

Workshop airs vet gripes, urges local involvement

By **MIKE RUST**
Of the Emerald

Activist veterans should be careful not to "isolate" themselves from the community.

That was the message presented at a workshop on "Political Legislation and Activism" Sunday.

The workshop — part of the Second Annual Western Regional Conference of Vietnam-Era Veterans — featured Vietnam veteran turned activist-author Steve Hassna and Peter DeFazio, an aide to Rep. Jim Weaver, D-Ore.

Discussion covered a variety of issues ranging from current legislation to the reception given Vietnam veterans by traditional veterans organizations such as the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Hassna said veterans must relate veteran issues to the community as a whole to gain support. He cited Cottage Grove as "a classic example" on the issue of herbicide spraying, explaining that community residents became aware of the problems facing victims of Agent Orange only after they became aware of the danger that herbicides posed in their community.

"When you separate yourself from the community at large, you get isolated," Hassna said.

Vets also were encouraged to work within established veterans' organizations such as the

American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. In the past, many Vietnam veterans were mistreated and ignored by the two organizations, Hassna said.

Workshop participants described being excluded from membership in the older organizations and being held responsible by veterans of earlier conflicts for the "loss" of Indochina.

"Because of the carnage and destruction — because we lost the damn thing — the Vietnam veteran was blamed for the whole mess," Hassna said.

"To the victor goes the spoils. World War I and World War II veterans came home conquering heroes — like the Spartans, they came home carrying their shields. We came home on them."

But the situation is improving as Vietnam-era veterans "infiltrate" Legion and VFW posts, he said.

DeFazio said it's possible for individuals to influence Congressional decisions by applying pressure to individual politicians. Participating in mainstream groups such as the American Legion and the VFW is a "ready-made way to influence Congress," he said.

Members of Congress are "scared to death in this age of apathy of 10 guys picketing their office," DeFazio said.

Students face benefits cut

By **ERICH KIRSHNER**
Of the Emerald

Approximately 650 University students may face a reduction in their college funds because of Pres. Ronald Reagan's proposed cutback of the Social Security program, says an aide to Rep. Jim Weaver, D-Ore.

Under the proposal, students currently receiving student Social Security checks would have them reduced by 25 percent yearly and no new students would become eligible for the program.

Reagan's proposal is now being debated in Congress, according to Peter DeFazio, a legislative assistant to Weaver. DeFazio says that several other means of phasing out student benefits also are being considered.

"If the president's proposal passes, it will probably go into effect by Oct. 1 of this year," DeFazio predicts.

T.J. Marrs, a sophomore majoring in telecommunications, is one of the students who would be affected by the proposed cut. Marrs became eligible for student benefits when his father, an Ontario cattle dealer, died while Marrs was in high school.

Marrs says that Eugene's tight job market might force him to return to Ontario and find a job

to make up for money lost from his benefits. His current monthly check of \$286.50 enables him to afford school, he says.

"I can't imagine going back to Ontario now. I can't relate to my friends back there anymore," Marrs says. "It's scary to think of being put back in an environment where I know I'm going to be uncomfortable. I fit in here."

Marrs says rumors of the elimination of student benefits have given him a new respect for school.

"School now seems infinitely more valuable than it did. My grades are better than they've ever been."

Marrs says the government is making a good investment by paying for his schooling.

"They are getting their money's worth. If I can just go through school, I'm sure I can make some money, and the government will get their share. They always manage to do that right."

Christie, a student who asked to be identified only by her first name, says she also is disturbed by the proposal.

"I'm more concerned for my two brothers who are now in junior high and high school than for myself," Christie says. "I'm graduating soon, but they haven't even begun yet. They are both planning to go to college, so my mother is understandably upset about this."



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