

EDITORIAL

New beginning for student government

At issue:

With new officers in place, it's time to start working to put the "student" back into student government

The Daily Illini Editorial Board:

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Last week the Illinois Student Senate held its internal elections in the Pine Lounge at the Union. After drama surrounding the Student Election Commission's role in the process and a nearly 5-hour voting session, we openly wondered if it might be a better idea to have the student body directly vote for officers like they do for student trustee.

But for that to ever be a feasible option, students should really have a better understanding of how student government works before debating on how it could be made more effective.

One of The Daily Illini's goals for the near future is to improve our coverage of the Illinois Student Senate and its associated in-

tricacies. We think that the student body will benefit by knowing as much as possible about their elected representatives. And in turn, they can feel that they, too, can get involved.

But an important aspect of this is the role ISS has to play in bringing more students and organizations into the process.

One common criticism of student governments (ours and other schools') is that at the end of the day, who cares? Student representatives are viewed as self-interested and aloof, and leadership admits that internal politics plays into division and stagnation. But it doesn't always have to be this way.

So how do you get a more stu-

dent-friendly student government?

A good way to start is to make sure students know who they can contact in ISS when they have an issue they care about. Previously, student senators have been required to hold office hours every week at the Illini Union. However, many students do not know this and could not really take advantage of them. Additionally, with weak enforcement mechanisms in place, too many senators can get away with not holding them at all.

However, new ISS bylaws state that senators can, with permission of leadership, hold office hours anywhere on campus, not just in the Illini Union. While the hope is that this will increase

student participation, senators need to make an effort to publicize where people can go to speak with them.

One of the best ways to increase student participation is reaching out to Registered Student Organizations and getting input, especially at the committee level. Newly elected ISS president Jaclyn O'Day has made this a key part of her plans to revitalize student government.

True, improvements will not be made overnight. But a new commitment to openness and increased participation is the best hope for student government to once again be worthwhile. As students ourselves, we hope that can soon be achieved.

SEE IT MY WAY

Mr. Atheist goes to Springfield

This sentence might be difficult to digest at first, but last week, in the Illinois legislature, something interesting happened. Most people don't care about the Illinois' legislative branch, except when they are arguing about the CTA, income taxes or Barack Obama's distant past. But, fortunately, this has nothing to do with any of those things.

Last Wednesday, state Representative Monique Davis, a Chicago Democrat, berated a local atheist activist named Rob Sherman for his beliefs. Or rather, lack thereof.

Sherman was testifying before the legislature about a \$1 million state grant that Gov. Blagojevich sneakily directed toward the Pilgrim Baptist Church. Couple that with the debate on Illinois' mandated school moment of silence period, which is still in legal limbo, and it's clear that bringing an atheist before some legislators was a recipe for disaster.

"It's dangerous for our children to even know that your philosophy exists!" Rep. Davis told Sherman, demanding that he leave his seat. "You have no right to be here! We believe in something. You believe in destroying! You believe in destroying what this state was built upon."

Pretty lofty rhetoric, no? Well, not surprisingly, the story has been picked up by some major media and some talking heads like Keith Olbermann, the sports-caster-turned-news-commentator who bestowed upon her the "Worst Person in the World Award" on Tuesday. She actually nudged Bill O'Reilly out of the way for that honor.

When Sherman showed up to the hearing, he came to testify that church-state separation makes the grant unconstitutional, but it is clear from the transcript that Rep. Davis had loftier concerns. While unleashing her fiery faith on him, she seemed more interested in his atheism than his argument, which is unfair.

The truth is that Rep. Davis could have tuned him out. She could have respectfully told him that she disagreed with his philosophy, and the church deserves the money to help recover from a fire two years ago. But she had no right, as a member of a public body during a public meeting, to berate Sherman's personal beliefs — even if or because he has none.

It's hard to say exactly what Davis was thinking when she lost her cool last week, but the fact that she has not yet offered any



JONATHAN JACOBSON

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sort of apology is telling. Even if she believes there should be prayer in schools and that the state should offer its assistance to churches in need, she should still recognize that Sherman did, in fact, have a right to testify.

One of the most embarrassing parts of Rep. Davis' diatribe, though, is also probably the funniest. She repeatedly referenced Abraham Lincoln and our fine state's license plate motto to drive her point home.

Even though she has been in the Illinois Assembly for two decades, this might be the most noise Rep. Davis has ever caused.

But it's certainly the most news Rob Sherman will ever make, assuming his Green Party candidacy for an Illinois House seat this November doesn't work out.

Sherman — who is campaigning in a mobile home he calls the "Sherman-ator" — is probably relishing the publicity, even if most of it is negative and directed not at him but at Rep. Davis.

The truth is that he's not exactly Mister Clean, either. His Web site — a bizarre amalgamation of commentary, news, a plug for his travel agency and general babbling — has a few defamatory remarks that have thus far evaded any coverage.

"Now that Negroes like Representative Monique Davis have political power, it seems that they have no problem at all with discrimination, just as long as it isn't them who are being discriminated against," he wrote last Friday.

I seriously can't remember the last time I saw the word "negroes" in print, but even if I could, I would still be taken aback by the generalizations and overt racism of that comment. If it had been posted before instead of after Rep. Davis' rant, I might have thought she held a personal grudge when she told him to leave.

Between the two of them, there should be a barrage of apologies. And if either one had a good PR man, there would be more than a few mea culpas to go around.

Jonathan is a senior in English and rhetoric. He would like a ride in the "Sherman-ator."

EDITORIAL CARTOON PAT BAGLEY, SALT LAKE TRIBUNE



QUOTES OF THE DAY

"I don't think that makes the situation any better. It probably makes the situation a little more difficult for the Chinese because they will pull back even more."

—Former Secretary of State COLIN POWELL on calls for world leaders to boycott the opening ceremony at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

"I don't think you should vote for or against my mother because of my father."

—Former (and possibly future) First Daughter CHELSEA CLINTON while campaigning for her mother at North Carolina University on Wednesday. She has faced repeated questions about her family and the 1990s MONICA LEWINSKY scandal.

So you've decided to burn down an orphanage

Today's topic is how you, an average citizen who just happens to be a major scumbag politician, can avoid public scorn. The simple secret is to come clean before anyone suspects something is wrong. For example, let's say you are a United States Congressperson who intends to set fire to the Orphanage For Really Cute Children. There are right and wrong ways to do this.

Right: Call a press conference before you set the orphanage on fire. Set the fire. Go directly to the press conference. Look into the cameras and say, "I set fire to the orphanage. I am aware this has hurt many people, but this matter is between me and God." Try to keep a straight face.

Wrong: Do not set fire to the orphanage. Have the press accuse you of setting fire to the orphanage. Deny having set fire to the orphanage. Resign in shame.

I learned the proper method from New York politician David Paterson. Within days of his inauguration as Governor last month, Paterson admitted to extramarital affairs and past marijuana and cocaine use. His admission stifled the possibility of an ensuing scandal and instead made the other 49 governors jealous of how he's a cool guy who has no problems getting laid.

This contrasts with Paterson's predecessor, Eliot Spitzer, who resigned March 17 after the press learned he paid \$4,300 for sex to a woman who, as he was shocked to learn, was a prostitute.

Spitzer did something no politician should ever have done. I



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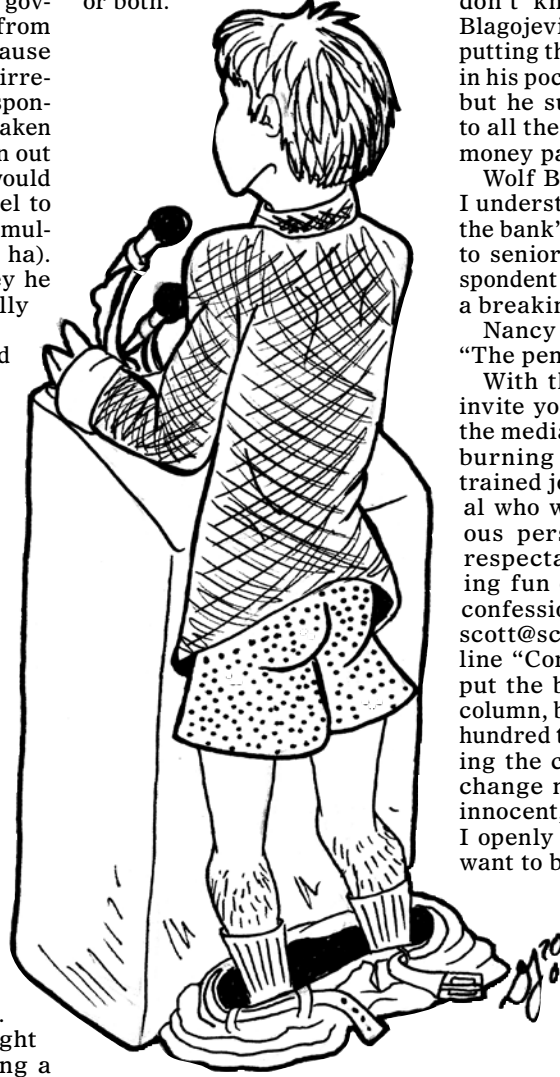
am not saying this because governors need to stay away from prostitutes. No, it is because this proved Spitzer's fiscal irresponsibility. A fiscally responsible governor would have taken that same \$4,300 and flown out to Nevada, where a limo would take him to a legal brothel to spend several hours with multiple polling experts (ha ha). With the remaining money he would buy his wife a really nice apology stripper.

But Spitzer opted to spend the money for one hour in a D.C. hotel, and he got busted, so he was forced, as punishment, to frown his frowniest frown at a bunch of television cameras while avoiding eye contact with his wife, who at any second could have woken from her stupor and bludgeoned him to death with her shoe. This all achieved the important political goal of taking attention away from his comb over, which hides his baldness about as effectively as if he drew lines on his scalp with a permanent marker.

Political scandals have the tendency to ignite because of a force so dark and evil that, like Dick Clark, it will never ever go away: the media.

If a politician comes right out and confesses to being a

recovering serial puppy kicker, there's not much to analyze. It just gets tucked into a "Lighter Side of the News" segment, and the anchors go back to explaining why a common household item has secret health benefits or is deadly, or both.



But when the story breaks before the confession, there is plenty to speculate about, as seen from this real CNN transcript that actually happened except for the parts I made up:

Lou Dobbs: "Well, Wolf, I don't know when Governor Blagojevich is going to admit to putting the bank's ballpoint pen in his pocket and walking away, but he sure owes an apology to all the Illinois voters whose money paid for that pen."

Wolf Blitzer: "Yes, Lou, and I understand the pen even had the bank's logo on it. We go now to senior ballpoint pen correspondent Nancy Grace, who has a breaking update."

Nancy Grace (via satellite): "The pen had blue ink, Wolf."

With this lesson in mind, I invite you readers to preempt the media and make your most burning confession to me, a trained journalism professional who will handle your serious personal matter in the respectable manner of making fun of it. Send your best confession, or confessions, to scott@scottsays.com (subject line "Confession"), and I will put the best ones in a future column, because that is about a hundred times easier than writing the column myself. I will change names to protect the innocent, by which I mean me. I openly confess that I do not want to be sued.

Scott is a second-year law student. He denies involvement in next week's orphanage fire.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bad experience at local event

On April 1, David Makovsky, a Zionist think-tanker, gave a half-hour public talk at Campus Hillel, which consisted of twisted invective against Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims, and self-promoting insider politics. He then entertained four non-controversial questions, responding to each with a rambling 10-minute answer. He decided to end after an hour and fifteen minutes of what had been announced as a two-hour event. There was no moderator to promote fair audience participation or civil discourse.

At that point, I interjected an alternative perspective regarding Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. My comments were substantive and not personal.

I was immediately shouted down, told to shut up and told to leave by several members of the local Zionist element, including professors Fred Gottheil and Ehud Yairi.

A physical altercation subsequent to this event, not initiated by me, led to a visit to my house later that evening from a police officer, telling me that I was henceforth banned from Hillel.

I was not aware that Hillel is a private residence owned by the

Zionist element whose right is to determine who can speak and who must leave. I was not aware that Jewish perspectives are limited to those that support Zionist militarism, racism, occupation and apartheid. I am, however, aware that local institutional Jewish leadership of all types has facilitated an atmosphere of arrogance and condescension in response to opponents of Zionist bigotry.

They are ultimately responsible for the repressive and intimidating atmosphere that pervades and corrupts the local Jewish community.

DAVID GREEN
Academic Professional

Campus needs civil dialogue

Last week, Allen Hall hosted the Cafe Intifada program, which was billed as a free-speech, open-mic event. After listening respectfully, Jeffrey Gross was singled out as a Jew and marginalized by having his microphone cut off when he tried to speak. He later described being driven from the room.

The events of that evening left him feeling unsafe on this campus and deprived of freedom of speech at a campus event that ironically was supposed to have been a forum to engage differing viewpoints. I haven't heard

anything denying that this happened; however, there have been numerous attempts to justify it.

Clearly there are different viewpoints on issues connected with the Israel-Palestinian conflict. But when reasoned discussion and exploration of these issues spills over into words and actions that sacrifice the ability of students to feel safe within our campus community, then truly we have crossed a line which I firmly believe is destructive for all of us.

Next week, our campus will experience both Israel Week and Palestine Awareness Week. It will be important for anyone attending these events to be ready to listen to whatever is

said with respect for the speakers. Meanwhile, all of us who do speak need to be mindful of the effects of our words and actions. The narratives that frame the perspectives on these issues are meaningful to a great many people on our campus. What we all must agree on is that no one should be made to feel unsafe because of their religion, race or political opinions.

In the coming weeks, may civility prevail over incitement.

JOEL SCHWITZER
Executive Director
UIUC Hillel

Editor's note: Gross is an Illini Media Company employee.