

Community television petition fizzling

By KEVIN HARDEN
Of the Emerald

With less than a week before its deadline, a petition that would put Eugene's cable television franchise agreement on a special election ballot is falling nearly 6,000 signatures short of its goal.

Don Chalmers, head of the Coalition for Community Television says the petition, circulated in Eugene during the past month, has only 500 of the necessary



Legislative Issues

lars spent those two years, went to higher education. In this biennium, \$311,932,282, about 14.5 percent of general fund expenditures okayed, is earmarked for higher ed.

Comparisons have also been computed for support expressed in amounts per \$1,000 of personal income. In the period from 1967-69 to 1977-79 support of higher ed dropped from \$10.9/\$1,000 to \$9.12/\$1,000.

During the same period, though, state support for all of post-secondary education remained constant at \$12.58. As support for higher ed declined, the dollars sent to Community Colleges increased from \$1.64-\$1,000 to \$3.03-\$1,000 and money given to the State Scholarship Commission grew from virtually nothing in 1967-69 to \$.43-\$1,000 in 1977-79.

Boyd says money spent in one area of education decreases the pot available to other institutions.

"It's not some kind of theological defect on legislators part, it's just fiscal reality. There's an intricate balance that they're trying to strike, not like a scale balance but like a chandelier balance with a whole host of things that have to be in perfect adjustment."

State Sen. Ed. Fadeley, D-Eugene-Springfield, sits on Ways and Means, the legislative committee that allocates state money. He agrees that higher ed has gotten by on less than it needs, but says it's been their own fault.

"Because higher education has been slow to adjust to a decline in the enrollment, fewer students are coming but the same number of faculty members are still there to draw salaries, we have not adequately supported higher education."

Boyd counters that the system is changing to meet a new role. Besides, he says, higher education is still catching up.

"We never got compensated for the increased workload when it was occurring and now that it's not increasing, the Legislature's saying 'You don't have any reasons for asking for more money now.' So it's a real Catch-22 situation."

Summing it all up in a simple statement, Boyd says, "Oregon once looked generous to higher education and it certainly does not now."

Chancellor Roy Liauallen, who heads the staff of the State Board of Higher Education, says appearances depend on the viewer's perspective.

"Oregon is in the top quartile in the nation in terms of per capita

6,400 signatures to the the franchise agreement to a public vote.

The petition is the second to be circulated in Lane County. If successful, it would force a vote on the cable television franchise between Eugene, Springfield and Lane County and the Teleprompter of Oregon Company.

The franchise was adopted by the Metropolitan Cable Television/Translator Commission in last August and gives Teleprompter an exclusive 15-year contract to provide cable television service to the county.

A petition circulated in Springfield two months ago failed to gather the necessary signatures to bring the franchise, already approved by the Springfield City Council, to a vote.

Eugene's petition isn't failing because of apathy, Chalmers says. It is having trouble overcoming the post-election blues.

"A lot of people who are politically involved in Eugene are resting after a big election campaign," he explains. "People who would traditionally be out helping us are just taking a big sigh of relief after

the election. I hope that they will recover in time for us to get our signatures by Nov. 22."

Chalmers says the petition is the CCT's last chance to bring the franchise agreement to a vote. After the agreement is signed by the county and two city governments, a special election would be impossible.

The CCT may be able to force some action, Chalmers says, because of an anti-trust lawsuit against Teleprompter by Eugene attorney Charles Porter. That lawsuit, which claims the negotiations between the cable commission and Teleprompter didn't involve adequate competition from outside cable companies, received a tentative okay from the Oregon Court of Appeals two months ago.

"That's one of our ace-in-the-hole items," Chalmer says. "No matter what people feel about the franchise, it's very clear from the correspondence from the various cable companies that there is a tremendous amount of collusion that goes on."

Whether that collusion violates the Sherman Anti-Trust Act hasn't been determined, Chalmers says. Letters solicited from cable companies around the nation by the cable commission during negotiations last summer, showed the companies were reluctant to

compete with Teleprompter.

If the lawsuit fails, the CCT will continue to work for a community television channel, Chalmers says.

"We're certainly not going to give up the ghost if we don't win on this petition drive. We have a lot of obligations to the community, and one of those is to try to create some quality public TV."

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support of higher education. But Oregon serves a much higher percentage of its population in public higher education than is true in many other states. When you translate that per capita expenditure into dollars per student it comes out below the national average. And that's where the rubber meets the road, in the expenditure per student."

Liauallen says that dichotomy causes problems at the Legislature.

"We're complaining about the level of support per student and the Legislature responds saying 'but we are giving you a high level of per capita support'."

Besides a decline in support relative to the state's total budget, the past decade saw student unrest centered on this campus. State Rep. Mary Burrows, R-North Eugene, admits legislative support of higher education has declined.

"Part of that, I think, is that there's still somewhat of a mistrust because of the problems of the late '60s. That mistrust is still in the community and it's had an impact; wrong, but it's had an impact."

Boyd accepts Burrow's contention.

"I can't point to any instance of

seeing it in the Legislature, but if a legislator says it's there, I believe it. I see it when I go around the state talking to various organizations. It's still true that 10 years later people will come up to me after the talk and when they really want to do is vent their anger at the University for the outrageous behavior it either allowed or encouraged."

But, Senate Pres., Jason Boe, D-Reedsport, says student unrest isn't an issue anymore.

"I was involved in the Legislature during those years and I don't see any of that left. The Legislature is pretty well satisfied that this generation of students is a very responsible group of people."

Whatever the role student unrest of the past plays in today's allocations, attention is beginning to focus on the upcoming session, which starts in January. Both the tax reform measures on last week's ballot failed but the message was clear; the Legislature must answer the concerns of the middle-class, which feels over-taxed and unfairly burdened. Those involved in higher education are scrambling to assure that that answer doesn't leave higher ed further short-changed.

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