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BOARD EDITORIALS

Misrepresentation

Misinformation about elections procedures has forced two Student Congress representatives to resign. The policy must be clarified now.

With a new crew of student leaders a week into their administration, confusion and inefficiency have taken over.

Since Thursday, two members of the 82nd Student Congress, Niel Brooks and Tim Logan, have resigned.

Both stated they were representing districts that they did not intend to live in next year, which disqualifies from holding the post.

In an e-mail to the Congress listserv, Brooks stated that "this is not my choice, but due to false information from someone on the Elections Board, I inadvertently ran for a congressional seat in my current district, not the district in which I will be living next year."

It's a shame that Brooks, a sophomore, might not be able to represent students in Congress this year. Confusions about the Student Code and the elections process punish the students who want to take on leadership positions, and they punish the students who, as a result, might not be represented.

The Student Code does not explain what those interested in running for Congress must do if they do not reside in the district they plan to represent and are not yet certain

of their future address.

Student Body President Brad Matthews told The Daily Tar Heel on Monday: "It seems that currently, you just have to be sure of where you are living for the next year when election time comes around, and this does not give on-campus residents the benefit of knowing for sure ahead of time. It has been portrayed to me in past years that part of being in Congress was usually staying in the district you live in this year."

But students who want to serve should not have their housing options restricted. To prevent similar resignations, the policy should be agreed upon and explained to all involved in the elections process.

The time to clarify this policy is now, as students will get the opportunity to vote for replacement representatives for Brooks and Logan, as well as more than 10 other unfilled seats, later this month.

Congress is slated to approve a date for the election tomorrow night. Its decision should be well-publicized so that interested students can run.

If empty seats remain, Congress' ability to truly represent students will suffer greatly. So much for a good start, boys and girls.

KELLI BOUTIN — EDITORIAL NOTEBOOK

Off Track

The debate over Elian Gonzalez's future has been muddied by too many side issues. It's time to refocus for the child's sake.

If nothing else, Friday's "Nightline," a town hall meeting at Florida International University in Miami held to discuss the Elian Gonzalez situation, summed up the events of the past few months quite nicely.

Instead of focusing the debate on what would be in the child's best interest, participants seemed to talk about everything but.

Subjects tossed around ranged from the Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act to whether U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno should be indicted for the Justice Department's handling of the 1993 Branch Davidian siege in Waco, Texas.

As the discussion showed, the little boy who was found clinging to an inner tube off the Florida coast in November opened up quite a can of worms.

In some ways, that has been good for this country. The Elian saga has forced the nation to face up to U.S. attitudes toward its communist neighbor. It is about time that this country re-evaluated its policy on Cuba.

Little Elian's situation has also made this country start considering the status of children, not to mention the definition of family.

Perhaps most significantly, this case has raised important questions about whether one admittedly influential faction of people

should have the power to make officials hesitate to apply U.S. law.

But all these issues have been raised to the detriment of the little boy in the middle of it all.

It will take time to work through all the baggage that little Elian brought with him, but he should not have to stick around to watch the process.

The first priority should be returning the young boy to a stable life.

Each day that passes by equals more mental anguish for a child who suffered more trauma at the age of five than anyone should have to in a lifetime.

Of course, determining what situation would be best for the child is no small task, either. Family relations are never easy, especially when those involved are not only separated physically, but ideologically as well.

It is time to refocus the debate.

The issue at hand is whether Elian belongs with his father. Period.

This country will have all the time in the world to discuss those side issues after little Elian's fate is decided and the world's eyes stop watching his every move.

A child's future happiness hangs in the balance. The world can wait.



Social Security Nothing but a Scam

Want to know a good moneymaking scam?

Offer someone an investment opportunity, guaranteeing a substantial return on his money. Then take his investment and spend it on whatever you want. When the time comes to pay your first investor, simply find another, and transfer the new payment to the older investor. As long as you can keep convincing more people to invest in your operation, it's all good.

This scam is known as a Ponzi Scheme. In 1920, Charles Ponzi pulled it on some gullible Boston investors and went to jail for 3 1/2 years.

Ironically, there is another Ponzi Scheme that has been running for 61 years, and its operators are in no danger of a jail sentence.

The Social Security Act of 1935 established a trust fund to collect taxes that would be returned with interest to the taxpayer when he retired.

But after only four years, politicians realized it was another source of revenue they could spend to achieve utopia. Social Security was then transformed from "fully funded" to "pay-as-you-go," whereby incoming revenue from workers was transferred to current retirees. Because workers exceeded retirees, the surplus could be spent on expanding government programs.

Sound familiar? Of course, no one considered what would happen if retirees exceeded workers paying into the system, i.e., the Baby Boomer vs. Generation X situation.

The bottom line is that given current tax rates, Social Security will start running a deficit in 2001 as all the money in its trust fund has been spent and replaced with IOUs.

Despite the doublespeak of big government defenders, such IOUs are actually worthless. You cannot repay credit card charges with IOUs kept in a shoe box, and the government cannot realistically repay Social Security money with IOUs in its trust fund.

As President Clinton's own budget acknowledges, IOUs in the Social Security Trust Fund "do not consist of real economic assets that can be drawn down in the future to fund benefits."

Instead, they are claims on the Treasury



JONATHAN TRAGER
THE LIBERTARIAN LETTERS

that "will have to be financed by raising taxes, borrowing from the public or reducing benefits or other expenditures."

Thus, either payroll taxes must be substantially raised (most estimate about 50 percent) or benefits must be substantially slashed.

So how do we get out of this mess?

Peter Ferrara and Michael Tanner, co-authors of "A New Deal for Social Security," offer a good escape. Their reform allows workers to choose to direct part of their payroll taxes into a private account and then invest that money via the private investment company of their choice. Eventually the option would be expanded to replace all the benefits they receive under the government program.

Not surprisingly, such a solution has outspoken enemies, such as Patricia Ireland of the National Organization for Women, John Sweeney of the AFL-CIO and Kweisi Mfume of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who staunchly oppose letting individuals control their own retirement.

But as Ferrara explains, the very individuals such leaders purport to represent would be among the greatest beneficiaries of a privatized system.

"Personal Social Security accounts give low and moderate income workers their only chance to participate in capital markets," he says. "Upper-income workers are riding the capital market boom through 401(k)s, individual retirement accounts (IRAs), stock options, etc. But the lower half of income earners is missing out, as they do not have the funds to make significant capital investments. As a result, they are falling farther and farther behind."

But wait, isn't investing in the stock market risky?

Tanner says yes, but only in the short run, which is irrelevant when considering market performance over a person's entire working lifetime.

Consider that had a new worker invested just prior to the Great Depression and the crash in 1929 that triggered it, obviously the worst economic period in U.S. history, he would still have benefited from a positive market return rate of 3 percent at normal retirement age. Contrast this with the inevitable predicted negative rate of return on Social Security if taxes are not raised and benefits are not slashed.

Which plan is really risky here? Since the inception of an optional private investment system in 1981, 95 percent of workers in Chile have voluntarily joined, and they have seen an astounding average 17 percent return on investment. Since 1993, seven other Latin American nations have implemented similar systems, as well as four Eastern European nations.

Yet many American politicians would rather make bold promises to "save the system" while actually doing nothing of substance, which threatens to alienate constituents who demand results. In fact, a National Public Radio Poll showed 60 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds favor the opportunity to invest all their payroll tax money into private accounts because they don't believe their benefits will be there in the future.

The Social Security crisis is coming. Our political leaders must do better than debate "lockbox" bills that keep money in Washington that are fraught with exceptions and loopholes, practically guaranteeing the money will be spent eventually.

As the largest existing government program, Social Security might be socialized, but it sure as hell ain't secure.

Let's stop procrastinating and fix the problem.

Jonathan Trager is a senior journalism and mass communication major from Long Island, N.Y. who plans to retire at 27, give or take. Please send stock tips and initial capital investment to trager@email.unc.edu.

READERS' FORUM

UNC Staff Salaries Don't Cover the Cost Of Living in Chapel Hill

TO THE EDITOR:

I wanted to applaud your series on the State of the Staff. I was a staff member until this past December, and the articles really hit home.

A 1987 UNC graduate with a bachelor's degree in business administration, I worked in private industry in Winston-Salem for nine years. Hoping to then leave my hometown, I thought the University would be a great place to work and began my search for what I hoped to be my life-long career. I accepted an accounting technician position in early 1996, but I had to take a \$10,000-plus pay cut from my job as a financial planning assistant. I was willing to sacrifice pay for the opportunity to work for a place I held in such high regard.

The job kept me busy, co-workers were wonderful and nothing could be finer than a picnic lunch in the arboretum every day. I could have kept up that routine for a lifetime, but the cost of living in Chapel Hill

finally took its toll on me, and I was forced to resign my position after two years. Low pay, coupled with additional costs for parking and the high cost of housing in the area left me with an empty savings and no hope of remaining in Chapel Hill.

Owning a home in the Chapel Hill/Carrboro area is nearly impossible for a single person on a staff salary. For those who commute, gas and automobile upkeep costs have to be factored into the equation along with the extra hours each day spent on the road. I consider myself an intelligent, hard-working and dedicated employee, and I think there are many others out there like myself who would love to have a challenging career with the University, but we can't afford to do it.

Recruiting and hiring more employees might not be the best and only answer to UNC's problem. Many job tasks at the University seem outdated. Things are done a certain way because "that's the way it's always been done." Two people making \$20,000 performing routine tasks might not be as good as one person who is asked to suggest ideas on ways to make her job more efficient, implements these ideas and

makes \$30,000. She will get the same amount of work done as the two people doing it the "old way" did and feel better about herself because she has input into how the job is done. The worker has a more challenging job and makes more money. The University gets the job done with one satisfied worker rather than two unsatisfied ones and for \$10,000 and one parking space less overall.

Redesigning job descriptions is not an easy task, but UNC needs to keep up with the times. The high number of vacant positions and the low retention rate of staff workers suggest there is a problem. Hopefully UNC officials will work on solutions in the near future.

I am now living in Greensboro, a lot more comfortably than I ever could in Chapel Hill, but I still dream about that career I had planned at UNC. Solve the problem now so maybe my dream can become a reality for future graduates.

Kelley Bullard
Class of 1987

The length rule on letters was waived.

NATO's Imperfect Peace Better Than Previous Slaughter, Mass Expulsion

TO THE EDITOR:

The wrong-headedness of much of what Jonathan Trager says in his March 28 column, "NATO Made Bad Situation Worse," is exemplified in the headline.

Does anyone seriously believe that the present, imperfect peace in Kosova is worse – or even comparable – to the barbaric massacres and mass expulsions of more than a million people?

It defies logic to equate Belgrade's premeditated and systematic campaign of genocide and forced expulsions of the 90 percent ethnic Albanian majority in Kosova to the largely spontaneous and voluntary exodus of much of the 8 percent Serb population.

Serbs themselves decided to leave out of fear of retribution for their participation in the burning of houses, the destruction of crops and animals and the poisoning of wells of their Albanian neighbors.

Indeed, not a few Albanian refugees lost

family members to Serb civilian snipers or were stoned and jeered at while departing by Serb women and children.

Trager also demonizes the Kosova Liberation Army and engages in fear-mongering by claiming that they have "taken control" of Kosova.

Ridiculous! Indeed, they are now disbanded – a fact confirmed by KFOR officials. The author mimics Serb propaganda by calling them a "terrorist" group. Actually, they were freedom-fighters.

The KLA came into existence only after years of failed peaceful opposition to Milosevic's inhumane repression. Unlike Belgrade's paramilitaries, they did not kill women, children or the elderly. They did not engage in rape, torture of prisoners or mutilation of their victims. They observed the Geneva conventions.

It is unfortunate that Trager has attempted to justify his libertarian views of non-interventionism by using half-truths and misinformation.

Thomas Coonan
Clerk Typist
Academic Advising Programs



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