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OUR VIEW

Senate spending habits deserve closer scrutiny

As members of this little community we call Truman State University, our officiating bodies of office have certain expectations from us. Like the saying goes, two things are certain in life — you die, and you pay taxes. We pay a form of taxes with our yearly \$4 fee to our student government. Through representation, Student Senate is “dedicated to the betterment of Truman State through service to the student body by representing their interests in the University’s ongoing development,” according to senate.truman.edu.

But the governed should have expectations of their governing bodies as well. Student Senate President JoEllen Flanagan said she thinks, as does the Editorial Board, that the best way to represent student interests is to better improve Student Senate’s disclosure of how students’ “taxes” are spent, making more records available for viewing.

The amendment proposed by Flanagan at the Jan. 24 meeting, which did not pass, attempted to make monetary resolutions more transparent. Because Student Senate is supposed to be representing student interest, this amendment should have been more carefully considered than it was.

As students, it’s important to be aware of how our government fees are being spent. Yes, each student pays a nominal \$4, but it should be worth investigating what that money is paying for, whether it is designated to researching new resolutions that will improve our University, or financing Student Senate name tags. Perhaps if students were better informed on what their \$4 was spent on, they might request their funds be returned if it isn’t something they support. On the other hand, students might appreciate Student Senate’s

responsible spending. Either way, the right to know what government is doing is deeply entrenched in a democratic society. Students voted — or chose not to vote — for Student Senate leaders. Although their offices don’t carry the weight of a Missouri State Senator’s office, the same principles apply. Democratic leaders serve the people first and to the best of their ability. Informing Truman students of how their money is spent is just a part of that responsibility.

As journalists, keeping the public informed on government policy and spending is a top priority. Student Senate is simply a student-run organization and not comprised of professional politicians, so keeping watch over its policies isn’t like breaking the Watergate scandal. But it is still important, as a democratic body, for Student Senate to disclose as much of their goings-on as possible. Students should be aware if Senate isn’t being as forthcoming with information as it should.

Senators might argue that few students on campus are interested in student government, and recording more monetary spending would be more unnecessary work. Maybe the senators who voted down the amendment think that because very few students show up to Senate meetings on Sundays, even fewer would take the time to examine the expanded spending records available on Student Senate’s Web site. But if Senate truly takes its job seriously as a governing body that represents student interests, it shouldn’t matter. Even if only one student takes the time to discover how his or her money is spent, it is democracy working as it should. And worth the extra time and work.

CORRECTIONS

To submit corrections or to contact the editor, please e-mail index@truman.edu, call us at 660-785-4449, or send a letter to Index, 1200 Barnett Hall, Truman State University, Kirksville, Mo, 63501.

•A women’s swimming story in the Jan. 21 issue misidentified junior Emily Buss as junior Anna Grinter.
•A pull quote on page 3 of the Jan. 21 edition was incorrectly attributed to Heidi Templeton, director of public relations. The quote should have been attributed to Communication Department Chair Elizabeth Clark.

CARTOON

By Alex Boles



Letters to the Editor

Political troubles plague Haiti

I returned from Haiti just a couple of days before a powerful earthquake rocked the country Jan. 12. I was in Haiti on a solidarity delegation to document human rights abuses by the United Nations Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH) and to observe preparations for February’s legislative elections. We met with social movement activists who continue to fight in the face of overwhelming odds to rebuild their country.

Many people have observed that the Haitian earthquake was more a political disaster than a natural one. The similarly powerful 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in California killed 63 people, while the death toll in Haiti appears as if it may soar over 100,000. Our experiences in the country confirmed that the solution to Haiti’s problem is political in nature.

Two hundred some years ago Haiti was the richest colony in the world, but today it is the poorest and most unequal country in the Americas. A successful slave revolt in 1804 defeated the French planter class, but the only other independent country in the Americas, the United States, refused to welcome a Black Republic because of the powerful example it set for marginalized and oppressed people everywhere. The French demanded a 150 million franc payment from the Haitians for losing their prized pearl of the Antilles. Haiti made the payment, strangling any possibility for development, and sacrificing its future so as not to be seen as an international pariah.

In Haiti, we heard from grassroots activists who complained

that large international aid agencies collect funds for administrative salaries, vehicles and office support, but little of this money filters down to the people who need it the most. Dumping cheap rice on the country has destroyed the local agricultural economy. Haiti has a desperate short-term need for assistance, but this aid must be funneled through groups like Doctors Without Borders (<http://doctorswithoutborders.org/>) and Partners in Health (<http://www.pih.org/>) that have a track record and distribution networks necessary in place to make proper use of the aid.

The longer term solution, however, is political. Already conservative pundits are proclaiming that the earthquake is an opportunity to remake the country along neo-liberal lines. But the extraction of natural resources, creation of low-wage jobs, and privatization of government functions are factors that have left Haiti incapable of responding to a natural disaster.

Haiti has never recovered from the ostracization it faced from the French and United States governments at independence, and ongoing international policies appear to be designed to sink the country deeper into debt. The U.S. marines occupied the country from 1915 to 1934, and the earthquake seems to provide a convenient excuse for the United States once again to land military troops and reassert its imperial control over the country.

In 2004, the French, United States, and Canadian governments removed popular leftist president Jean Bertrand Aristide who promised to shift resources to the most marginalized sectors of society. They have insisted that the current government ban his Fanmi Lavalas, the largest political party in Haiti, from participating in electoral contests.

The solution to Haiti’s problems is to allow the country to develop its own economy and political system without constant outside intervention.

Otherwise, Haiti’s next natural calamity will be worse than this one, and the country will continue to sink deeper into poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

Marc Becker
Associate Professor of History

Taxpayers’ money wasted on left, right

Please stop publishing letters from Larry Iles. His novel length letters are incredibly annoying, usually don’t make sense and are full of typical liberal trashing of conservatives.

In the Jan. 21 edition of the Index, he complained about Congressman Blaine Luetkemeyer sending out mail to his constituents using taxpayer money. He claims it was all propaganda, and tax payers shouldn’t have to pay for the postage. Since I didn’t see the letter I can’t vouch for the “propaganda” content, but wasting taxpayer money? How about the \$300 million bribe Harry Reid used to buy Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu’s vote for the health care bill? Or the deal made with Nebraska Senator Ben Nelson that will make the federal government pay for Medicaid in his state while the other 49 states foot the bill? Now that should be considered a waste of taxpayer money in my opinion. Larry, please get a computer with spell check and learn how to write coherent sentences, otherwise keep your double standard, one-sided opinions to yourself.

Brian Strode, sophomore

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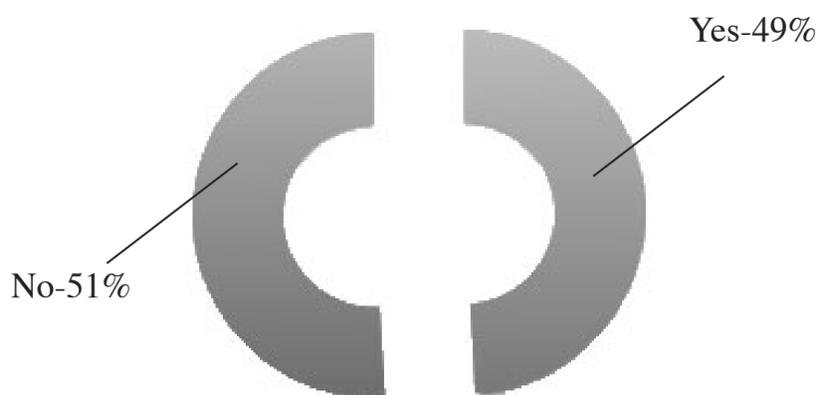
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