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Prejudice abounds

Cut of COLAGE funding shows bigotry

If it wasn't apparent before, it is now -- homophobia and bigotry exist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. And they exist in the highest student governing body, the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska.

ASUN Wednesday night removed student fee funding for the Committee Offering Lesbian and Gay Events. Earlier in the semester the Committee for Fees Allocation had allocated \$746 for the gay/lesbian programming group.

ASUN needlessly removed that funding, while giving various reasons that showed each senator's personal prejudices, fears of what they know little about and total disregard for the mission they were elected or appointed to perform.

Countless times during the meeting senators brought up a 1987 ASUN ballot question asking students if they approved of funding for a gay/lesbian group. Senators said the majority of the students who voted in the election voted against the funding. ASUN senators claim they are representative of the UNL student body. But that is not a valid claim when only 15 percent of the student body voted.

Gay and lesbian students boycotted the 1987 elections, protesting the NOFAG party that was on the ballot.

If senators want to be truly representative of the student body, they should represent all of the student body -- including homosexuals. That did not happen at Wednesday's meeting. And that shows ASUN senators are not doing the job they have been elected to do.

ASUN senators, like all citizens, are allowed to have their own personal biases and prejudices. But, when acting as the representatives of all students on this campus, they should rise above those prejudices.

They did not do that last night.

Case in point -- newly appointed Sen. Steve Thomlison, a freshman in general studies, opposed COLAGE funding partially on a morality basis. Since when do ASUN senators have the right to judge the morality of students?

Thomlison moved to amend CFA's proposal so that it would not include money for gay and lesbian programming.

He quoted the U.S. Supreme Court case, *Bowers vs. Hardwick*, that stated that "the federal Constitution does not confer fundamental right upon homosexuals to engage in sodomy."

Part of that decision was based on "the presumed belief of majority of Georgia electorate that homosexual sodomy is immoral and unacceptable . . ."

Thomlison said after the meeting that to assume that homosexuals have constitutional rights is to throw away years of teaching of morality.

During the meeting, he urged ASUN senators to take the morality of homosexuality into consideration before voting. Part of his speech included an assumption "that we are all Christians here."

Well, UNL is a state-run university that does not discriminate because of race, sex or religion. Thomlison seems to be forgetting that. He said that a "majority" of students on campus are Christians and he feels he is representing that majority. But not all UNL students are Christian.

And Thomlison's arguments concerning sodomy have no business in this debate. COLAGE funding does not go to organizing sodomic orgies, or any other sexual act -- be it heterosexual or homosexual.

The University Program Council, which COLAGE is a committee of, creates its committees to suit the educational, entertainment and cultural diversity of student needs at UNL. COLAGE is a committee that does this, but ASUN doesn't seem to care.

COLAGE programming can benefit all students on campus by just bringing homosexuality out into the open, by increasing the understanding of homosexuality and by stopping homophobia. That is something that ASUN senators would definitely benefit from.

The gay and lesbian population also can be considered a legitimate culture. Homosexuals have their own distinct history, literature, music, vernacular and societal function to provide for progress and change. Therefore, the gay and lesbian population is definitely a minority: as Webster's Dictionary says, "a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment."

Last semester, ASUN senators talked openly about how a weekend "Appreciating Cultural Diversity" retreat showed them how minorities were treated unfairly. Other senators' comments showed they wanted that treatment to change. What has happened to their attitudes since then? They definitely reverted back to old attitudes last night.

Students cannot have representatives who go back on their words and don't rise above their biases when passing legislation. For this reason, the Daily Nebraskan asks for the resignations of the 18 senators who voted against COLAGE funding.

The DN has urged funding for COLAGE since the semester began, and continues to do so.

ASUN President Jeff Petersen, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs James Griesen and Chancellor Martin Massengale must look beyond any prejudices they might have and put funding for COLAGE back into UPC's student fee budget.

The funding will benefit all students.

-- Curt Wagner and Amy Edwards
for the Daily Nebraskan



Bigots are everywhere at UNL

Columnist dumbfounded by abundance of prejudice and hatred

Bigot: One obstinately and unreasonably wedded to a particular belief or creed.

-- Webster's Dictionary

Try this definition. Bigots are everywhere at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Over the last few weeks I have been shocked and outraged by the close-minded and prejudiced letters appearing in this paper. Letters denouncing gays and their lifestyles are the worst.

This is not a new problem. In my five years here, I have gone through many explosions of hate directed at homosexuals. I felt it was time to get a different opinion of them in these pages. An opinion from a "straight" white American male -- one just like many of you.

"Gays are people too" is a quote we all hear often. There cannot be a truer statement, yet gays are continually treated as if they are not people. They are treated as if they are evil, sick, weird and not normal. They become objects of ridicule and targets for violence.

An acquaintance of mine from some years back (I can't call him a friend) was a bigot. He took great pleasure in hanging out by the capitol and "gay bashing." One night, he and a friend picked up a gay man, took him out in the country and beat the hell out of him. This was "fun" for them. It wasn't fun for their victim. This acquaintance of mine took pleasure and pride in describing the event. I was amazed that someone could actually find anything so revolting "fun."

Justice of a sort was served in this case. The victim got the license plate number and this acquaintance of mine and his friend were both found guilty of felony assault. But in another sense, justice was not served because the victim now has to live with that horrible memory.

I pose this example to show you to what lengths people will go to for their hate, and to show what people are capable of doing when they don't understand someone different. Lack

of understanding is the major problem as I see it.

We had an opportunity to do something about this lack of understanding. The Association of Students of the University of Nebraska last night cut all funding for the Committee Offering Lesbian and Gay Events. ASUN senators did not have the foresight and intelligence to make the right decision concerning COLAGE funding. I only hope ASUN President Jeff Petersen, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs James Griesen and Chancellor Martin Massengale have the foresight to reverse the decision.

Craig Heckman



Later this spring, all of you will have the chance to voice your opinion on the subject. The question will be placed on the ballot for ASUN elections. This gives each of you the chance to open yourself up to learning about a group of people you may disagree with. You may actually learn something. I realize many of you fall into the category of bigots, but here is your chance to change that.

Problems abound. First, is the electoral turnout a true representation of the student population? Over the last three years, the percentage of eligible voters who actually voted has been between 13 and 15 percent. That's a very low turnout. The demographics of the voters are subject to question, also. During the last three elections the greek system has had more input than either the residence halls or off-campus students. You can argue that it is the non-greek population's fault for not voting or you can argue that there is a flaw in the system which allows this to happen (but

that's another story).

Secondly, is it really fair to place a minority organization on the ballot for acceptance or rejection? Given the nature of man to reject those different from himself, I feel it is very unfair. Why should COLAGE have their fate placed on the ballot when other minority organizations do not?

Why shouldn't the Asian-American, Chicano, Black and Native American student organizations also be placed on the ballot? Why shouldn't the Women's Words and Music group be placed there? All of these groups represent a minority position. All of these groups are discriminated against. All of these groups are using their funds to fight this discrimination. But I haven't seen any letters complaining that these groups will receive student fees.

Why then has the funding for COLAGE created such a stir? Maybe it has to do with fear. You can usually identify a member of a racial minority, but you can almost never identify a homosexual by sight. Even after talking to one or being friends with a homosexual you may have no idea. Herein lies the fear -- of not knowing if your friend is gay. How would you react? Would you still be friends? I know a few men who are gay and I don't have a problem with them -- though I admit it has shocked me. I don't know of any close friends of mine who are gay. Does that scare me? No, and it shouldn't scare you either.

Even if it does you should not turn your fear into hate. Face the fear and learn from it. Don't deny other people's rights because they are different. Learn from that difference.

You all will be given a choice. Make the choice that shows intelligence and the willingness to grow. Do not turn fear into hate.

Hate destroys a little bit of all of us.

Heckman is a senior international affairs major and a Daily Nebraskan editorial columnist.

letter

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Letters will be selected for publication on the basis of clarity, originality, timeliness and space available. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit all material submitted.

Readers also are welcome to submit material as guest opinions. Whether material should run as a letter or guest opinion, or not to run, is left to the editor's discretion.

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