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Penn State student fees used to fund transsexual's speech

By Ellen Sorokin
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A Pennsylvania State University group's use of student fees to pay a supporter of the North American Man-Boy Love Association to speak on campus has sparked criticism from students, state lawmakers and taxpayers.

The Womyn's Concerns group hired Patrick Califia Rice, a transsexual author of sadomasochistic books and a backer of NAMBLA — an organization promoting legalization of sex between men and boys — to speak last month at a women's health conference.

Mr. Rice spoke about his experiences as a female-to-male transsexual.

"Would the university allow David Duke or Osama bin Laden to speak at an on-campus event? Obviously not," said William Devlin, president of the Urban Family Council in Philadelphia.

"If they want to promote these pathologies, let them do it on their own dime, not on the backs of taxpayers of Pennsylvania. This has become an embarrassment," said Mr. Devlin, whose group is asking university alumni to withhold donations and parents not to send their children to the school because of several similar incidents.

The three-day conference, in-

cluding Mr. Rice's visit, was funded with student activity fees.

Besides Mr. Rice's appearance, the conference also held workshops on bisexuality, abortion and homosexual Disney characters.

"It's really embarrassing when I go home and hear people talk about these kinds of events at Penn State," said Rick Smith, 21, a business logistics major and former member of the university's student government. "These types of events don't help our image at all."

University spokesman Tysen Kendig said students' freedom of speech always comes first. Mr. Kendig said the university's student affairs department monitors the events and counsels student groups on what is within the boundaries of good taste before the groups host an event.

"We have to be careful we're not infringing on a student's rights," Mr. Kendig said. "Protecting those rights is the most important thing to us."

One university official said that when he found out about the event, he called the host group to make sure that no one younger than 18 would be admitted. The official also said he "deeply" regretted that the group invited Mr. Rice.

Womyn's Concerns could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The event is the latest in a string of incidents at Penn State that has

enraged state legislators and local pro-family groups.

In 2000, the same group held a festival that was given the name of a vulgar term for female genitalia.

Last year, the same group organized an event called Sex Faire, which featured games designed to help students become more comfortable using sexual language. The group also wanted to operate a "Tent of Consent," a closed-off spot where students would have been allowed two minutes of consensual behavior. School officials rejected the idea. In addition, Larry Flynt, publisher of Hustler magazine, accepted an invitation last year to speak at the university.

The recent incidents so angered state Rep. John Lawless, a Democrat, that he called on the state legislature last spring to cut all funding to Penn State. As a result, the state House voted to cut nearly \$10,000 from the university's appropriations budget, but the Senate rejected it.

Yesterday, Mr. Lawless said there is nothing he can do to keep the events out of Penn State because there aren't enough votes within the legislature.

"Unfortunately, football is much more important at Penn State than morality in education," Mr. Lawless said. "Frankly, for some here, voting against Penn State is like for them voting against Mom and apple pie."