

The Daily Tar Heel

97th year of editorial freedom

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Ease congress' tension Focus on action, not appearances

Residents in Student Congress district 12 witnessed a slightly childish power struggle between their two elected representatives last week. A petition to recall Rep. Mark Bibbs was circulated, coming to a halt only when the DTH discovered that Bibbs was not guilty of voting on budgets of groups to which he belongs, as the petition had suggested. Rep. Mindy Friedman, who is known to have supported the petition, later stated that she had nothing to do with it.

This sort of small game-playing is certainly not unheard of when it comes to politics, even the politics that run our country. But the political body in this situation is Student Congress, and the politicians are students. It would appear that members of congress, particularly those in leadership positions, are losing sight of the issues — as well as their place as students — while searching for greater political power.

There is much to suggest that congress has taken a large step toward playing politics since the 71st congress began in the spring. Many students — both congress members and those who have attended student congress meetings as observers — have noticed a disturbing trend which one representative called "an obsession with procedure." This was especially a problem in the spring, when many people, including the student government adviser, could not even get recognized to speak. And sadly, the focus on form inevitably distracts everyone from the real issues.

Formal rules of order obviously do have a place in congress meetings, for the simple reason that they prevent general chaos and wasted time. However, those same rules can be used to limit debate on an issue or let one person have the floor for far too long. Representatives who know the rules can manipulate and have the clear advantage over those who are less familiar with them. Considering that members of Student Congress are volunteering their time as students and have reading assignments beyond Robert's Rules of Order, it is unfair and unreasonable to place too much emphasis on procedure. And in the long run, preoccupation with form can be more time-consuming than it merits.

There have also been unfortunate incidents in which students who attend congress meetings have been treated less than politely by congress members. Some representatives seemingly intent on a show of power often grill the leaders of organizations beyond the necessary, questioning their judgment and sometimes even insulting them. At the most recent meeting, Bibbs openly implied that Phoenix Editor Ed Davis was lying when Davis stated that he had spoken with the editor of The Black Ink about that paper's use of the Phoenix's proposed computer system. This sort of behavior is uncalled for and damages congress' credibility.

Another dangerous trend in congress is the advent of extensive political factions and small groups of representatives who vote together on issues. Every representative interviewed recognized the existence

of "voting blocs." This becomes a problem as congress members become so dependent on each other that they always vote within the same bloc rather than according to their constituents' wishes or even their own conscience. One representative noted that during the frequently-taken roll call votes at the last congress meeting, many representatives "passed" during the first reading of the list of names, implying that they wanted to see how others voted before making a commitment either way.

Many people involved in student government also complain about the tension they see between congress and the executive branch of student government. Some see the two branches competing to take the credit for new programs or policies that will benefit students. This sort of politicking is simply inappropriate and unnecessary on campus issues. While checks and balances are important, it is highly inefficient for congress to insist upon looking at and approving everything the executive branch does.

Much of the blame for these changes must fall on the speaker of Student Congress, Gene Davis. The speaker has the power to set the tone for congress, and Davis seems responsible for the hostility and tensions that are prevalent this year.

Davis has also gotten involved in many other organizations that take away from

the time he can spend on congress matters. Most recently, Davis was elected president of the Association of Student Governments, an organization of student government representatives from the 16 UNC-system schools. This surely makes other representatives feel that they should also get involved in as many powerful positions as possible, rather than remembering their primary purpose — service.

Davis' commitment to his job is obvious, and his goals of greater student body awareness of Student Congress and increased opportunity for participation in student government are admirable. But the emphasis *must* stay on using that awareness to serve students better, rather than serving representatives' personal goals. Congress is not there to be used as a stepping stone for aspiring politicians.

Those who attended previous years' congress meetings remember a time when meetings were held in decidedly unpretentious places such as room 226 of the Union. Today congress meets in places such as the Institute of Government because — in Davis' words — it's more similar to the meeting place of the state legislature. Dress used to be casual, as was the atmosphere. In contrast, today's congress leaders favor requiring coat and tie and formal procedure rules. The emphasis has changed from issues and people to appearance and power. Perhaps the most symbolic change, however, is that unlike Davis, who wields a gavel and the rules of order, yesterday's speakers wielded a can of BS repellent.

We hope that in the next five months before campus elections, Student Congress members will consider how best to serve the campus, resulting in useful meetings that are conducted efficiently, politely and modestly.

the last word

I read recently that the average editorial writer works as a reporter for 30 years before writing editorials. That's slightly impossible for this editorial board, but now that we're all together, it's time to introduce them and their experience and explain how the edit board works.

Mary Jo Dunnington has been the editorial page editor since February, and her new co-editor is Tammy Blackard, who was the state and national desk editor. Charles Brittain has just finished up as city desk editor, a job he held for a semester, and he will be the assistant edit page editor. Rounding out the areas of experience are James Burroughs, a former assistant university desk editor, and Jennifer Wing, who was a university reporter.

Last year, we only ran "board opinions" once in a while; now, we run one per day. The board opinions are just that — the opinion of the majority of the board (in the rare case of a tie, I don't vote). We restrict the board opinions to campus and city issues since we think we have the best grasp on them.

We also usually run one, sometimes two,

signed editorials per day. While they are not the opinion of the board, they are often the opinion of more than just the person who wrote them, so we feel they belong on the left side of the page. One more thing about the writers: Editorial writers do not report news, as that would be a conflict of interest. They are not involved in any groups they may have to write about, with one exception: Brittain was elected last year as president of his dorm, long before he knew he would be writing editorials. So he will not participate in board opinions on dorms or on the Residence Hall Association should they arise, and that will be noted with the editorial. Finally, the last word is our ombudsman column. It was begun by a former edit page editor and will be a semi-regular feature. We realized that readers often seem confused about how the paper works, how decisions are made, and we think we owe it to them to explain that. Next week, in this same space, we'll try to explain why once in a while, your paper may not be on the racks when you go to your 8 a.m. class. Stay tuned. — Sharon Kechsull



Readers' Forum

Music critic needs to do his homework

To the editor:
 I am writing in response to Ian Williams' "review" Sept. 13 ("Music's terrible top 10 grows to 20"). I have observed, and been directly involved in, both the local and national music scenes for well over 10 years. The problems that Mr. Williams claims to have with our popular music are not at all uncommon among self-righteous types who have not explored the history of popular music and culture in general and its place in everyday life.

The first point that I think needs clarification is in making the distinction between "songs" and "recordings" in popular music. Mr. Williams names no less than seven recordings in his listing that are not actually the original versions of the songs that he is so naively lambasting. Of the remainder, six more of these songs were written by someone entirely different than the person who was mainly responsible for the recordings that he mentions. And as anyone who is as involved in music as Mr. Williams professes to be (after all, he places himself in some pretty good company toward the end of his "review" — Beethoven, Gershwin, Presley and Lennon — although any serious student of popular culture knows that

Presley's writing talent was minimal if at all existent) should know a song is merely the starting point in making a recording — much as an envisioned scene is the first step in creating a painting, or a script is a beginning step in making a film. A quality song can be rendered highly ineffective by a poorly executed reading, and a poorly written song can become a stirring experience when coupled with a good arrangement and performance.

In this context, it would seem that Mr. Williams is criticizing the recordings themselves and not the songs as written. I wonder if his opinion of "Once Bitten Twice Shy" would differ if he were aware of the original recording, or if he really doesn't like the Beatles' version of "I Saw Her Standing There" (maybe he can tell John Lennon all about it standing next to him in hell).

A song like "Shake Your Booty" or "In the Navy" was written with just as precise a purpose in mind as anything by the Smiths or Schoolly D. Whether or not a song achieves its intended purpose is the true measure of its success, regardless of what level that achievement occurs on. This can occur just as

easily and/or completely as a result of the performance as it can by initial song quality.

Mr. Williams doesn't display much insight into popular culture for someone who professes to be a student of psychology. Songs on top 40 radio, just like the plethora of teen movies that flood the theaters of our nation all year round or the spate of situation comedies and highly implausible action dramas that blast out of our television sets nightly, have one purpose that seems to escape Mr. Williams: for entertainment, for release, for interacting with your peers, to dance to and listen to and drive your car to. They are not, for the most part, to take seriously; certainly not seriously enough to warrant causing paranoid fantasies. And as anyone familiar with the multi-billion dollar recording industry and, through demographic study, painstaking market analysis and modern recording technology, turned into product for mass consumption, made even more palpable by mass promotional tools of literally all kinds. In other words, they are a product, and that is all they are intended to be.

If Mr. Williams were aware of

the current advances in recording technology, he would also realize that there will not be "albums in all flavors and packages" at any time in the future. The long-playing album, as well as the single, are being rapidly displaced by the compact disc and the already well-entrenched tape cassette. Many catalogue items are no longer being manufactured in vinyl, and soon only major new releases will be available on vinyl before they are completely phased out (much to the chagrin of many of us who hold a particular affinity for the "wax" format).

In summary, let me say that what disturbs me the most about "critics" like Mr. Williams and his ilk is not the content of their opinions. The way that they are expressed, in such a poorly informed and badly thought out way and amount to not much more than a "cute" attempt to fill a bit of newspaper space. These "critics" appear to be some kind of a musical intellectual at the expense of others who work very hard to do what they do. My advice to folks like Mr. Williams through the years has been that it's easy to criticize others, but "put up or shut up."

BOB NORTHCOTT
 Evening College

Area has to fight domestic violence

To the editor:
 The beginning of the school year usually brings a series of articles in The Daily Tar Heel on rates of physical and sexual assault on campus, including the steps students can take to safeguard themselves from crime. What the statistics don't show is the frequency of violence between male and female acquaintances. But recent studies confirm what most students already suspect, or have experienced themselves — that violence against women by their male acquaintances occurs regularly and frequently on campus. Consider:

— A survey of freshman and sophomores at a Minnesota university found that more than one-fifth had been abused or had inflicted abuse in a pre-marital relationship at least once; most victims of abuse were women. Of those who had been abused, 4 percent said they had been assaulted with closed fists, and 1 percent said they had been choked, strangled, or had a weapon used against them. If the 4 percent incidence of assault with closed fists is representative for college campuses, then more than 400 female students on the UNC campus may have experienced that form of violence.

— Another study at Arizona State University revealed that 60 percent of students surveyed reported being either a victim or perpetrator of abuse in a dating relationship. Forty-six percent of the students reporting abuse said they had been kicked or shoved, 19 percent were punched or kicked, and 21 percent were pushed to the floor. Some of the studies show that physical

Tom Rudin
 Guest Writer

abuse is more likely to occur in serious rather than casual dating relationships. As documented by the Orange-Durham Coalition for Battered Women, more than 700 women from the two counties sought help from the battered women's shelter last year. Approximately 1,600 "assault on a female" warrants were issued in those two counties during that same period. These women can attest to the fact that battering is a frequent occurrence in many marriages and other intimate relationships.

Why does such abuse occur? Through his use of abusive behaviors and tactics, the batterer is able to gain power and control over his partner. This need to be in control has historical, social, cultural and political roots — men choose to be abusive to maintain this "right" to control their partners.

Often men blame their behavior on alcohol, jealousy or a "bad upbringing," all in an effort to minimize or deny their actions. The fact is, however, that men get angry with people other than their partners but they do not attack them. So the issue remains, why do men choose to strike out at their partners?

The reason: The abuse serves a purpose in exacting and maintaining control. For the violence to stop men must know that our community will no longer support their actions. The coalition is working with the police

and courts in developing a comprehensive protocol that clearly holds the batterer accountable and works towards the woman's safety.

Men's beliefs about "owning" or being dominant over women must also change. Abusive as well as non-abusive men must be willing to examine how their beliefs about women might be victimizing our sisters and mothers, nieces and friends, or aiding and abetting those beliefs.

Fortunately, a program exists to address men's abusive behavior toward their partners. The CHANGE Program, a component of the Coalition, provides domestic violence counseling for men. The CHANGE model emphasizes the need for the man to take responsibility for his actions, realize the impact his actions have had by examining their effects on his partner and eliminate the desire to deny or minimize these effects. Ultimately, the program encourages the formulation of an alternative set of values based on respect for women. The Coalition is eager to recruit concerned men and women — graduate students, faculty and staff from the UNC campus — to facilitate the CHANGE groups.

Often the situation of domestic violence seems far removed from our daily existence. Rarely is it discussed openly. But for thousands of women in the Triangle area, and perhaps for hundreds of women on this campus, the problem is quite real and its consequences are profound. Your participation in confronting the problem may help stop the violence — and perhaps save a life.

Tom Rudin is a graduate student in social work from Carrboro.

Republicans, rallies, storms and streakers

"It's indicative of the closed-mindedness of the College Republicans in general. First of all I think it's juvenile, and it's a misrepresentation of what the CIAAC has done in the past." — Dale McKinley, a member of the CIA Action Committee, responding to satiric posters denouncing the committee that the N.C. Federation of College Republicans posted around campus last week.

"People are worried and getting a little bit nervous. They have asked everything from where Hugo will hit to if the State Carolina game will be affected." — Larry Stone of WCHL radio, who said the station had received numerous phone calls about

Week in Quotes

the hurricane Thursday. The storm caused billions of dollars in damage in Charleston, S.C., and many Charlotte residents will be without power for at least another week.

"When the protests began, I rented a room in the Shangri-la Hotel, one of the few places that got uninterrupted satellite transmissions, and watched CNN (Cable News Network) to find out what was going on in China. Then CNN called me to get an eyewitness report of what's going on in China,

when all I knew is what I'd seen on CNN." — Sociology Professor Craig Calhoun, who was in Beijing during the student protest in Tiananmen Square.

"The rally gives students the chance to wave a few signs to say they're not happy." — Student Body President Brien Lewis at a rally held last week to respond to tuition hikes.

"This is one of those crimes where we've got to have a complainant." — Campus police Sgt. Ned Comar, who said there were no complaints filed about Wednesday's Lewis Streak, so no arrests were made for indecent exposure.