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FIRE's Heat Douses Student Censorship in Oregon

By Jim Brown
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(AgapePress) - In a sudden turn of events, the University of Oregon student government has increased funding to a conservative student magazine that had been the target of alleged viewpoint discrimination.

The *Oregon Commentator* came under fire after satirizing transgendered student senator Toby Hill-Meyer, who had requested that the campus newspaper refer to him using the general-neutral pronouns "ze" for "he," and "hir" for "him." Consequently, the Associated Students of the University of Oregon (ASUO) recognized and denied funding to the magazine for poking fun at Hill-Meyer. That is when the *Commentator* contacted the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE).

FIRE's director of legal and public advocacy, Greg Lukianoff, was taken back by the student leaders' reaction.

"The *Commentator*, somewhat unsurprisingly, made fun of [Hill-Meyer]," says Lukianoff. "[But] for that to lead to a situation where the student government refuses to recognize their mission, refuses to fund them for several months, and continues to debate whether or not they have to recognize a group at all, is simply remarkable."

Not long after FIRE sent protest letters to the university administration and campus leaders, the student government re-recognized the *Commentator* -- and even increased the magazine's budget by more than five percent. Lukianoff says although that is all welcome news, UO administrators never criticized the student government's initial censorship.

"If you're distributing student fees, you're not allowed to distribute them on the basis of viewpoint, period. That's [directly] from the Supreme Court," the FIRE spokesman says. "And to let the student government languish, actually requesting help from the administration, and not clarify what their constitutional duties are, in our opinion, is unforgivable."

Pauline Austin, a spokeswoman for the university, had no comment on the story when contacted. But FIRE says it is hopeful both the school and its student leaders have learned a lesson, and that student fees will no longer be used as a "tool to favor or disfavor particular viewpoints."

Jim Brown, a regular contributor to *AgapePress*, is a reporter for [American Family Radio News](#), which can be heard online.

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