

1973

Board of Trustees Public Hearing March 27, 1973

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UNIVERSITY OF MAINE
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

March 27, 1973
Bangor, Maine

PUBLIC HEARING

PRESENT: Chairman L. M. Cutler, Miss L. M. Cormier, V. P. Currier, J. C. Donovan, S. J. Evans, R. N. Haskell, S. T. Hughes, C. R. McGary, J. H. Page, K. H. Ramage, Mrs. J. Sampson and Clerk J. R. Magill; Mrs. J. M. Kulberg and Miss P. A. Riley (SAC members) Staff: D. R. McNeil, S. L. Freeman, A. S. Buswell, W. P. Fridinger, W. C. Libby, E. A. Olsen, A. C. McGuinness, F. S. McGuire, B. I. Shur, R. A. Eustis; the press and the public.

Dr. John Donovan, Chairman of the Student Affairs Committee, presided over this hearing which was scheduled by his committee to provide an opportunity to hear proponents and opponents of a proposal from the Maine Public Interest Research Group. The organizers of MAINE-PIRG hope to establish a research organization which would utilize student researchers and a professional staff to identify and evaluate public interest issues, and the group requested Trustee authorization for increased student activity fees to fund the organization.

Dr. Donovan introduced Mr. John Melrose, State Coordinator for MAINE-PIRG, who outlined the purpose of the organization, described the base of support generated among the students on several Campuses in the system, and discussed the several funding options available to PIRG which included reliance on voluntary donations, a check-off, or mandatory fees. To assure adequate predictability of funds, PIRG proposed a mandatory fee to be collected by the University, with a refund guaranteed by PIRG to any students who do not wish to support the program.

Following Mr. Melrose's presentation, Mr. Mark Hopkins, UMO student, spoke briefly in opposition to the method of funding, noting that the PIRG plan obligates students who don't support the program, to take the initiative to obtain a refund. Mr. Hopkins suggested that a positive check-off, whereby students could elect to remit the fee, would be preferable.

No other speakers responded to an invitation to present a statement and, at the request of Chairman Donovan, Mr. Melrose and Mr. Hopkins responded directly to questions from members of the Student Affairs Committee and from other Trustees. After determining that there were no further questions, Chairman Donovan thanked the various spokesmen and adjourned the public hearing.

Dr. Cutler, Chairman of the Board, immediately convened a public session of the Board of Trustees to consider and take action on the PIRG proposal.

Chancellor McNeil summarized staff and Administrative Council review of the proposal, noting that the group was supportative of the PIRG concept but unwilling to advocate mandatory fee collection for agencies over which the University exercised no control. The Chancellor read a resolution which was presented to the Administrative Council for discussion and reaction. Essentially, the resolution provided for University collection of membership fees from students on a trial basis for a two-year period, where payment of fees would be clearly voluntary and collection initiated only on the request of a majority of students, and where each request by any organization for such collection would be subject to the approval of the Campus President. The Chancellor reported that the resolution was acceptable to four of the seven Presidents on the Administrative Council. However, since he believed it would establish an undesirable precedent, the Chancellor recommended to the Board that the University not be authorized to engage in any collection of voluntary fees for non-University organizations.

There was extensive discussion of the resolution supported by the Administrative Council and of the Chancellor's recommendation. The University's Legal Counsel responded to questions about probable liability if the University should serve as fiscal agent only. Mr. Haskell MOVED that the Board of Trustees respectfully decline to approve the request of the Public Interest Research Group that the University act as fiscal agent for mandatory fee collection with guaranteed refunds.

The motion was seconded and VOTED with Trustees Donovan, Hughes, McGary and Sampson dissenting.

After further discussion the resolution providing for collection of voluntary fees was moved, amended, seconded and, with Trustees Currier, Cormier, Haskell, Page and Ramage dissenting, it was VOTED: that the University of Maine serve as the fiscal agent for the collection of membership fees for organizations paid voluntarily by students on any campus of University of Maine, provided that:

- 1) a majority of the students enrolled on such campus indicate to the President of that campus by properly executed petition, or such other means as the President may reasonably require, that they wish to have the University serve as the fiscal agent for voluntary payment of organization membership fees;
- 2) the means of voluntary collection of such membership fees is such that it is clear beyond any doubt to the student that payment of the membership fee is voluntary and that the University accepts no responsibility for suggesting or in any way urging the student to pay the membership fee;

3) the organization agrees in writing in such manner as the University may reasonably require to pay to the University such sums as may be necessary to defray all costs to the University incurred in the University's serving as fiscal agent for collection of organization's membership fees;

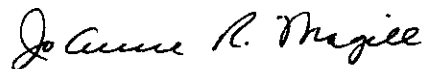
4) the period during which the University agrees to serve as fiscal agent for collection of membership fees for the organization shall be for two years beginning August 1, 1973, and ending July 31, 1975, at which time the Board of Trustees shall evaluate its policy and determine if the University shall continue to serve as fiscal agent for collection of the organization's membership fees;

5) each bill presented by the University to students for their voluntary payment of the organization's membership fees states clearly that the University is functioning solely as fiscal agent, and that the University accepts no responsibility for, nor in any way endorses or passes judgment on, the goals, activities, policies or practices of the organization; and

6) the Campus President approves each request by any organization which wishes to have the University serve as a fiscal agent for collection of membership fees for such organization.

With respect to collection of fees for the MAINE-PIRG, it was further understood that the two-dollar fee would be listed on student bills and students would be free either to remit the fee or to disregard it, as they choose.

Adjournment.



JoAnne R. Magill
Clerk, Board of Trustees