

ASWWU
 Legislative Affairs Council Meeting
 Tuesday, February 26, 2008
 VU 567

Legislative Affairs Council Members	<i>Present:</i> Adam Day, Joel Graves, Alexander Garcia, Tracy Lamont <i>Absent:</i> Devin Malone, Gina Tichenor
AS VP Legislative Affairs	Erik Lowe <i>Present</i>
Legislative Liaison	Sarah Ishmael <i>Absent</i>
WSL Chapter Chair	Kristina Mader <i>Absent</i>
Advisor	Kevin Majkut <i>Present</i>
Guest	Jakob Lunden

I. CALL TO ORDER

Erik Lowe, AS VP Legislative Affairs called the meeting to order at 4:07pm.

II. ADDITIONS/CHANGES TO THE AGENDA- *None*

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Daniel McLafferty is out sick tonight and has not finished the minutes. Both minutes will be on the agenda for approval next week.

IV. PUBLIC FORUM- *None*

V. CHAIR REPORT- *Nothing new to add.*

VI. INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Weekly Legislative Report

Lowe reported that he will send out Sarah Ishmael's Legislative Liaison Report tonight or tomorrow.

B. Disability Resources for Students

Lowe has continued having meetings with DRS and will have more to report soon.

C. Student Employment and Basic Food Program (Food Stamps)

The guidelines basically state that students working over 20 hours a week and are under a certain income guideline are eligible for Basic Food Program assistant. Students working at Western are only able to work up to 19 hours a week. There are many reasons for this rule. The HEC board has studies about student work effecting academic performance. Jakob Lunden discusses this issue: An on-campus job is the best opportunity for students, because they are the most flexible in terms of scheduling. However there is the 19 hour limit. What is happening is a one hour difference between the rule and the Federal Law needed to receive food stamps. Lunden is here to ask the LAC to either change the school's rule or work to lobby the Federal Government to lower the threshold of hours that students must work to receive food stamps. Lowe states that the amount of students

who require food stamps to get by is relatively small. The benefit of being eligible for this program is very large. In researching this, Lowe found out that the 19 hours is set by the Board of Trustees. Kevin Majkut (stating that he hasn't looked this up in a while) believes that the Student Employment Policy, which includes the 19 hour policy, is approved by the Board of Trustees. There is also some IRS waiver for students that has to do with working 19 hours a week versus 20 hours. This is explained on the Center for Work Experience Website. Lowe states that there is also a difference in the amount of money that the University has to put forth in terms of insurance and benefits due to part-time versus half-time work. The University has a responsibility to Federal, State, and collective bargaining units to half-time employees to provide certain benefits. This is also something that would have to be considered. Majkut was wondering why the Federal Government has the 20 hour limit. Lunden stated that someone involved with the Basic Food Program said that they feel that students are voluntarily committing themselves to poverty to be students for 4 years and then after that they will have a real advantage in society. Tracy Lamont brought up that it is almost unacceptable now to go directly from high school into the workforce, yet students are being treated as though they should suffer through 4 years of college. Lowe stated that the HEC Board's goal is to get people into higher education and then graduate. Their studies were looking at how much students should be working in order to be successful and graduate. Western's Counseling Center feel the max should be about 15 hours. Lowe thinks it would be more beneficial to lower the requirements to receive assistance. The question of how much this would cost the government also includes: how many students would need assistance? How many schools would participate? This number would not include students who are still dependent. Lowe thinks that initially we should look into how many students on Western's Campus would be affected by changing the federal law to 19 hours. Majkut suggested looking into what the United States Student Association's opinion is on this subject. Lowe is hoping to meet with representatives of the USSA while he was in Washington, D.C. Lowe asked the council if they would be comfortable with him speaking with USSA about this subject to see what support we could get for the next session. The council agreed. Lowe will also discuss this with the AS Board of Directors and inform them that LAC feels it is an important issue that should be investigated.

D. Off-Campus Housing

1. The Bellingham Herald had an article about the ordinance in Bellingham that stipulates no more than 3 unrelated people can reside in a single residence. This is an issue because there are several houses in North Campus that are more like rooming houses and more than 3 students live there. If this ordinance forced landlords to accommodate students by renovating to accommodate students or have the houses zoned for multi-family. The issue arises when landlords stick more than 3 people in a house, when it's not zoned for multi-family use. This poses a safety issue, trash issue, noise issue and parking issue. If this ordinance was done in the right way it could be of a great benefit to students in that it would force landlords to be more understanding of student needs and safety concerns. The problem is people are trying to have it enforced to get large houses of students out of their neighborhoods. Lowe says there are lots of examples of landlords splitting up houses illegally to house more people, for example making a den a bedroom, etc. The York neighborhood, for example, is zoned completely for single families. In most cases

the residents aren't opposed to students living in their neighborhoods as long as they follow the 3 person guideline. This ordinance was examined by City Council last night. If this law was enforced by forcing landlords to stick to the codes that would be good, but the most vocal people about this are just complaining about the students. Lowe felt this was important even though it is not technically a legislative issue. This issue also affects low income families and non-traditional families.

2. Lowe and Lunden have had discussions with Laura Cable, the Legal Information Center Coordinator, about doing a database to allow tenants to give feedback on landlords or property management services in an objective setting. This will not be used to vent, but rated on legal issues, likelihood of getting your deposit back, etc. The information would come primarily from small claims and district court. This would help tenants find information about their landlords/property managers before they sign a lease. Most tenants have to do a background check before renting; this would be a way to do a background check on landlords/property managers. Lowe thinks that we should ask city council or the mayor to have someone design a website. Once the website is up maintenance would be fairly easy. Majkut said that we should check with the Attorney General about any possible issues. He also wonders if they could just mine the public records about once a week to see if there are any updates for the webpage. If anyone is interested in helping please contact Lunden.

E. MIPs

When underage students have been out drinking some of them are afraid to come back to the dorms because according to state law their body is a container and therefore they are in possession of alcohol. This is an issue because it scares students into making bad decisions; they might stay at someone's house that they don't know very well because they might end up with an MIP. Lowe wanted to bring up this issue. He does not want to encourage underage drinking but wants to encourage safety. A former RA spoke about Residence Life stressing that people are safe. The only situations where MIPs are involved are where there are huge campus parties or destructive behavior. This also brings up how people find transportation back to the dorm. Lowe said that they have the Late Night Shuttle for this purpose. Lowe believes that working with Residence Life and the University could help with education in this area to emphasize safe recreational habits. He suggests a campaign advertising that the consequences are much reduced by returning to the Residence Halls than by being out late at night. Western promotes responsible drinking verses complete abstinence. Lowe sometime in the 60's Western was one of the top party schools in the country and Western has come a long way in encouraging safe and responsible habits. Lowe just wanted to get an opinion of law verses university policy/education.

VII. ACTION ITEMS- *None*

VIII. NEXT MEETING DATE

4:00pm Tuesday, March 4, 2008 in VU 567

IX. ADJOURN- 5:08pm