicans win state legislative races in 2002; a grand jury has already indicted three of his associates in the case.

(Don't think that this was a push for a legislative supermajority: Republicans have a tougher hand in Texan state politics than their seven-election streak of red state-ness suggests. That year marked the first time the GOP held a majority in the Texas State House of Representatives since Reconstruction.)

Anyway, with the old language intact, an indictment of DeLay would force the majority leader to step down from his post. Under the Republicans' new but rescinded rule — unsympathetically nicknamed the DeLay Rule — an indictment would instead trigger a review by a party steering committee to determine whether the charges war-



TRAVIS WILLSE
RIVALLESS WIT

rant removal. The change, which would have stripped much accountability from the authority of the increasingly ideologically centralized congressional Republican leadership, drew fire.

"We have gone from DeLay being judged by his peers to DeLay being judged by his buddies," lamented Fred Wertheimer, president of the Washington watchdog group Democracy 21.

Rank-and-file Republicans naturally (and moreover reasonably) obliged DeLay's request, happy to avoid a deserved imbroglgio over unjustifiably tweaking the rules.

Count Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn. — who with some other Republicans opposed the original rule change — was among the relieved: He told CNN, "It takes a big man to do what he did, and a smart politician. This allows us to stick together."

Behind this rule shuffling sits a plainer but more sinister story: House leaders nearly unraveled important ethical codes, trading down relative moral clarity for political potency. Conflicts between ethical and political aspirations are neither new nor surprising. But, of course, that's

why guidelines like those threatened in recent months exist in the first place: to illuminate and respond to those conflicts in accordance with the public interest.

DeLay takes a dim view of the potential indictment: "This has been a dragged out 500-day investigation, and you do the political math," he told CBS News. "This is no different than other kinds of partisan attacks that have been leveled against me that are dropped after elections."

DeLay's historical appeal is shaky: The House ethics committee rebuked him three times in October and November, once for offering to trade an endorsement of a lawmaker's son in exchange for a vote in favor of Medicare legislation.

All that aside, the threat of baseless attacks designed to destabilize a party's leadership is a poor excuse to drop ethics rules: It's exactly the grand jury's place to filter the slings and arrows, determine which are legitimate and which are partisan nonsense. Dropping the rules in question would short-circuit the process, putting the decision in the hands of a possibly unduly sympathetic steering committee.

This incident, however well-ended, should leave a public wary of future changes to congressional guidelines. If the above is any example, legislators rarely roll back ethics rules to improve the ethical character of politics.

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■ Editorial

Doing right thing just not 'feasible' for ASUO

Nearly three months have passed since an undisclosed group of self-described "cocky, smooth, motherfuckers" from our student government violated conduct code and Oregon Administrative Rules during an Oct. 8-10 Sunriver retreat by drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana.

More than a month has passed since the ASUO decided to take group responsibility for the violations. By way of punishment, ASUO officials proposed fundraising and/or garnishing of wages as a way to restore the approximately \$3,200 of student incidental fees spent on housing and transportation for the retreat.

At the time, ASUO Public Relations Director Nathan Strauss said of the group punishment: "It was just the responsible thing to do."

Now the rhetoric has changed. Certain members of student government are questioning the "feasibility" of repaying the money. However, since they have insisted on taking group responsibility for their actions, everyone on the retreat would either have to pay or fundraise less than \$100 in order to repay the money in full. That seems more than feasible.

Furthermore, if individuals don't want to pay back the money when they've done nothing wrong, then they should drop this group responsibility farce and let those who've broken the law pay for what they've done personally.

While producing a dos-and-don'ts video (hopefully not using incidental fees) and forming a committee are two great steps toward guarding against future misconduct, paying the money back is a crucial step toward making right what they did wrong in the first place.

The bottom line is this: Student money that is inappropriately used should be paid back. Certain ASUOians will argue that the money was not used inappropriately because the retreat served a valuable function for the group, in addition to its more "taboo" components. But just because useful work occurred at the retreat does not mean that the funds were used appropriately. Helpful byproducts do not justify inappropriate use of student money.

Don't forget the note written in the guest book of one of the houses rented by ASUO members in Sunriver: "Do you pay incidental fees at the Univ. of Oregon? If so, your money just paid for six people to sleep here for two nights. We got drunk, played taboo, and learned about the finance system, all on your dime. We are some cocky, smooth, motherfuckers."

The ASUO's lame excuses for refusing to do the responsible thing is further evidence that they just don't care about the student body and our dime. When elections come around, the student body should kick the entire group out of office.

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INBOX

Marriage made 'lackluster' by lack of seriousness

Marriage is not something to be taken lightly. In fact, of all choices and directions in life, marriage should be among the most important decisions a person can make. I am tired of the left side blaming the right side of being close-minded in response to keeping marriage traditional. I am also tired of the right side blaming the left for decimating the traditional values of marriage in pursuit of their own minority agenda. Both liberals and conservatives are guilty of making marriage a lackluster fact of life.

Marriage is not about convenience, tax relief or furthering individual self-interests. A very long time ago, marriage was a life-long commitment made between two consenting adults in hopes that their lives would be better off together than apart. Excuse the cliché but marriage was made in hopes of a "happily ever after."

Marriage has never been easy and never will become an easy arrangement. Marriage was designed to be a long-term permanent arrangement, or perhaps brides and grooms across the globe weren't paying attention when they were saying the very important "for better or worse, until death do us part" portion of the marriage ceremony. If people actually took marriage seriously perhaps the divorce rate wouldn't be so high, states wouldn't need legislation to limit divorce and people could drop a lot of unnecessary emotional baggage. So please, stop the bickering about which side destroyed marriage first. Marriage gets destroyed the moment it is taken lightly.

Jenifer Morrison
Business administration

Unsafe Beltline should receive priority funding

As if holiday traffic wasn't enough on Coburg Road, I witnessed the

stop-and-go traffic and a huge exodus of cars due to another accident on Beltline. I understand there are accidents on Beltline almost daily, especially during the holidays. Beltline has proven to be an unsafe highway that should be first for highway funding in Lane County.

Sections of I-105 will be partially closed in 2005 for repairs. This will add additional traffic on Beltline and necessitates slower speed limits until we can invest in the needed improvements. If you've experienced accidents or stalled traffic on Beltline, and you want safer travel, please call your city and county elected officials.

Meanwhile I plan to avoid Beltline. I also plan to speak up and urge safety as first priority for road building funds, not more money spent on the \$180 million boondoggle of West Eugene Parkway.

Ruth Duemler
Eugene

OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged, and should be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com or submitted at the Oregon Daily Emerald office, EMU Suite 300. Electronic submissions are preferred. Letters are limited to 250 words, and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submissions should include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style. Guest submissions are published at the discretion of the Emerald.

CORRECTION

Due to a copy editing error, the summary for the Wednesday article "Commentator mission rejected" was inaccurate. The summary stated that the Oregon Commentator magazine objected to the "ASUO committee's decision to cut its funding." The ASUO Programs Finance Committee has not made any decisions to cut the magazine's funding. The Emerald regrets the error.