

ITEM 122-103-R0304 ATTACHMENT

February 2, 2004

To : Board of Regents Members (Ex-Officio & Voting)  
RE : Board Policy 940.24

Dear Members of the Board of Regents,

This letter is written on behalf of the students of the Montana University System. The letter's authors are Christian Hur, Student Regent and Vice-Chairman, Board of Regents and Scott McCarthy, President of the Montana Associated Students. We urge the Board of Regents to eliminate the highly unfair and partisan "Policy 940.24."

For those that are not aware, the Montana Associated Students (MAS) voting membership consists of the elected student body presidents of each Montana University Campus and the three community colleges. MAS presidents in turn, elect their own MAS President to speak for and represent the interests of the elected student leaders and Montana University Students in general, before the Board of Regents. The Student Regent is a regent nominated by MAS to serve on the board, appointed by the Governor of Montana, and confirmed by the Montana Senate. The Board of Regent's code of expectations states: "The Student Regent has a first and foremost responsibility to represent students in the Montana University System." MAS represents the students of Montana.

In the 1980's, the Board of Regents created policy 940.24 to allow only the political entity MontPirg to utilize government resources and collect membership dues for their organization. By getting students to sign a simple card, UM administration then automatically places a "volunteer MontPirg fee" on the tuition bills of students who volunteered. No other political, or even non-political, student organization has access to this considerable funding advantage.

MontPirg is a highly political and partisan group. MontPirg was one of the major endorsers of the "buy back the dam" proposal that failed on the 2002 election ballot. In an article dated August 22, 2002, Jonathan Adler of the National Review cited PIRG as an affiliate of the Sierra Club and Earth Justice. While we believe, groups like MontPirg, the college Democrats, and the college Republicans, have a right to exist and solicit membership on campus; we believe that it is fundamentally unfair to allow one political group access to government resources in their efforts to collect dues while at the same time denying all other groups such a lucrative funding avenue. MontPirg must agree with this statement because they now seek to expand the policy to allow other student groups access to their funding scheme.

Unfortunately, to open up the existing policy to allow all political groups such access, would undermine the autonomy of the elected student government, who currently decides how to allocate limited student government resources to various student groups and projects that will benefit the student body as a whole. Under MontPirg's proposal, there would be no need or role for an elected student government. University tuition bills

would directly fund groups whose roles and motives may not be in the best interest of the students at large. Additionally, opening up the policy to all would result in a burden on campus' resources as University of Montana administration would be forced to cater to an ever growing political menagerie of special interest groups.

The federal government doesn't collect tax dollars for the Democrat or Republican Party. Why should the UM campus, an entity of the State of Montana, operate any differently?

At the November 2003 Board of Regents meeting, the elected student presidents voted, with the vast majority in support of a resolution calling for the end of campus resources being used to collect such student government fees and to endorse a board proposal that would have amended Policy 940.24 by eliminating the use of Government-campus resources being used to automatically collect money for MontPirg and any other student group. Aside from the fact that it is fundamentally unfair to allow a single political group like MontPirg to collect its money by using taxpayer resources, the current process undermines the autonomy of the student governments, whose leaders are elected in a general election by the student body.

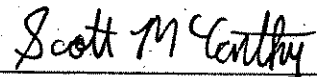
Whether a liberal organization like MontPirg or a conservative alternative, no student entity, other than each recognized university student government group, should be able to circumvent the democratic process by using taxpayer and general student tuition funds to fund and collect dues for their organization. The current board policy allows just that to happen. This very unfair and burdensome process must end with all possible haste.

Please help us preserve the elected student governments and end such a discriminating policy.

Thank you for time and consideration.



Christian Hur, Student Regent



Scott McCarthy, MAS President

cc. Associated Press  
Leadership of the Montana State Legislature