

Huge turnout rejects the Pill option

By Erika Sajnovic

"I'm glad that the matter is finally settled," was WLUSU President-elect Dave Bussiere's response to the final vote on 'Pillgate.'

The April 2 referendum resulted in the 'No' campaign winning by a margin of 62.8% to the 'Yes' campaigns 36.7%.

The turnout for the second referendum was 38.6% of the voting students. "I think that both sides should be congratulated on their efforts," said Bussiere. "They got information across to over 1700 students."

Tom McBride, Executive Vice-President-elect, was pleased by the level of involvement by the students. "I think that it was a 'No' vote with regards to the pill and with the way WLUSU handled the whole situation."

"The level of turnout makes it a valid measure of the student body's opinion," said McBride.

Bryan LeBlanc, a newly elected Student Senator, said, "I was happy the turnout was so large, and that the campaign was an informative one which sparked real and meaningful debate amongst the students."

Jeff Burchill, Vice-President: University Affairs was also happy with the turnout. "It would be tough to question this referendum because it was run under the proper rules and there was such a large turnout."

Shelley Potter, co-chair of the

'Yes' campaign, said that she was disappointed with the result of the vote, but happy with such a large turnout. "The university community has lost in this vote," continued Potter.

Karen Bird, chair of the 'No' campaign, said, "I'm very pleased with the turnout... it shows that the message got across to the average student."

Bird's main objective was to educate the students about the problems and consequences of the Pill being on the Health Plan.

The idea of an open forum and a debate aroused many students' interests in this issue. "I think that they were indicative of the interest that was created over the issue," said Bussiere.

Brian Thompson, outgoing President of WLUSU was generally pleased with the decisions made by WLUSU, the respective chairs and the students.

"The students have decided on their own in this issue," said Thompson.

Bird agreed, "The situation (Health Plan) was best before the Pill came along and the students have voted to save themselves the cost of \$16."

All those concerned agree that some changes to the WLUSU by-laws need to be made.

"I hope that we can put all this behind us now and learn from our mistakes," said McBride. "Students can also expect some by-law changes

at next year's General Meeting."

Bussiere added WLUSU will be requesting a SEED (Student Employment and Education Development) grant to hire a student to work with WLUSU on changing the by-laws. "This is a major priority for the summer," said Bussiere.

Leblanc said, "The by-laws need to be revamped, revised and streamlined to make them accessible not only to student politicians but also the student body."

Burchill said, "This year WLUSU,

specifically Bussiere and McBride, must change the books and if not, then they will be negligent."

Burchill and LeBlanc both commented that perhaps the 50% plus one rule should be looked at so as to give a larger majority, therefore not having 51% dictate for the other 49%.

Bussiere said, "While this referendum may have caused some bad publicity, it finally allowed for the whole question to be settled."

The Pill is *not* on the Health Plan.

The Pill's complex history

By Erika Sajnovic

It all started February 5 when the students of Wilfrid Laurier University voted that the Pill would not be included in the existing Health Plan. A ruling was made March 4, in effect reinterpreting this decision so that the Pill was on the Health Plan.

The results of the second referendum, April 2, concerning the Pill were: 'Yes' 650 (36.7%); 'No' 1113 (62.8%); and spoiled 10. The total turnout was 1773 or 38.6% of the eligible voting students.

This means that the Pill *will not* be included in the WLUSU-administered Health Plan in 1986-87.

Brian Thompson, outgoing President of the Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union (WLUSU) gave a comparison of the referendums and general meetings held in the last five years.

"This turnout is much better than in any of the others (referenda)," said Thompson.

In 1982, a Health Plan received a 56.8% to 43.1% margin — only 22.9% of the eligible voters turned out. The WLUSU board at the time required a two-thirds majority for the plan to be successful.

In the October 7, 1986 referendum for the revised Health Plan, 82.0% voted 'yes' while 15.7% voted 'no'; only 12.8% of the eligible voters turned out.

In the February 5 referendum, the Pill was passed by a 52.3% to 47.7% margin with 31.7% of the voters eligible turning out.

There were accusations at the time that Tim Wills, President of the Laurier Christian Fellowship (LCF) and one of the 'No' chairs, was speaking in the Concourse on voting day.

Wills commented, "I did commit infractions but it was unknowingly."

The referendum of February 5 was ruled a failure due to the fact that a two-thirds majority was not achieved by the voting students.

In the WLUSU by-laws it states that a motion to raise fees must attain the two-thirds majority of the directors to go to a general meeting. This was interpreted as requiring a two-thirds majority of students to pass as well.

On March 1, at a Board of Directors meeting, the BOD defeated a motion

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The Numbers

Yes	650	No	1113
	36.8%		63%
	10 Spoiled		

1773 Voted, 38.6% of
those eligible

Languishing in a sea of ignorance

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to recognize the majority needed in referenda as 50% plus one. The motion, made by Graduate Director Shelley Potter and seconded by President-elect Dave Bussiere, would have passed the Feb. 5 referendum on the contraceptive addition to the Health Plan.

Bussiere and Potter had previously asked for proof that a two-thirds majority was required at the pill referendum.

Thompson spoke with lawyers to see if the 50% plus one argument would stand on its own. "I knew that the 50% plus one argument was valid, but would it stand up according to our by-laws?" asked Thompson.

The March 1 meeting, despite an apparently decisive secret ballot, proved controversial as some people were still upset over the possible contravention of the by-laws.

Thompson did more consulting with lawyers to determine what a majority was and informed the BOD, at an emergency meeting March 4, that their failure to recognize the simple majority of 50% plus one was contravening the by-laws — the new amended version (#35).

Thompson said after the meeting, "I was disappointed that the board did not accept the first proposal at the March 1 meeting."

Jeff Burchill, Vice-President; University Affairs and Bryan LeBlanc, an Arts Director, both felt that a 50% plus one was not sufficient for a majority. LeBlanc called it "tyranny of the majority."

Burchill commented that, "Lawyers have their place ... we have the DAC (Dean's Advisory Council) as our lawyers ... other lawyers are not here and do not understand the situation fully."

From the March 4 meeting it was concluded that the Pill was on the Health Plan.

A drive to collect signatures on a petition for a new referendum began on March 12 when advocates of the 'No' side — including some WLUSU directors and members of the LCF — set up a two-hour booth in the Concourse. The petitions were circulated for the following week — including in Wilf's on St. Patrick's Day.

The question arose as to whether there were any by-laws prohibiting the collecting of petitions within Wilf's. According to the WLUSU by-laws it is not illegal.

The petition needed 10% of the eligible voters signatures to even be

considered by Thompson and the BOD.

Thompson and the BOD, according to the by-laws "shall have the power to call a new general election" when a valid petition is submitted. The names and student I.D. numbers were checked carefully and a new referendum was called for April 2.

Karen Bird was nominated to chair the 'No' campaign while Shelley Potter and Tammy Whitehead were

Has democratic exercise killed apathy?

With many, the Pill has been more than just an academic debate on the ethics of its use, or the morals associated with such a device. This has been an exercise of process and a demonstration of procedure within a democratic system. The Pill has simply been a subject, or a tool, which catalyzed debate and demonstrated the need for thorough exchange on issues that effect the entire student body.

Prior to our first referendum, Feb. 5, 1987, there was a lead time of approximately ten days for the members of the Corporation to become familiar with the issues. Secondly, many students were preparing for mid-term examinations. Given these two factors many were not informed about the issues surrounding the addition of the pill to the now existing health plan. Those who did vote were educated about the pill and had an opinion formed concerning its usage. This informed population constituted the 52.3% that voted YES to the addition of the pill to our health plan.

Referendum number two, April 2, 1987, had a two-month lead time. During this period there was considerable publicity concerning contraception in general. WLUSU's promotional campaign using free condoms, along with the national newspapers and television networks not only confronted the average student on campus, it confronted them at home. This resulted in forcing the student to become acquainted with the issue.

As a result of this media campaign considerable opinion was formed within the dailies. Many of these comments acted as opinion leaders to the average student on campus. Students saw these commentators' reaction to the issue on campus. Many saw us (students at Laurier) as leaders in the field of contraception, while many others viewed this situation as tasteless and gauche. The average student opinion was greatly influenced by their main source of information, **The Cord Weekly**. This weekly continuously reviewed the situation and gave each student first-hand information about who and what was involved with the Pill issue.

The **Cord** gave their readers a highly impartial rendition of the day-to-day activities consequently, their representation of the facts allowed many students to shape their own opinions.

More importantly, many were responding to the knowledge that the pill had been placed on the health plan. As such the majority of students responded to what they felt was not feasible. This issue gained greater legitimacy within the

nominated to chair the 'Yes' campaign.

On March 24 Burchill, LeBlanc and Linda Shick, an Arts Director, called a news conference. The three outlined that WLUSU was using the wrong by-laws in dealing with the Pill issue.

All three discussed errors they felt had been made in the handling of the issue by Thompson, the BOD and **The Cord Weekly**. The directors

Letter to the Editor

mind of the average student when a petition began to circulate instructing the Union to have another referendum. Not only would the required 431 signatures be directly aware of this issue, but so too were each of their spheres of influence.

By the time April 2 had arrived many were well-educated and had opinions formed as to how they would vote in this new referendum. This increase in awareness resulted in the highest voter turnout ever experienced within the Union (38%). This of course resulted in a better representation of the student population. The pill would not be included on the health plan.

Who then was to blame for the lack of information during the first referendum: WLUSU, students or each of the campaigns?

WLUSU's job during a referendum is to ensure the rules are followed and the event is well-publicized. This of course was fulfilled via advertising in the **Cord**, banners, posters and open forums. WLUSU was also responsible for ensuring the existence of a "YES" and "NO" campaign. Although the Chief Returning Officer canvassed extensively for individual chairs many refused to participate given the approach of midterm examinations. Chairpersons, however were found to head each campaign.

The Campaign chairs could be accused of not soliciting the members of the Corporation more aggressively. Many could blame them for not publishing enough articles or materials to further orient students on the issues surrounding the pill. Yet how can one measure what is considered to be enough literature to inform the populace? This can only be measured in the form of demand. If people were not requesting information then how could either side of the issue gauge the amount of interest?

The interest must be generated by the average student. In order for a democratic process to work and be representative of the masses that it governs it needs the input of more than just a few. Case-in-point was the February 5 refer-

endum (Ref #1) expressed the hope "never again can a board of directors be allowed to languish in a self-perpetuating sea of ignorance."

The campaigning began on March 23 and an open forum and debate were held on March 26 and 30. Both events had tempers flaring with supporters of both the 'Yes' and 'No' side voicing their opinions loudly.

The referendum was held April 2.

endum (Ref #1)

In this referendum the educated few were able to pass the pill on the health plan. It just so happened that at the time those who were familiar with the issue and approved of the pill were able to outvote those who were opposed. It was not until the April 2 referendum that we saw a record 38% of the student body deciding to vote. Just 6% more voted on April 2 than in February. Translated to raw figures this is approximately 200 persons, just barely enough to change the results in the first referendum. Yet this does not reflect the overwhelming 62.8% of the 'no' voters in the April referendum. Obviously, many who voted in February changed their vote in April to a "NO."

Why, then, would these individuals bother to change their minds? Many, as I already have, would blame it on the lack of information during the first referendum and that once individuals were knowledgeable they were able to make an educated decision. This 6% then reflects the level of ignorance during the first referendum.

Personally, I could not blame this lack of information on the Chairs of each campaign or WLUSU because each group simply did their jobs by the book. The problem stemmed from the lack of involvement and interest generated from our student body. Initially when asked for people to chair committees, many responded by saying " ... no, I am too busy to be bothered."

In the future I would suggest that a referendum of such magnitude have a campaign period greater than ten days to allow thorough debate and give the average voter ... more time to be bothered. Maybe this exercise in democracy has killed apathy on campus.

Brian Thompson

The Cord Weekly special referendum supplement is grudgingly produced by the staff of the **Cord** who are failing an exam so they can bring you this earth-shattering information.

Contributors: Matt Johnston, Cori Ferguson, Erika Sajnovic, Mike Wert, and a cast of tens.

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