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The Daily Tar Heel

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BOARD EDITORIALS

Do Something!

Student Congress members just can't get off their self-made world stage. Last week, members once again spent meeting time debating a proposal that didn't have a thing to do with UNC.

In a move admittedly made without student input, Congress passed a resolution calling for students to boycott South Carolina for Spring Break trips because the state flies the Confederate flag over its capital building.

But regardless of how students feel about this issue, are they likely to change their minds "because Student Congress said so?" Doubtful.

Why? Because Student Congress has become a joke - and that's because it deals with matters like these instead of becoming a driving force in University issues.

Without validity, which comes through truly serving students, Congress' stances on the large-scale issues it has tackled - Iraqi sanctions, the death penalty and the Confederate flag in South Carolina - are meaningless. And they should be considered as such.

Student Congress has done a poor job this year of representing students and serving as a voice for them at UNC. This group of politicians has tackled the obligatory funding bills and Student Code changes with zest but has failed students in one of the biggest years in University history.

Congress failed to assist Student Body President Nic Heinke in soliciting student input on UNC's chancellor search, for which Heinke has provided the lone student voice. It has yet to make its own recommendations to Heinke.

Congress failed to move on legislation to examine Student Stores' practices.

Congress also failed to encourage UNC officials to take campus fire safety more seriously after a string of arson attempts in Morrison Residence Hall.

The list goes on. But there's still time for Congress members to take measures such as:

- Attending meetings with regularity
- Staying involved after they've put Congress on their résumés
- Following up with officials to make sure change is made after the annual lighting tour
- Improving the Elections Board
- Taking a stance on the proposed tuition increase
- Examining labor issues
- Voicing an opinion on student representation in the Chancellor's Search Committee, including the proposal to keep Heinke as the student representative until May

After Congress shifts into a role as an active student voice, then members can pursue causes outside of UNC.

But until the body gains validity, those stances mean nothing.



Adding Perspective

As the chancellor search committee narrows down its list of potential leaders for the University, it has become increasingly important for students to have a strong, informed voice in the process.

Until now, the person behind that voice has been Student Body President Nic Heinke. Because he has been involved in the process from the outset, Heinke should remain the student representative for as long as possible.

Student Body President-Elect Brad Matthews could choose to take over Heinke's position on the committee after he is inaugurated April 4, but he has said he will ask that Heinke stay on until the end of May.

Matthews plans to sit in on committee meetings as a non-voting member after that date.

In a perfect world, the chancellor search would be completed before April, but given the committee's tendency to prolong the process, it is quite possible that the search will still be on when Matthews takes over.

Matthews' proposal certainly has students' best interests at heart. But the students would be even better served if he were to take his idea one step further and demand to be allowed to sit in on the committee's meetings now.

After all, if the committee misses its Commencement deadline and is still search-

ing when Heinke leaves, it would only benefit the process if the new student representative had in-depth knowledge of the candidates and issues being discussed by the committee.

In addition, Matthews should be given a vote on the committee as soon as he becomes student body president. His office entitles him to that privilege, and as the new leader of the student body, he should have a say in who will be the new leader of the University. At the same time, Heinke should be able to keep serving as a student voting member of the committee.

Having two student body presidents serve on the same committee would not be an unprecedented move. The 1995 committee that chose the late Chancellor Michael Hooker included both George Battle, the 1994-95 student body president, and 1995-96 President-Elect Calvin Cunningham.

Students are grossly underrepresented on the current search committee. Right now, Heinke is the sole student member.

Adding another powerful student voice to the process can only help to ensure that the University's next leader will be someone who is in touch with student concerns.

As our newly chosen leader, who would be in a better position to provide that additional student perspective (and student vote) than Brad Matthews?

Government Fighting Losing Battle

Our government is at war. True, we are at relative peace overseas. But within our borders, the battle over personal vice is raging strong.

Last week, the U.S. criminal justice system will make history when the number of incarcerated people will surpass 2 million. What is amazing is that it took more than 200 years for the criminal population to reach 1 million, while in just the past 10 years or so the population has doubled.

What accounts for this recent spurt in prisoners?

At first blush, we might be tempted to conclude that government crime fighting has increased in efficiency, and thus a higher percentage of criminals are being sent behind bars.

But statistics show the overall crime rate has doubled between 1970 and the early 1990s, making it more likely that the increasing amount of prisoners reflects a huge surge in crime and not a boost in efficiency.

The root of the problem is a drastic increase in government crackdowns on victimless crimes, the quintessential example being the "War on Drugs."

Cato Institute Executive Vice President David Boaz cites evidence that drug enforcement cost \$22 billion during the Reagan years and increased during the Bush administration to \$45 billion. About 60 percent of individuals held in federal prisons are there on drug charges, and these prisons are operating at an average of 25 percent over capacity.

Despite this government effort, a 1995 survey showed at least half of all graduating high school students in the United States had experimented with a controlled substance and more than 80 percent said marijuana was easy to obtain if they wanted it.

In addition, Drug Enforcement Agency records indicate the supply of heroine and cocaine currently being smuggled into America is at a record level.

Leaders such as New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson are basically echoing what most people, with the exception of those who have a political stake in continuing the drug war such as drug czar Barry McCaffrey, know all too



JONATHAN TRAGER
THE LIBERTARIAN LETTERS

well: The War on Drugs has been a bad investment.

Unfortunately, the drug war hasn't merely meant monetary loss but a loss of life as well. In this regard, the War on Drugs bears remarkable resemblance to the Prohibition Era of the 1920s.

According to U.S. Department of Justice statistics, the murder rate per 100,000 population increased from seven to 10 from the start of Prohibition to its repeal in the early 1930s. From this point to the start of the drug war in the '60s, the rate had fallen to five. Since the Drug War started, however, the rate has climbed back up to more than 10 in the early 1990s.

It's not difficult to understand the link between the drug war and crime.

When the government declares supplying a particular product to be illegal, individuals willing to risk jail time to get rich quickly will rush to supply the product at a massively inflated price.

Soon, gangs and crime families develop to more efficiently compete for market share. But instead of cutting costs and innovating (à la corporations), criminal organizations often rely on violent measures such as drive-by shootings to expand their clientele.

Also bear in mind that every prison cell occupied by a drug buyer or seller means one less cell available to house a murderer, rapist or other violent criminal. The pressure to free up prison space for an increasing lot of drug offenders often means violent criminals who have served only a portion of their sentences are released early and put back on the streets where they might further victimize peaceful

citizens.

The result is a society where many innocent urban-dwellers feel unsafe to walk the streets at night, fearing gangster bullets, criminals who have been prematurely released from jail or addicts who must obtain a massive amount of money to support their habit.

Unfortunately, few politicians are willing to accept the fact that total drug decriminalization is the only serious way to reduce the crime rate to the level of 40 years ago.

Contrary to popular belief, you do not have to be a woolly-haired dope-smoker to advocate decriminalization.

I'm certainly not one, and I don't believe Nobel prize-winning economist Milton Friedman, who has called the drug war the "Immoral War," is either.

Yet many people continue to oppose decriminalization, worrying that endorsing such a measure might be equal to condoning drug use.

This is absolutely not the message that drug decriminalization sends.

Only in a society where government is the definitive moral authority would the legal status of products imply approval or disapproval of their use.

Decriminalization merely implies that we realize that government is not an adequate mechanism for combating social ills, and the efforts of private citizens yield greater results at only a fraction of the cost.

Whether or not you believe drugs, prostitution, gambling, et cetera are scourges on civil society, you simply can't fix problems by cutting off supply without substantially reducing demand.

Nevertheless, there will always be some segment of the population that will make poor choices.

The government shouldn't force those who make responsible decisions to pay for other people's mistakes.

Jonathan Trager is a senior journalism and mass communication major from Long Island, N.Y. whose mother did not smoke dope during her pregnancy. Write him at trager@email.unc.edu.

Want to Blow Off Some Steam?
Write a guest column for The Daily Tar Heel. Guest columns typically appear every Monday on the Viewpoints page. Submissions should be about 800 words in length. Bring typed copies to the DTH office in Suite 104 of the Student Union or e-mail them to editdesk@unc.edu by 6 p.m. on the Wednesday before you'd like them to run. Include your name, class, hometown and e-mail address. For more information, call Editorial Page Editor Scott Hicks at 962-0245.

READERS' FORUM

DTH Editor's Column Implies Matthews' Race Made Him Unqualified

TO THE EDITOR:

Ever since I arrived at UNC, I have been bothered by the persistently icy condition of race relations here. On Feb. 22, I was disappointed to find that the editor of our campus newspaper, Rob Nelson, was doing his part to make the situation worse by needlessly introducing the issue of race into the student body presidential race.

Nelson began his column lamenting the fact that student elections tended to be devoid of substance. Ironically, he then proceeded to trivialize our student democracy by making explicit references to Brad Matthews' race, implying that this trait made him a less qualified candidate.

Nelson described a "disturbing comfort zone on this campus when it comes to the student body presidency." However, he did not attribute this complacency to any sort of executive ineffectiveness. On the contrary, the problems that he had with past presidential candidates were far more shallow. Nelson wrote that "candidates are

usually white, usually Greek, usually male and usually soaked in student government experience."

Therefore, Nelson's idea of progress seems to be electing a nonwhite, non-Greek, female candidate with little experience. I sincerely, and perhaps naively, hope that these factors (excluding experience) are not considered by intelligent students when deciding for whom to vote.

First of all, the implication that students should vote on the basis of (or even consider) race when heading to the polls is ignorant and offensive. Why should we discriminate based on this attribute? If the office of the student body presidency is truly in need of change, I would hope that "change" means more than simply avoiding white candidates.

Later, Nelson stated that one benefit of electing Erica Smiley would be to demonstrate that good ideas can come from someone who isn't "an Abercrombie white boy." Here, Nelson emphatically reiterates his aversion to electing a white student. This derogatory statement is just plain racist and extremely unfair to Matthews. The DTH has no right to portray him in this condescending, dehumanizing fashion.

Moreover, why must Nelson harp on what shouldn't even be an issue? Is this what Martin Luther King Jr., had in mind when he dreamed of a day when we would judge people on the content of their character instead of the color of their skin?

Now, let's imagine that an editorial was written in which that racial epithet was inverted to describe a black candidate. I think that it is clear that people would be outraged, and rightfully so. Therefore, my question is: Why is The Daily Tar Heel willing to print this racist rhetoric? Is racism acceptable when it is directed at the majority?

Nelson was not fair to Matthews in his column, and furthermore, he trivialized the very process that he bemoaned was so meaningless. At best, his racially oriented remarks show a callous insensitivity to Matthews. At worst, they betray a subtle, yet insidious racism in Nelson.

Still, his column didn't make me angry so much as it saddened me. It is a crying shame that these sentiments persist, especially at an institution of higher learning. I can appreciate the yearning for a change in student government. However, if change is to be made on the basis of race or sex, I

think it would be best to leave well enough alone.

Ben McAllister
Senior
Political Science and Physics

The length rule was waived.

Morrison Residents Need Sleep; Cameras Will Aid In Catching Arsonist

TO THE EDITOR:

Last year when I renewed my housing contract, I naively thought that I would have a chance for a better life on posh Middle or North campus: a chance for air conditioning, a bigger room and a shorter walk to class.

Instead I got a room in Motown sans air conditioning. Now, I would just settle for the peace of mind that only an arson-free building brings.

The fires at Morrison are so notorious that when I wrote a check in Raleigh, the cashier looked at me with concern and said, "Isn't that where all those fires are?"

Are you OK?"

The day after a fire, there's always a panicked call from my parents. I always assure them that it is a huge brick building; it can't burn. But can it? There is always the possibility that a fire can be set in a bathroom or a suite hallway, if this so-called "Fire BOLO" really wants to cause damage.

And then there are the false alarms. No weekend would be complete without an alcohol-fueled fire alarm at 3 a.m. If the Department of University Housing wants to publish some realistic pictures in their brochure, they should have sent a photographer to Motown a few weeks ago at 3 a.m. as 900 of us huddled together outside in the pouring snow and ice.

The answer to all this seems simple to me: put surveillance cameras by the fire alarms. This way we could catch the idiots who pull false alarms and maybe even catch the real arsonist.

We pay close to \$250 a month to live here. I think that should be enough buy us some sleep.

Lauren Miura
Sophomore
Journalism and Mass Communication



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