



Student exec accused of rigging draw, hiring friend

Neal Hall

Vancouver Sun

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

In order to lure students of the iPod generation to attend a special general meeting last September of the Kwantlen University College Student Association, \$13,000 in prizes were offered, including MP3 players, TVs, DVD players and an \$8,000 grand prize for a tropical vacation.

However, documents filed in B.C. Supreme Court allege that not only was \$8,000 spent on prizes not authorized by student council, but the prize draw was rigged, "with the grand prize not being drawn randomly but rather drawn in a manner designed to ensure that a friend of the [then student association] chair, Aaron Takhar, won the grand prize."

The legal action also alleges that Takhar decided not to run for re-election to the Kwantlen Student Association earlier this year but was hired as an executive adviser to the KSA and is now making \$115,727 a year -- more than double the salary and benefits of the previous person hired for the job.

Takhar, contacted Tuesday, denied he was making that much but wouldn't reveal the amount he is being paid. He also denied rigging the prize draw.

"These are allegations. We don't pay attention to this kind of stuff," he said.

Court documents allege that the student association has been dominated by a student political party called Reduce All Fees (RAF), led by Takhar, which changed the KSA's bylaws and ousted four rival members of the student association at the special general meeting last September seconds before the \$13,000 in prizes were given away.

The legal action claims that Takhar said before the vote:

"Okay, before we get to what this is about, we have a lot of people who have come here for one reason, which is to win prizes, so why don't we take a show of hands first as to who is interested in reading -- this has been posted for three weeks now so if you haven't had a chance to read this 200-page document, unless you want to read it right now -- so if we can just . . . have a show of hands, who wants to get prizes?"

"Can we have [chair raises his arm] in favour of the motion so we can get straight to the prizes: iPods, DVDs, a trip to Mexico?"

The court document states:

"No more than 30 people raised their hands in response to the chair's question, which, if that question was the resolution to amend the [student association] bylaws, was considerably less than the 75 per cent of the votes cast by those in attendance at the SGM required to pass such a special resolution . . ."

The legal action claims most people didn't read the fine print in the document, which stated the new bylaws would reduce the number of elected students from 20 to nine and double their terms of office to 2 years.

The legal action alleged that the motion purportedly passed, without the chair counting or announcing the result of the vote, also included a motion to expel four rival elected members of the KSA: Mathew Huff, Steven Lee, Johnny Woo and Laura Anderson.

Lee and the ousted student councillors recently launched a legal action in B.C. Supreme Court, asking the court to declare that the special general meeting of the KSA last Sept. 29 was not properly called, the bylaws weren't properly adopted and the expulsion of the four student councillors has no force and effect.

The petitioners were also seeking to have the court declare the last KSA general election in January as null and void because of voting irregularities, including a poll clerk unlocking a ballot box and putting his hand inside the box.

As well, the legal action alleges that Takhar appointed a chief returning officer for the election, Amar Randhawa, without approval of the student council or executive, and paid Randhawa a \$20,000 retainer.

"Mr. Takhar advised Laura Anderson and members of the executive that Mr. Randhawa was an employee of Intercultural Ethnic Communications Inc., a consulting agency that deals with non-profit society elections," court documents claim. "Intercultural Ethnic Communications Inc. does not exist."

The petitioners were seeking a new election for this fall and were prepared to argue their case in court this week, but the respondents -- Takhar, current KSA president Danish Butt, treasurer Jatinder (Joey) Atwal, and student council members Jaivan Khatari and Ajay Cheema -- consented to a new election to be held Oct. 19.

The consent order approved by the court also reinstates two ousted student councillors, Steven Lee and Laura Anderson, to an interim student council that includes eight existing KSA members, including Butt.

"Ultimately, I am glad that we were able to find a resolution to this matter and that the students of Kwantlen will be able to run in and vote in a properly run election this fall," Lee said Tuesday.

"I think we got an excellent settlement," said Anderson, who spent money out of her own pocket to file the legal action.

She said she was frustrated that Kwantlen's administration was unsupportive of a group of concerned students who brought the KSA problems to the attention of the administration.

Anderson, who plans to attend law school once she completes her criminology degree, said she is looking forward to seeing KSA's financial statements to find out how it got into such a "horrid mess" financially even though it recently raised student fees by almost 21 per cent. She claims the KSA is \$200,000 in debt, which Takhar denies.

"We're not in debt, as far as I know," Takhar said. "We're here to represent students and that's what we'd like to do."

Kwantlen spokesman Peter Chevrier said the college takes student complaints seriously but has no authority to meddle in the internal affairs of the student association.

"It's politics. Each side complains about the other," he said. "We do care about our students."

nhall@png.canwest.com

© The Vancouver Sun 2006

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2006 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.