

Poker For Guns Draws Players, No Protests

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November 25, 2015

After all the anticipatory hubbub over the Young American's for Liberty Nov. 20 Liberty Poker Night at UO's Erb Memorial Union — during which the YAL's local chapter was denied event funding by the UO student government — the tournament itself was a surprisingly tame event. Among the predominantly male crowd, not a single protester appeared.

Thomas Tullis, co-present of YAL's UO chapter, said Monday he was disappointed that not one person who tried to shut down poker night actually showed up to protest the event. "We're encouraging free expression and we want to encourage discussion," Tullis says. "It's disappointing that more people care about silencing us than they do about voicing their own opinion."

According to Tullis, the poker tournament was "explicitly a protest of the concealed carry ban on campus," which he says "is essentially a failed gun-control policy and it doesn't work. It just makes campus more dangerous, statistically."

When pressed about supporting data, Tullis cites several CATO Institute studies, including one arguing that repealing the concealed-carry ban on Colorado campuses has prevented at least once school shooting.

In a letter to UO President Michael Schill sent Nov. 18 by Ari Z. Cohn, a senior program officer of the Philadelphia-based nonprofit Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), Cohn argues that, since the prize firearms would not be brought on campus, the YAL event did not violate the university's no-gun policy. The UO student government cannot deny funding the tournament "on the basis that it may make others feel subjectively 'uncomfortable,'" Cohn writes, noting that there is no prior restraint on free speech, no matter how unpopular.

The letter calls upon Schill to reverse "this unwise and unconstitutional ban on student expression," asking that the UO president respond to the letter by Nov. 20.

EW called the UO president's office to find out if Cohn's letter had been addressed and was instructed to call Tobin Klinger, senior director of public affairs. "Honestly, I don't know where that stands," Klinger said, and offered to get back to *EW*. As of press time, however, the UO had not offered a response.

Tullis says that, as the hype surrounding the poker night dies down, the real story might be the response, or the lack thereof, of the administration. "Of course we're trying to be controversial," Tullis says. "When you stir stuff up and challenge people's ideas, that's when learning starts."

He says it's possible the UO admin could overturn the ASUO's decision, and that funding could still come through. "The most exciting aspect of the event could be yet to come," Tullis adds.

In the interest of full disclosure, an *EW* reporter won his first hand (three-of-a-kind) at the YAL tournament, then busted flat for the rest of the night. Every poker player received a copy of the U.S. Constitution, courtesy of YAL.