

OSL lobbyist senses success

Bernau swaps sit-ins for legislative lobbying

By SALLY HODGKINSON
Of the Emerald

With only one hour of sleep in the last two days, Jim Bernau is tired. "I don't usually smoke," he apologizes through a puff of cigarette haze. "I have to have something to keep me going." But Bernau's enthusiasm and dedication to his job as executive coordinator of the Oregon Student Lobby overrides his fatigue and the cigarette smoke.

"I will not accept anything less than 100 percent effort by the OSL in seeking our legislation," he says. "If I have my way, we will be as successful this session as we've been in the past."

Although apathy is a word often used to describe today's students, Bernau says there are more students involved with change than ever before.

"If apathy means putting down a picket sign, putting on a suit and using research and facts to build your case, maybe we need a different definition of apathy," he says.

"There are times when carrying signs is appropriate and there are times when you have to fight with facts, not noise," he says.

One of the best ways to initiate change is through the legislature, Bernau says. "Students were challenged to go through the system to make changes. The problem with that is people who make that challenge — and don't make it — make it very hard for us to go through the system."

Since its birth in 1975, the OSL has been instrumental in passing legislation allowing students to use collective bargaining, freezing resident tuition and increasing financial aid funds \$1.5 million over the governor's recommendations, Bernau says.

"The OSL has a good reputation," he says proudly. "Some of the best research in the country is being done by us."

OSL priorities for this legislative session include a freeze on resident tuition, release of faculty evaluation results, a teacher improvement project and minimum wages for student workers.

The chances for accomplishing these goals looks good, Bernau says. "They would not be our priorities unless there was a reasonable chance that the Legislature will pass them. We need to convince the Legislature to make them their priorities too."

A bill that would mandate release of faculty and course evaluations has been reworked from a similar bill that died last session. The changes, which include provisions for faculty rebuttals to evaluations, have increased the chances for passage this session, says Bernau.

"With all the obstacles that were put in our way by the administration and the chancellor, it's unfair to say students have not tried. Because of institutional bias, we can't get a fair hearing," says Bernau.

Bernau has been involved with higher education and student

government since 1974 when he began working with the ASUO. During 1975-76 he served as ASUO president. He became the legislative coordinator for OSL the following year.

that's a serious mistake, Bernau says.

"A generation of new knowledge is essential if we are to solve the technological problems we are faced with," he says.

"Higher education's lack of long-range planning and forecasting in dealing with the financial crunch has had a tremendous impact on the institutions," Bernau says.

As tuition goes up, accessibility and enrollment goes down, Bernau says, pointing to the dramatic decrease in minority students enrolling in Oregon's universities as proof.

Funding for higher education has actually decreased over the last decade while the Legislature allocates more money to social services, he says.

"Institutions and faculty members are growing old together," says Bernau. Higher education must, once again, become a high priority item, says Bernau, adding that keeping tuition down to make education available to everyone is a good step in the right direction.

The OSL identifies with the public's growing concern with the high cost of government and that's one reason for the proposed tuition freeze for resident students, says Bernau.

Since higher education is one of the few benefits middle-income families receive, he says, raising tuition has the same effect as raising taxes — and they're not going to like it.

Bernau says he's not sure what his future plans will include; maybe something to do with law or real estate.

"I get a lot of personal satisfaction out of taking an old, crummy house and turning it into an attractive place to live," he says.

But for now, Bernau is concerned with the OSL and its legislative battles.

'If apathy means putting down a picket sign, putting on a suit and using research and facts to build your case, maybe we need a different definition of apathy.'

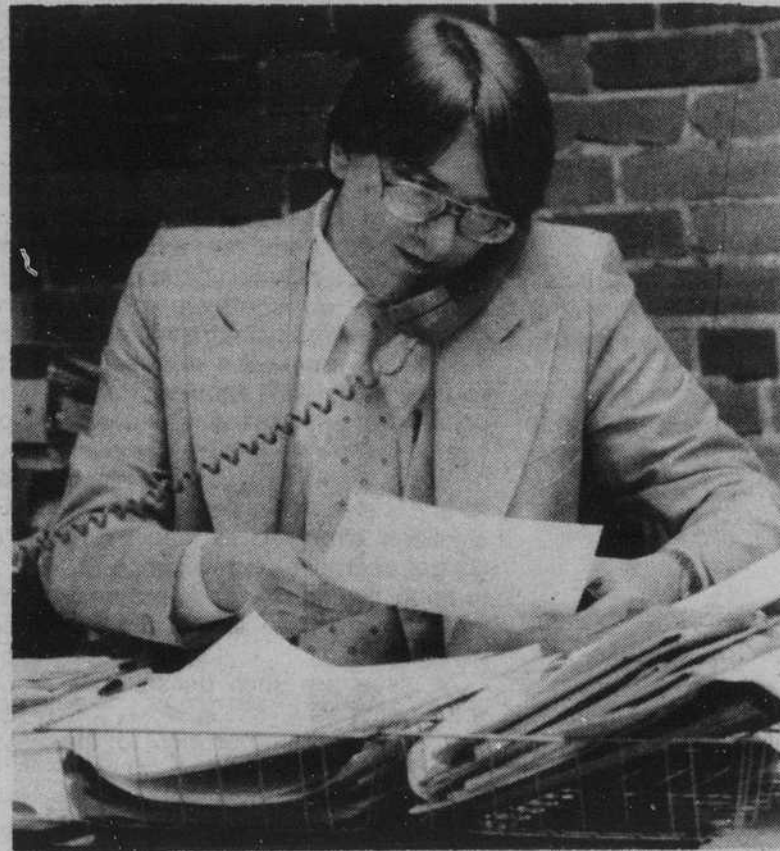


Photo by Dana Tims

Jim Bernau puts in plenty of hours in Salem lobbying for student rights and benefits. His goals for this year are set high, but then there is a lot at stake for the students whom he represents.

"Higher education is an exciting field," Bernau says. "I'm deeply committed to students' interests."

Student government should focus their attention on the need for academic improvements and change instead of playing around with money and social activities, says Bernau.

"The goal of a student association should be to integrate students into the administration's and faculty's decisions," he says.

Students, administrators and faculty need to work together to solve some of the problems higher education is facing, says Bernau.

"We should meet these problems together. There will have to be compromises and there will be disagreements but that's part of the challenge we must meet," Bernau says.

The potential for involvement is being under-utilized by student government, he says. Bernau was instrumental in establishing the Student University Affairs Board and says he is disappointed by their inactivity this year.

"You fight so hard for an organization's potential to meet students' academic needs and this is what happens," he says.

"The potential for affecting the University is there," he says. "It's more than just the votes SUAB members have. They have an obligation to present facts, information and develop proposals to enhance academic programs."

The biggest problem universities and colleges in Oregon are facing is the public's declining interest in higher education, a move

adopted a course of opposition, not proposition," Minority Leader Bob Smith, R-Burns, says.

Smith was joined in his remarks by all Republican senators except George Wingard of Eugene, who disagreed with the initiative idea.

VISTA

Are you a self-starter who believes that social change on behalf of the poor and powerless in America is possible? If so, you belong in VISTA.

VISTA volunteers serve one year working with non-profit organizations, neighborhood self-help groups and social service agencies. Their goal is to help the poor and powerless in our society have a greater voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

As a VISTA you may organize community action groups to deal with neighborhood issues, or work on projects related to consumer affairs, legal services, business and economic development, housing, education, youth counseling, or health and nutrition.

Your degree or relevant community work experience may qualify you for the experience of your life. See our representatives for information on current and future openings throughout the U.S.

Volunteers In Service To America

INFORMATION:

Tues.-Fri., Feb. 27-Mar. 2
EMU Lobby, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

INTERVIEWS:

(Sign up in advance)
Tues.-Thurs., Feb. 27 - Mar. 1
Campbell Hall 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

FILM & SEMINAR

Tues. Feb. 27
EMU, 7:30 p.m.

Senate Republicans plan to take tax bill to voters

SALEM (AP) — Senate Republicans announced Thursday that they will bypass legislative inaction on Gov. Vic Atiyeh's embattled tax relief plan by taking it straight to the voters as an initiative.

"The legislative leadership has