

NSL — lobby with a purpose

By VALERIE MCINTYRE

Editor's note: McIntyre has been active in University student political activities for several years. She was recently selected Region I board member for the National Student Lobby.

For years the largest and most powerful labor unions, corporations, and business interests have had well-staffed and well-financed lobbying operations in Washington to protect and further their interests. The popular myth surrounding these lobbying organizations is characterized by men walking the Halls of Congress with bags of money "buying votes" and promising political support for certain candidates at election time. As a myth this picture of lobbying is easier to believe in than to prove. As with most institutions in Washington, the reality is far from the public image.

In reality, lobbying includes a broad variety of activities and is much more complex than simply trading votes for money or political support. In some respects the most important work done by lobbying organizations is the presentation of information and perspective to Representatives and Senators concerning a specific issue. To build the best possible case for a certain viewpoint, good lobbyists rely on factual evidence pertinent to the issue and real support from a voting constituency. With regard to the latter, the student constituency we represent, a few things are important to keep in mind considering student lobbyists.

Students now enfranchised

Unlike other constituencies, students have been recently enfranchised by the 26th amendment to the Constitution. It is still a relatively "unknown constituency" and Representatives are interested in talking with students about issues of national importance.

Larry Salmony, Jeff Jefferson, Ray Cotton, and myself - representing the state of Oregon - were among the 700 students from 140 colleges in 43 states who went to Washington D.C. last month.

The students were gathered there by the National Student Lobby, an 18 month-old organization that counts about 220 colleges as dues-paying members (\$50 plus 1 cent per student). Those colleges enroll about 1.5 million students.

It has a voluntary staff of three full-time professionals, plus about a dozen intern students.

This was the second time the lobby had brought a large corps of students to the capitol. A year ago 400 students went to Washington to lobby for the higher education bill.

After financial aid

The lobby's top priority this year is full funding for traditional federal student-aid programs such as educational opportunity grants, work-study, and direct student loans, plus funding for the newly authorized basic opportunity grants, which would aid middle-income and low-income students.

The Nixon Administration has asked for funds for work-study and the basic-grants program but nothing for the opportunity grants. It also wants the direct loans to be phased out.

The students' other priorities include: Defeat of a bill that would allow employers to hire students who are under 21 and non-students under 18 at 80 percent of the minimum wage; passage of a bill that would permit youth discount fares on airlines, (the Civil Aeronautics Board

recently ordered elimination of the discounts); passage of a bill preventing federal and state authorities from forcing reporters to disclose confidential information or sources to disclose confidential information of sources of information, (the bill is of special interest to student newspaper editors, many of whom are among the leaders of the lobby).

Limiting war powers

The students are also backing such legislation as limiting the President's war-making powers, stopping foreign aid to military and colonial governments, restricting the influence of multinational corporations on U.S. foreign policy, using highway trust funds for mass transit and bicycle paths, allowing voters to register by mail, and funding campus daycare centers.

(A more detailed analysis of this and other student related legislation shall appear in future editions of the Emerald).

So far the students have been surprisingly effective. In the battle over the 1972 higher education bill we were more successful than the traditional higher education lobbies (according to the Chronicle of Higher Education 3-12-73). The students backed Senator Pell (D-RI) whose major proposals were included in the bill finally adopted by Congress.

This year the students expect to work more closely with the American Council on Education and other associations because all are working for full funding of the programs included in the 1972 legislation. The students also won Senate approval of an amendment expressing the "sense of Congress" that students should be included on college governing boards. In the final bill, however, the resolution was watered down to say that colleges should "give consideration" to such a step.

The NSL staff in Washington has the experience and research resources to effectively represent students on a wide range of issues before Congress. Also, NSL represents students before executive agencies on issues such as airline youth fares, Price Commission policies on tuition and student rentals, and Office of Education Task Forces.

The current executive director is Layton Olson, a 1967 graduate of the University of California Law School and a member of the Illinois bar.

Writes fund proposals

The Lobby has helped students write funding proposals for foundations and government, to participate on government advisory committees which write guidelines and review grants, and helps with appointments and other arrangements whenever students are in Washington.

If you are in Washington for a few days, you can use the NSL facilities to lobby. Also, students and recent graduates from member schools across the country may work full-time at NSL for a semester, quarter, or summer. Interns receive academic credit and a first-hand education on how the Washington political system works. An intern also becomes a representative of his or her own school's or state lobby's interests in Washington. When interns return home they are well trained to work with local lobbying efforts, voter registration drives or political campaigns.

NSL keeps its members informed through a twice-monthly Legislative Report, through voting-record posters, and special mailings and telephone calls. These communications detail upcoming legislation, administrative regulations,

governmental funding deadlines for student projects and other information.

Six NSL regions

The U.S. is broken into six NSL regions, each of which selects two members for the NSL Board of Directors.

Region I is broken into two sections: the Northwestern states, and Southwestern states. I was elected by Region 1 to represent the Northwestern section (which includes Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska).

Responsibilities of board members include:

Legal responsibilities for a non-profit District of Columbia corporation (NSL).

Determining organizational and business priorities.

Maintaining close contact with student governments and state student lobbies in the region.

Arranging contributions from various sources.

Arranging for interns to work with NSL in Washington who later work with state student lobbies.

Assisting Planning and Administration of NSL Annual Conferences including giving briefings, and coordinating lobbying activities for various states and their delegates.

Currently the NSL is trying to encourage students to establish lobbies in every state to support the national effort and to lobby with their own legislatures over state and local issues. Most of the states have some kind of student lobbying with state legislatures, although not all have formal ongoing organizations. The University of Oregon and OSU are the only schools within the state with any type of legislative offices.

In 1969, a Gallup survey showed that "71 percent of the students said they would consider working as part-time volunteers if there were projects operating in or near their college community." The number of young people who show up for political campaigns, walk-a-thons, volunteer organizations etc., proved the existence of a great concern among student populations about their political and social environment.

Students consider volunteering

The question then is where are they the day after the elections? Why do they stop expressing their concern? The answer was touched on by the Gallup people: students would consider volunteer work "...if there were projects operating in or near their college community."

Presently, it is very difficult for a person who is concerned with their surroundings to create desired change. They simply do not know what to do or where to start. And they do not have the necessary facilities or the expertise to undertake a social or political commitment.

First, there needs to be a means for students to be informed. They must know what is happening and then be able to channel input to those making decisions affecting their concerns. Secondly, there needs to be coordination between student groups in the state so that they can benefit from solutions to mutual problems. These require that an agency, heretofore non-existent, be established to perform these functions and give students an identifiable, responsible, significant place in society.

Oregon lobbying a priority

Consequently, the first priority of the local NSL Office will be the establishment of legislative programs to coordinate and

generate student programming on all campuses in Oregon. Determining the operational relationship between this office and other pre-established organizations such as Oregon Student Association (OSA), Inter-Institutional Union of Students (IUS), Oregon Community College Student Association (OCCSA), and Legislative Coordinators shall be deliberated later this term.

The eventual development of a state umbrella-type office in Salem to coordinate these existing organizations will evolve before the next legislative session begins.

This agency will act as a clearinghouse for all student organizations around the state. It will develop an awareness in students of the social and political system as it relates to them. Then, through the umbrella agency, their input will be channeled into the most strategic areas.

A statewide magazine (to be paid for by advertising) will be developed. It will include issues, developments, ideas, programs, research, opportunities and anything else which would have an impact on students. Written with the Oregon college and university person in mind, it could include research and articles by students who have something they wish to receive statewide attention.

The means for a student to pursue a topic or issue to realization must be provided by making available the resources (such as office space, information files) and contacts in the governmental realm, expertise, and special guidance that may be needed.

Establish relevant programs

The establishment of relevant academic programs and opportunities will be another priority. These programs will be monitored from their inception until they are fully implemented to insure the necessary student input is provided. Special reading and conference courses will be promoted in all Oregon schools. In connection with these special courses, intern programs in the governmental and private sectors must be further developed so students can make practical use of their knowledge.

Work must also be done with HEW, the State Department of Education financial aid offices, educational institutions, etc., to provide student input into the development of educational planning and programming.

Beyond membership and continuing participation in such political organizations as NSL, the organization of our own state lobby force is the obvious move for student governments in Oregon. It will begin here, at the University where there is the leadership, direction, and motivation to pull together the fragmented legislative attempts. (The University is the leadership center of the state in terms of the statewide positions held by its students. The IUS, OSA, the strongest student legislative effort, and the regional NSL Office are all based at this campus).

If a state student lobby can develop and remain responsive and responsible to student opinions and demands through statewide referendums etc., the organization will prosper. With a legitimacy in operation, the power to effect legislation will naturally follow. The potential to influence the decision making process through these kinds of efforts has been realized in California and other states where known and respected lobbies are operated by students.

If you are interested in more information about NSL or would consider working with the program, please call me, x4360 (Legislative Coordinators Office, 309 EMU).