

OPINION

opinion@gateway.ualberta.ca • thursday, 8 march, 2007

Time for Council to grow a pair

WITH ALL THE HULLABALOO SURROUNDING Students' Union Executive elections this week, it's easy to forget that the SU's real governing body, Students' Council, has kept on keepin' on. And by "keepin' on" I of course mean charging full-steam ahead without any regard for fiscal responsibility or rational decision-making.

In a year where the Powerplant will likely post over \$200 000 in losses, drastic action needs to be taken to pull Council's lemmings off course before they plunge into the fiery abyss of insolvency. With this in mind, the Budget and Finance Committee outlined a number of cost-cutting proposals, including eliminating councillor pay, resuming tobacco sales and cutting ECOS' budget. Coincidentally enough, each measure would result in a \$30 000 boon for the SU, give or take a few bucks—not exactly chump change.

But after a lengthy debate, Council felt it was inadvisable to make any of the cuts suggested, and so sent BFC back to the drawing board—an action that committee chair Theresa Chapman said may lead to a fee increase for students.

Perhaps the budget proposals were unacceptable—and true, it wouldn't look very good to back out on the smoking ban students voted in favour of last year—but until there's a concrete plan in place, flat-out rejecting any proposals that might stem the bleeding is entirely irresponsible.

Never mind the fact that everyone knew this year's budget was unsustainable: last year's vice-president (operations and finance) came flat out and said it. Anyone with a cursory knowledge of the SU could have seen the budget was unrealistic, especially if you look at the 'Plant, which was slated to turn a profit this year despite a clear history of declining sales and patronage. Put down the crack pipe, guys.

Nobody wants to be on the Council that cut services or compromised its ethics in the face of practical necessity, but nonetheless, being the Council that shuffled deck chairs on the Titanic doesn't look so hot, either.

When faced with a budget crunch, Grade 6 math can show that there are but two options: raise income, or reduce expenditures. For the SU, income can be raised through either business profits or students fees—unfortunately, attempts at the former have thus far only driven the SU further into the red. But still, Council seems unwilling to look at the prospect of cutting expenditures, no matter how superfluous they may be.

There's a slight reek of impropriety (or maybe that's horse shit?) when Council mulls over a student fee increase rather than eliminating the already questionable councillor pay scheme. Don't get me wrong: I'm in favour of providing incentive for hard-working councillors when cash flow permits. I'm also not opposed to fee hikes, if necessary to keep afloat the services that students value.

What I can't abide is a Council that continually, year after year, pisses away hundreds of thousands of dollars on a business that students don't care about. If the 'Plant attracted even a slightly acceptable client base, perhaps its continuing operation as a money-sucking service could be justified. As it stands, however, students should be very worried about the seemingly careless way in which Council handles their money.

Fortunately for them, we go to the University of Alberta, so most likely no one will notice.

MATT FREHNER
Editor-in-Chief

Forbidden Art

WE COULD ALL LEARN SOMETHING FROM ART Spiegelman—and about 500 of us did last night at the latest installment of the Revolutionary Speaker Series.

Perennially a generation ahead of his time, Spiegelman's social commentary is, in hindsight, always bang-on. Equally constant, however, is the reactionary venom spewed forth at him every time he's pushed the boundaries. But rest assured that whatever "shocking" images he's drawing today will be seen as brilliant and incisive criticism.

ADAM GAUMONT
Opinion Editor



SCOTT C BOURGEOIS

LETTERS

'Expert' opinions overrated, Gateway

I'm probably not the only one who's unsurprised to see that the panel of experts that the *Gateway* assembled (and admittedly call SU hacks) aligned themselves with a current SU exec member (re: "Election Dissection," 6 March). I am, however, a bit surprised at the panel's word choice when dissecting the rhetoric of student government, and how such a discussion was sold as expert opinion.

The panel gushed about Amanda Henry's ability to "speak to questions directly while answering them holistically," and vaguely described such intangibles as grace and the ability to play within a team in the past, present and future. I'm not an expert, but this doesn't sound much like taking a scalpel to rhetoric; it actually doesn't sound any less abstract to me than say, integrating sustainability into advocacy.

If the panel was a bit too hand-waving when it came to Ms Henry's campaign, the election guides more than made up for it when they bluntly called Cody Lawrence "a paint by numbers candidate," or when they called the Janz platform the kind of thing that "could be carried out by a lamppost." These comments were made with little support or argument, and certainly seemed to validate the kind of hard-hitting image that the panel was after.

Now, I know that the *Gateway* encourages readers to take the words of their "crack team of SU gurus" with a grain of salt and tells students to go out and get informed (the day after the election forums), but these mandatory footnotes seem a tad insincere when they are made the day before campaigning stops and students go to the polls. Naturally, the panel assembled by the *Gateway* all have a right to their

respective opinions, but if they are truly going to live up to their reputation as experts, they shouldn't give one candidate a free bye from scrutiny, and they should probably present their thoughts against the other candidates in a more justified and structured manner.

And speaking of presenting ideas, the *Gateway* has a responsibility to its readers give all the candidates in the election a fair and equal representation on the day before we vote, especially since said candidates are powerless to respond. And if we really do need a panel discussion that tells us who to vote for, why don't we diversify it a bit and include a couple of the students who made informed decisions who aren't SU hacks?

GORDON BRASNETT
Science IV

Liberal hackspiracy in media exposed

It's an article like this [that] highlights a large problem with the SU: that it is being controlled by a small, select group of hacks. What qualifies the panellists who wrote this feature to act as power-brokers in such an important election? Why wasn't Mr or Ms Average U of A Student consulted on this feature? Does the *Gateway* believe that we are too obtuse to make informed decisions on our own?

I hope that the undergraduate population does not drink the SU hack kool-aid on [7 and] 8 March and votes for the candidate that *they* think will do the best job.

DEVIN FROBB
Pharmacology IV

Funding facts unfounded

(Re: "Two Sides square off over Coke," 6 March). I think the issue of Coca-Cola's funding to the Students' Union needs to be clarified. People seem to

think that should the [SU] decide not to renew the Coke-exclusive agreement, students would lose over half a million dollars annually. However, the [SU] only receives around \$50 000 in Coke funding annually, which goes into a special projects reserve and does not directly alleviate the financial burdens of students.

The University has stated it will renew an exclusive agreement with Coke regardless of what the [SU] does, and thus the half-million dollars in funding for scholarships and bursaries would likely continue. This information should have been included on the plebiscite posters, as they give no detail as to the context of Coke revenues in the larger [SU] and University budgets.

The rhetoric around this issue seems to be all about extremes. The No side wants Coke kicked off campus because of ethical concerns, while the Yes side tells us that Coke is the only option for students.

I don't think either of these all-or-nothing approaches are good courses of action, and the best thing we can do in this situation is try and come up with a pragmatic solution that allows students to benefit without completely selling our souls.

The [SU] can take a moral and/or anti-monopoly stance and not renew the contract; meanwhile students can benefit directly from the University's already declared decision to continue an exclusive relationship with Coke.

Further, if we can elect a student government that stops running our businesses into the ground, the [SU] will benefit from breaking the monopoly by being the sole provider of alternative beverages on campus. In this situation it is not unreasonable to imagine that lost Coca-Cola revenue could be compensated for, and ultimately even exceeded through profitable SU business initiatives.

CHAD SANDERS
Science IV

U-Pass well worth the shared cost

In response to Travis Lidstone's letter regarding the U-Pass (re: "Car-driving crowd won't be pleased with 'Pass," 1 March), I fully understand the argument regarding not wanting to subsidize other people's lives; however as a fellow law student this is something I cannot endorse.

As one of the professional programs at the University, Law students are required to pay a differential fee of \$2000 per term. This is a subsidy that we all pay to make everyone else's life at the University better, but we do not know how this is spent, and it surely does not provide me or my fellow law students with any direct benefit. I cannot fathom how anyone who so obviously condones spending an extra \$4000 on top of their regular tuition to get absolutely no benefit out of it can complain about an extra \$150 on top of that.

Secondly, it must be nice to be able to afford to live so close to campus and be one of the very minute minority with such a luxury. One would think you would count your stars for being so lucky and be willing to help those less fortunate than yourself. I personally cannot afford to live that close to campus and for me there was no choice in the matter.

If you can't take the bus there's less traffic for you to sit in. If you don't drive there's more fresh air to breathe, less noise, and less stress in your walk or bike ride. The U-Pass is more than simply subsidizing someone else's life—it's about making a positive baby-step in a more environmentally friendly direction. If that happens to help some students save \$250 a year, that is a bonus. But to complain about a \$150 subsidy and fail to mention the \$4000 extra you already pay and see no returns on makes no sense, sorry.

MEREDITH LAFORGE
Law II

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