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Fiscal budget approved, House scraps pub help

by Jeff Beebe

The University of Maine’s Board of Trustees was vindicated for their support of the Wilde-Stein Club on the floor of the Maine House of Representatives last night as the House approved $35.4 million of the Super-U’s 1974-75 budget.

Two-thirds of the House, 101 members, were required to approve final enactment of the current services portion of the state budget, in which the university’s budget was included. After two hours of debate, the first roll call showed 97 proponents and 34 opponents present. Brief debate followed a motion to reconsider, and a second vote was taken.

The final tally was 101-34. The second vote was not a roll call, and the individual votes are not noted for the public record.

The act now goes to the 33-chair State Senate.

Orono representative Ted Curtis told The Campus most of the debate was focused on the issues at UMO.

“I was an attempt to intimidate the university system, to spank the hands of the Trustees and the campuses for condoning the Wilde-Stein Club,” he claimed. “But my colleagues didn’t buy it.”

Opposition to the enactment was led by Rodney Ross of Bath, Louis Jalbert of Lewiston, and Francis B.B. Brawn of Oakland.

Jalbert earlier had brought up a resolution asking the Maine Supreme Judicial Court to rule on whether the Board of Trustees may deny university facilities to a campus organization, but it was tabled, and thus did not affect the budget action.

The Trustees were asked this week by members of the legislature to reconsider their position regarding the Wilde-Stein Club’s Apr. 20 convention. They refused to do so.

Senate President Kenneth MacLeod of Brewer said the Trustees action was endangering the university’s budget and the fund drive now underway. If the Trustees had rescinded their action allowing the conference to proceed, a supreme court ruling would have inevitably followed the law suit that would result from that action. Instead, Thursday’s order was designed to force the court to rule.

The Trustees standing in the eyes of the 101 representatives who voted in favor of enacting Part I, current services, of Maine’s budget was summed up by Rep. Frank J. Murray of Bangor: “We knew we shouldn’t force the Trustees into changing their decision; we shouldn’t interpret what the U.S. Constitution says in regard to free speech and freedom of assembly, which is what it’s all about.”

The $35.3 million was included in Part I of the state’s $173.7 million budget, but the budget could not have been picked apart section by section in the final enactment stage. Part II, which will go through the picking apart stage known as “engrossment,” holds only slightly more than $1 million for the university.

Murray said the university budget may have suffered had Part I gone through the engrossment stage in light of the controversies now centered around UMO.

UMO did suffer this week, however, as a bill to allow the Trustees to hold a corporate liquor license was defeated Wednesday by a wide margin, 82-55. Murray sponsored the bill on behalf of the UMO Food Service and the Student Senate.

The bill was aimed at speeding the development of the on-campus pub which has been in the planning stages for more than two years.

But the pub is not dead. We can live without that bill,” emphasized Student Senate Vice President Ted O’Meara. “We will have a pub.”

Now, O’Meara and the pub committee he chairs are still waiting for a constitutional ruling from the attorney general’s office in Augusta. That office will adjudicate conflicting claims regarding the university’s right as a corporation to hold a liquor license.

“Our lawyers think we have a case, but the liquor commission doesn’t think so,” explains O’Meara. “If the attorney general says no, UMO can’t run the pub, we’ll go off campus to get someone to come do the job.”

“If the bill had passed, it would have cleared up any constitutional problems and allowed the liquor commission to move ahead,” continued O’Meara. The license application, now before the liquor commission under the name of Howard R. Neville, was approved unanimously by the Orono Town Council.

Murray described his bill as a "control measure," and looked back to the original

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Trustees denied pub license

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Bill he sponsored last fall to allow the sale of alcoholic beverages at a secondary institution.

"The bill we passed last in the regular session was relatively a lot more radical than this measure, but we didn't have enough foresight to include this measure then."

If the measure allowing UMO as a corporation to hold the license had been included last fall, it would have passed easily, according to Murray. "This time, they just added up all the anti-university feeling, the gays, the streakers, everything," and killed the bill.

"A workable solution has been thwarted," charged Murray. To give the Trustees control over the operation of the pub, said Murray, would have been "much more desirable way. I tried to sell it as a control measure, but I failed."

O'Meara agreed. "It would have helped somewhat, but now we're back to that stumbling block of interpretations."

O'Meara was asked, only hours before the House's budget vote, if he thought the anti-university sentiment that arose during the debates could possible be an omen of disastrous negative action to come in the legislature regarding the University of Maine.

"I hope not," he replied.

Apparently, much to the relief of O'Meara, UMO administrators, The Campus, students, and the entire university community, it was not.