

**Preachers' detractors do little but taunt, chide**

To the editor:

A sad testimony to the poverty of public discourse: Outside Student Stores a couple of weeks ago, a fundamentalist preacher attracted a loyal group of detractors — students who congregated around him every afternoon and found amusement in taunting him as he issued his predictable and simplistic moralisms. I'm not sure, though, which was more appalling: this moronic religious zealot or the spectacle of students eager to find a strawman who would satisfy their desire to think that their complacent, petty and resolutely apolitical liberalism constituted a sufficient response to the antagonisms that animated the social formation.

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**New selection process for editor not a cure-all**

To the editor:

Ruffin Hall's dream of converting the editorship of The Daily Tar Heel from an elected position to an appointed one was realized Feb. 11 when a fraction of the student body approved a referendum endorsing the idea.

The move to an appointed editorship is a dramatic development for an award-winning newspaper such as the DTH, and it will be interesting to see whether there is a noticeable improvement in the newspaper's performance. There is no guarantee that the change will be positive. Hall's motivation — a desire to free DTH editors from destructive political squabbles —

is to be commended. However, the strategy Hall adopted was flawed seriously. —

First, supporters of an appointive process have argued that students know so little about what it takes to run the DTH that they cannot be relied upon to select the most qualified candidate. If this is true, why should we believe that these same inept voters are somehow able to elect effective student body presidents? If the ignorant voter theory holds, then student body presidents, as well as other campus officers, also should be chosen through appointive processes.

Second, if supporters of an appointive process do not believe it is proper to allow such a small percentage (fewer than 1,200 votes were cast in the DTH referendum) of the student body to choose DTH editors, then why do they believe it is proper for that same small percentage to have the power to dismantle an elective system that has been in place for nearly seven decades? It's ironic that the same group of voters that cannot be trusted to elect a newspaper editor is allowed to bring about structural change in University life.

Third, the solution put forth by supporters of an appointive process will place greater power in the hands of fewer people. In fact, the change will heighten the power of people such as Hall, who is president of the DTH Board of Directors. In the future, the newspaper's Board of Directors will appoint eight of the 11 members of the committee that will choose an editor. What's next? A panel to appoint weekly columnists?

All this raises the question of why Hall, who says he is concerned about "an educated and informed student voice," believes

that he knows more about what it takes to choose an editor than the other 22,000-plus students enrolled at the University. I, for one, believe I am better qualified than he to decide. In coming years, however, all students who have not schmoozed their way onto the appropriate committee will be shut out of the DTH editorship decisions.

Fourth, supporters have argued that appointive processes are less contentious than old-fashioned, beg-for-the-vote elections. These people obviously missed the recent hullabalos about U.S. Supreme Court nominations and White House chief of staff selections. Appointive politics, for cases in which the constituents care about the job being filled, can be just as ugly and fierce, if not more so, than elective politics. Committee members, for instance, may agree to support one person's bid for the editorship in exchange for a plum job at the paper or for positive coverage of a pet project.

Fifth, recent news articles about the DTH editorship referendum have pointed out that the newspaper has won several awards during the years and has been led by prestigious student editors such as Charles Kuralt and Ed Yoder. Supporters of an appointive process put forth a skewed claim that the elective process must be cast aside if the DTH is to remain successful. What they failed to acknowledge, however, is that the DTH has achieved great successes with the very process they condemn.

The new appointive process could well create another layer of blue-ribbon bureaucracy that produces sterile, mediocre editors who threaten no one and accommodate everyone. A few of the committee members will want Candidate A.

Others will prefer Candidate B, so the group will compromise by choosing someone who came in second on everyone's list.

Finally, the most disturbing thing about the decision to convert the editorship to an appointive post is that Hall and others who led the charge behaved like third-graders who stumbled upon a freshly poured concrete patio and who were unable to resist the urge to scribble their initials into the surface. Their overriding goal was to find some way — any way — to leave their mark on the University, no matter how severely the alteration might disfigure the experience of campus life for future students.

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**Letters policy**

The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticisms. We attempt to print as many letters to the editor as space permits. When writing letters, please follow these guidelines:

- Letters should be limited to 400 words, although longer letters are accepted. However, the shorter the letter, the better chance it has of running.

- If you want your letter published, sign and date it. No more than two signatures.

- All letters must be typed and double spaced.

- Include your year in school, major, phone number and hometown.

- If you have a title that is relevant to your letter's subject, please include it.

- The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarity.

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