

OECC — OEA: Who will win the struggle?

SALEM — One of the most fascinating power struggles this session has been the effort by the Oregon Educational Association (OEA) — the state's most influential teachers' lobby — to kill the Oregon Educational Coordinating Commission (OECC).

Created in 1975, the OECC was that Legislature's latest attempt at coming to grips with Oregon's often uneven educational policies.

Primarily an advisory body, the commission gathers and analyzes facts, monitors the activities of education policy making boards and makes policy recommendations to the Legislature and governor.

The OEA is actively lobbying House members to kill the OECC's budget, which is up for a vote this week. The reason the

ways reflect the views of the OEA or other educational groups.

Other groups that oppose the OECC include the Oregon School Board Association, the Confederation of School Administrators and Oregon's community college presidents, who say the OECC's power to veto proposed new community college programs — if they have an adverse impact on another segment of education — undermines the control of local community college boards.

The OEA has particularly objected to the OECC's recommendations in the area of school curriculum, decisions the OEA thinks should be made at the local level. They also resent the OECC's philosophy that strings of "accountability" should be attached to the \$1 billion the state contributes to education every year. In total, the OEA's main criticism is that the OECC is superfluous because the State Boards of Education and Higher Education are equipped to coordinate educational policy.

But even members of both boards admit that coordination between the two has often been lacking.

"There's a lot of turf protecting," says Sedley Stuart, a Board of Education member. "We jealously guard grades K through 12, and the community colleges, while the state system looks out for the four-year schools. When I first came aboard, I was appalled at the lack of coordination because without it you can't have a good educational system."

Another obstacle to coordinating, or even creating, policy is the lack of time. Both boards tend to get bogged down in minor, administrative decisions that demand immediate attention at the expense of policy decisions which can be postponed indefinitely.

As Louis Perry, chairer of the Board of Higher Education, remarked, "We're always saddled with a specific agenda so there is never enough time to discuss pol-

icy. Someday I hope we'll be able to have a meeting with no agenda, just one subject to attack."

Some legislators and education groups say the Legislature should perform the coordinating role the OECC is charged with. But most seem to feel that with \$1 billion at stake, the job should be entrusted to a separate agency representing no special interest, and with a stable membership.

"For continuity in information and direction, you need a stable, intermediate group," says Sen. Ed Fadeley, D-Eugene, chairer of the Joint Ways and Means Education Subcommittee, who chaired the Senate Education Committee when it passed legislation creating the OECC in 1975.

analysis

"I'd be nervous about the two-year shift in legislative committees," he added. "The members of my subcommittee are more interested in community colleges this session, next time it could be K through 12."

Aside from the education lobbies, most of the response to the OECC's work has been positive. According to one Ways and Means staffer, the OECC's forte is whittling away at the arguments of anyone who is grinding an ax in behalf of a special interest.

"They wear away all the rhetoric and arguments with facts," he said. "By the time the issue reaches the Legislature, the quick retorts have been eliminated and the real issues are staring you in the face."

The OECC budget bill passed the Senate easily last week and indications are that it will pass the House despite the heavy OEA lobby effort.

One of the reasons the OEA may lose

their fight is that quite a few legislators doubt whether the OEA's position accurately reflects the rank and file.

A memo sent by the OEA to House members last month states, "Our bright legislators must be made aware that the teachers in Oregon, all of whom are taxpayers of one sort or another, are united in their belief that the expansion of the bureaucracy should have stopped short of this watchdog body."

But Jacqueline Rogers, an OEA member who sits on the OECC's advisory commission, says she thinks most teachers don't know what the OECC is.

"I don't think teachers were even aware of its existence until the OEA took its position," said Rogers. "All of this activity had been coming from the leadership and not the members."

A frequently voiced criticism about the OECC is that they have the best of both worlds, being able to make policy recommendations but not having to administer them.

"They get a lot of press and consequently have a big stick in getting their point out to the public," said Chris Dudley, a representative of the Oregon School Board Association. "They can throw rocks at glass houses, with no responsibility for what happens."

T.K. Olsen, the executive director of the OECC, admits the OECC is in a comfortable position, but that the true challenge will come when the agency has to evaluate the outcome of its own recommendations.

"Will the OECC be able to objectively evaluate what we told the Legislature to do?" asked Olsen. "And if need be, will we be able to say, 'Gee, what a disaster, that advice we gave you was a crock?'"

Whatever the outcome, it will make for interesting watching during the 1979 Legislature.

By MARY BETH BOWEN
Of the Emerald

OEA wants the OECC out of the picture is simple: The OEA feels its power is weakened by the OECC's presence and could be even further weakened in the future.

With 8,000 teachers, large campaign coffers and a well-organized, grass roots network that can produce "constituent" response within 24 hours, the OEA has become very influential with Oregon legislators in recent years.

Prior to the OECC's existence, it was the OEA that provided the Legislature with much of the information about elementary and secondary education. By being selective about the information they provided, the OEA was often able to determine which issues were addressed by the Legislature — and which were not.

With the advent of the OECC, the Legislature is now being supplied with information and recommendations that don't al-

Fate of student issues hangs on Legislature's purse strings

By MARY BETH BOWEN
Of the Emerald

SALEM — The fate of the "high priority" bills of the Oregon Student Lobby (OSL) probably will be decided this week and next.

Unfortunately, the attention of most students will be turned not to Salem, but to the joys of summer vacation.

Most of the OSL bills have price tags and consequently are sitting

•Tuition Freeze for Resident Undergraduates — Also a part of HB 2414, this proposal seems to have a good chance of winning subcommittee approval. The OSL has lobbied for a freeze on all tuition, but it appears that there is more sympathy for helping resident undergraduates.

•Financial Aid for Middle Income Students — Gov. Bob Straub is supporting a \$2.6 million appropriation bill to extend finan-

The State Board of Higher Education opposes charging the differential and would rather continue current tuition charges. What the subcommittee will do is impossible to predict.

•Women's Athletics — The State Board of Higher Education is asking for \$1 million to fund minor sports for women. HB 3147 hasn't been heard by the subcommittee yet and if funds are short, probably will have little chance of passing.

•Day Care for Low-Income Students — The chairer of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee #4, Rep. Howard Cherry, D-Portland, has said the \$3.65 million appropriation bill, HB 2459, has little chance of subcommittee approval. However, Cherry says if full funding isn't approved, he will support a pilot day care program at the University, with a price tag under \$1 million.

•Student Faculty Evaluations — HB 2702 is bogged down in the Senate Education Committee with Sen. Tony Meeker, R-Amity, holding the key vote. If approved by the committee and the Senate, the bill would become law.

Sales extension slated for House

SALEM — The House is scheduled to vote this week on a conference committee report on SB 500 which would allow retailers to sell existing stocks of aerosol spray containing fluorocarbon propellants until Sept. 1. The report was approved 17-12 in the Senate.

cial aid eligibility to students with family incomes from \$12,500 to \$15,500, while the OSL is backing a \$4.4 million appropriation, SB 5557, that would extend aid to the \$17,500 bracket as well as to part-time students. Sen. Ed Fadeley, D-Eugene, has said he thinks there is enough money to finance both the tuition freeze and the financial aid appropriations; other subcommittee members don't seem so sure.

•Graduate Tuition Increases — Straub and the Oregon Educational Coordinating Commission support increasing all graduate tuition and charging non-resident graduates more than residents.

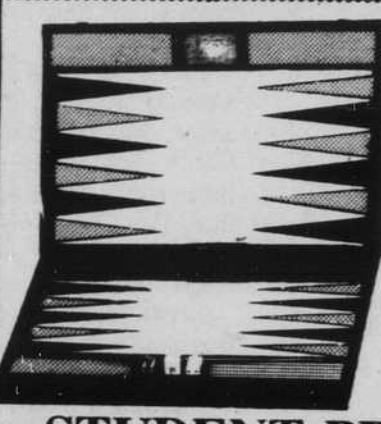
Legislative Issues

in the Joint Ways and Means Education Subcommittee. Their passage depends on two factors: how the subcommittee members vote and how much money is left over after the Legislature decides on a school finance program.

Here is a status report on how the bills are progressing:

•Consumer Price Index Proposal — HB 2414 would limit increases in resident undergraduate tuition to no more than the increase in the Portland Consumer Price Index. The subcommittee hasn't discussed the bill yet; the OSL is lobbying to expand the bill's eligibility to include all students.

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