

Trustees approve same-sex benefits

Domestic partner benefits package narrowly passes by a 5 - 4 margin

LEONARD CRIST | *The Jambar*

Same-sex domestic partner benefits have been extended to all Youngstown State University employees after the YSU Board of Trustees voted Thursday to approve a measure extending the benefits.

"It's about time," said retired YSU professor Glorianne Leck moments after the measure passed.

"I think it's wonderful news

and I think it makes YSU aligned with the other major universities in the state in supporting diversity," Leck said.

The board narrowly passed the measure, with four of the nine trustees — William Bresnahan, Scott Schulick, Chander Kholi and Donald Cagigas — vocally opposing the measure, citing economic concerns.

"This is a very substantial expense," Bresnahan said. "The

\$60,000 price tag, which has been quoted on this, may or may not be the actual cost."

Any extra costs incurred will come out of students' tuition, Bresnahan said.

Cagigas said YSU should be looking for ways to decrease the cost of health benefits and find ways so the burden does not fall on the shoulders of students.

Pogue countered that the monetary costs are but one aspect of the true cost YSU faces

on this issue. The value of faculty, basic fairness and equality all factor in on the decision, he said.

"The cost of fairness and equity ... outweighed the financial cost," Pogue said.

Board President Larry Esterly agreed with Pogue, but said he understood the opposition's position.

"I think there are other considerations surrounding this issue beyond economic issues. I think the point made by trustee

Bresnahan is very, very well taken. It's hard to estimate what the costs will be for this," Esterly said. "One of the objectives of this university is the diversity objective. I see this vote as consistent with serving that diversity objective."

L. J. Tessier, professor of philosophy and religious studies, said she was thrilled with Thursday's decision, but she felt the plan was not comparable

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to the benefits offered to traditionally married couples.

"I see on the form that one, in order to apply for these benefits, would agree to pay a 10 percent co-pay. My colleagues don't pay anything," Tessier said. She also said there is no tuition remission in the new plan, a benefit offered to married couples.

"It's a move in the right direction, but it still seems to me that we are being told, 'Yes, we recognize that you have partners and you have families, but we're not prepared to give you equity,'" Tessier said.

Tessier's partner Tara

McKibben, who has multiple sclerosis and a seizure disorder, said the monthly cost of her medication alone is more than what she gets from social security.

"Having the healthcare benefits through YSU is going to be amazing. I'll be able to get the treatment that I need," McKibben said.

"It becomes impossible to stay where Tara can't get medical care," Tessier said. "We're desperate and need these medical benefits more than I can possibly say. I am extremely grateful that the university is making this move."

But even with the extension of domestic partner benefits, Tessier said she is worried the benefits may be blocked if

Issue 1, the Ohio ballot initiative against gay marriage, passes in today's election.

"Issue 1 is a disaster. Issue 1 is the most backward looking legislation I have ever seen. I'm frightened about it," Tessier said.

Pogue said he believes that if Issue 1 passes, it will bar YSU from offering the new benefits, but he said he feels there are significant legal challenges that can be made if it passes.

He added that there was no political motivation behind bringing the domestic partner benefits measure before the board so close to the election.

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