

Heated Debate

ASUN fetal research lobbying sparks controversy

(Editor's Note: Following is a portion of the response to Nikki Beran's guest column on 2/2)

Say "no" to celling slogans

I'm afraid Nikki Beran's "Picky Politics" article was lacking in both tact and thought. Now I don't know Mr. Schuerman any more than I know you, Ms. Beran, but what I do know is that he's the president of the student body. He cared enough about the students of this campus to run for office, and guess what? They elected him. Apparently the majority of students out there thought that Mr. Schuerman and his party represented their views.

The people of this campus have a right to academic freedom. That freedom encompasses the gay and lesbian population as much as it does you, Ms. Beran. The student government office should be a place of safety, and I'm shocked that you would think otherwise. Perhaps you would feel differently if the student offices were hostile to advertising majors?

Then there's the great fetal cell debate. For once, Ms. Beran, I think you are in the majority. I seriously doubt that many students on this campus would claim to be pro-abortion. Where I disagree with you, however, is the application of political slogans to fetal research. Even the pro-choice politicians involved in this debate recognize the value of the research that is going on at UNMC.

The Medical Center is a part of every University of Nebraska student in this state. Like a sibling that lives in a different town, what hurts them hurts us. We live on the front door of the Capitol building. We are the largest campus in the NU system. If not our voice, then whose?

Finally, Ms. Beran, who are you to judge the morals of this campus or state? You are certainly no more qualified than Mr. Schuerman, and he is the one who was asked to represent us. Yes, there are a great many people in this state that don't like abortion. Mr. Schuerman and I are two of them. We both agree, however, that neither of us should force that very personal decision on others.

James D. Reintsma
Doctoral Student and College of Law Alumni

From the desk of the ASUN president

There are several points I am compelled to make that were missing in Ms. Beran's column. The most striking reason I was compelled to write is because she failed to mention any of the specific reasons why I believe fetal tissue research at UNMC is important to UNL students — a topic we discussed at length in the interview.

Here they are: Family and friends of UNL students who suffer from the very neuro-destructive diseases for which this research is conducted will gain a great deal from the important strides that have been, and continue to be, made since the genesis of this research at the Medical Center.

Some of those advances include fetal cell transplants in Parkinson's Disease victims under 50 years old, advances in the treatment of, and cure for, Alzheimer's Disease and other neuro-generative research.

Another reason, and perhaps the one with the most direct impact on a number of UNL students, is the threat to the academic freedom and integrity this intervention of Nebraska politicians poses to the University of Nebraska system.

The politicization of research will certainly impact our ability to recruit top teachers and researchers, as academicians will not want to come to a state in which its politicians dictate the research that is conducted. Further, it could jeopardize our competitiveness for federal research money in the future if politics are allowed into the realm of research.

There are mechanisms in place (i.e. Institutional Review Board) to ensure all research conducted at NU follows standard procedures in parity with those at other academic and research institutions. These mechanisms also ensure all research is ethical and aligned with the mission of the university.

My position was also misrepresented when Ms. Beran failed to draw an important link that I made explicit in the interview. As she stated, our society has made abortion a political issue, and because many people are unable to separate the issues of abortion and this research, the fetal tissue research has become political.

The only reason this research has become

political is because of people's inability to separate it from the politics of abortion. Ms. Beran also noted that I did not contact Students for Life or any of the campus Christian groups to get their opinions. As mentioned above, I do not believe this issue involves abortion. I believe it involves academic freedom and the necessity for this important research to continue. Therefore, why would I contact groups that advocate a position that has nothing to do with those two items?

A final point: Ms. Beran ended her column by citing the number of people who turned out for the Walk for Life held on January 22. I suggest Ms. Beran check with those 3,000 participants before she just assumes they all do not support the fetal tissue research. Last time I checked, pro-life does NOT necessarily mean anti-research.

Andy Schuerman
senior
marketing education
ASUN President

Just a difference of opinion

As I was the campaign manager for President Schuerman's opposition last year, I can tell one thing you got wrong in your diatribe: Andy Schuerman's policies should not come as a surprise. Andy and I have had some fierce debates on numerous topics in his administration, but this much is for sure, I knew we would have them.

Andy is as much to the left as I am to the right, and he made no secret of that during his campaign. If the voters had asked on specific issues what Andy would have done, he would have told them. And you, and I for that matter, would have disagreed with him, but that is everyone's fault. You got exactly what was fairly voted for, a president who is extremely liberal and never made himself out to be any other way.

If you were surprised by President Schuerman's actions, you and your supporters should have been more active in the democratic process during the last ASUN elections. No one who was active, even his opponents, were surprised. Mr. Schuerman's crime is nothing more than having a political opinion that differs from yours.

Andrew Faltin
Government
Liaison
Committee
chairman

"Student" Government?

As a past ASUN president and past chair of the Government Liaison Committee, I feel compelled to write against the proposed bill to direct GLC to lobby in support of fetal tissue research. GLC should spend its time and resources on a more student-focused agenda.

During an election year, GLC should be registering students to vote and getting them involved in the political process instead of throwing resources at a controversial state issue. The purpose of GLC is to represent student opinion in the local, state and federal government.

Student government leaders of UNL need to pick the agenda items that make the biggest difference to our campus, and I know there are better ways to represent the students than lobbying against legislation many students don't support.

During a year term, the student government has limited time to make a difference.

It is critical that ASUN put its resources

he has taken to pandering to the Board of Regents for more practices that many find morally deplorable. Schuerman has no right to place so many students in a situation where their student fees and their affiliation with UNL would cause them to be in conflict with their moral, religious, personal or political convictions.

It's no wonder Schuerman didn't contact any group that might possibly have a different opinion than he does. He thought he could just mention it a few days before, lobby his ASUN senators and slide it through.

He didn't want any students or groups to give him a run for his money. So much for that ASUN outreach he's been paying lip-service to.

It was courageous of Trisha Meuret to disagree publicly with Schuerman and for Nikki Beran to draw attention to this matter on the pages of the DN. Hopefully, as a result of their courage, his efforts will be thwarted. I'm confident that Schuerman has a speech prepared about how much this research will impact students indirectly, by curing all of their old and ailing relatives of degenerative diseases.



in efforts that can make an impact at UNL. I highly suggest that ASUN and its leaders consider how they can make a difference for the students they are representing.

Shawntell Hurtgen Pichler
ASUN President
1995-1996

Political agenda vs. student morals

Since his election, Andy Schuerman has indeed been advancing his own political agenda. He has been the darling of the gay and lesbian community.

Instead of reducing student fees or working on parking, he has devoted his time to a special interest group that makes up a slight fraction of the university community, and is not only controversial, but advances issues that many find morally deplorable. Now it seems that

Well, perhaps if he would do his homework, he would find that many universities do fetal tissue research without using tissue from abortions. If the geniuses at UNMC would just agree, they would appease most of the pro-life and Christian community and can rid themselves of the blemish incurred on their reputation by being associated with someone as despicable as Leroy Carhart, the abortion doctor who supplies the fetal tissue.

I'm also confident that Schuerman will throw out some more lines about the "broader scope" of interest. The fact remains that UNL has nothing to gain academically from taking a stand on UNMC's fetal tissue research. And surely even Andy Schuerman can see that the anxiety and outrage it would cause among a great deal of students is not worth him scoring brownie points with the Regents.

Jessica Flanagan
former DN columnist

Purely politics?

When I was in ASUN, it was difficult to get the legislature and the governor to respect our position. We asked for additional funding so our programs were not cut and to keep faculty.

State senators normally accuse us of not understanding the need to live under current fiscal restraints. Students don't understand taxes, students don't live under a budget, etc. But at least state senators understand that we care about the university and its quality.

If ASUN gets involved in fetal cell research at UNMC, it is lobbying on an issue that does not affect UNL. Secondly, ASUN is getting involved for purely political reasons. If it votes to lobby on this issue, it will undermine its ability to lobby on issues that directly affect UNL.

If ASUN lobbies on this issue, it will alienate a great number of state senators who find the use of fetal tissue abhorrent.

Andrew C. Sigerson
ASUN President, 1992-93

Megan Cody/DN