

Effects of proposed subsidy debated

Childcare plan would alter services

By PAUL TELLES
Of the Emerald

The new childcare subsidy system created last week by the Incidental Fee Committee definitely would affect the childcare services available to student parents.

But nobody's sure what those effects would be.

The system, drafted by IFC chair Jon Neiderbach and unanimously approved by the committee, would create a \$50,000 childcare fund administered to individual student parents by the financial aid office. The parents could spend their subsidies at any state-accredited childcare center.

Currently, the EMU Childcare Center and the Child Care and Development Center receive \$36,000 to administer the programs, and the CCDC receives \$33,000 to be paid out in Parent Equalization Payments to needy parents.

The money for the direct payment system will come from the PEP and the administration budget, which the IFC has recommended be cut to \$18,000.

However, the IFC gave the EMU a set amount for its operation and left the details — like how much to spend on childcare administration — up to the EMU Board and administration.

Neiderbach says he proposed his plan, which requires University administration approval, to "insure maximum benefit to those students with the most need."

The current program doesn't meet this need because students with relatively little financial need and some non-students are reaping benefits from the IFC childcare funding, he says.

Neiderbach says the two centers are among the highest priced in the Eugene area and "student parents who use other, less expensive daycare centers are, in effect, punished for their frugality since they cannot receive any daycare subsidy precisely because they searched and found lower-cost services."

However, not everybody agrees with Neiderbach.

Childcare coordinator Mary Curtis-Gramley says the two centers seem more expensive than others because they charge by the hour and allow for hourly use, while other centers charge by the full or half day.

The few non-students who use the centers do so only at

times when student parents aren't registered, Curtis-Gramley says. Currently, 3.2 out of a possible 81 childcare spaces are filled by non-students.

"They provide us with children at times — like early morning and late evening — when there isn't enough demand from students" to justify staff and expenditures, Curtis-Gramley says.

Almost no student parents have been turned away from the University's childcare centers this term, she adds.

Curtis-Gramley says she shares Neiderbach's concern about equity in the distribution of childcare subsidies, but she doesn't feel his plan approaches the problem in the right way. She has suggested the PEP's, which now are available only to CCDC parents, be opened to EMU center parents as well.

Neiderbach's plan may result in tuition increases or staff cutbacks at the two centers, both of which would lower the level of service at the two centers, Curtis-Gramley says.

Neiderbach says potential staffing cutbacks or tuition increases are the responsibility of the EMU Board and administration. If they want to continue funding the childcare program administration at its current level, they can cut other parts of the EMU budget, he says.

The effect of the plan on the childcare centers is not its only potential problem.

For instance, it remains to be seen how the money will be disbursed to parents. The financial aid office probably will be able to assess students' needs for childcare subsidies in the same way it determines need for other financial aid but may not be able to assure the money is spent on

childcare, says Lance Popoff, assistant director of the financial aid office.

Neiderbach has suggested parents could be given vouchers that would be redeemed by the childcare centers where the parents spend their subsidies. However, this billing arrangement may be too expensive for the financial aid office, Popoff says.

"It may mean too many administrative costs," he says.

The subsidy probably wouldn't affect the students' eligibility for other forms of financial aid, Popoff adds.

Some people also are worried about the childcare subsidies being used off campus. They say it will result in less student control over childcare quality.

Parent committees at the two centers developed governance documents for the centers this year, a move for student control

of the two centers spearheaded largely by Neiderbach. Now the parents wonder if Neiderbach has forgotten that concern.

"Was the move on the part of CCDC and EMU Childcare Center to develop . . . governing policies . . . a waste of time?" they asked in a letter to the EMU Board, which rejected the plan before the IFC mandated it.

"It is conceivable that fewer people could get more money" while other parents receive nothing under the proposed system, EMU Director Adell McMillan says. Currently, about 160 families benefit from the subsidies to the two centers, and about 50 receive PEPs.

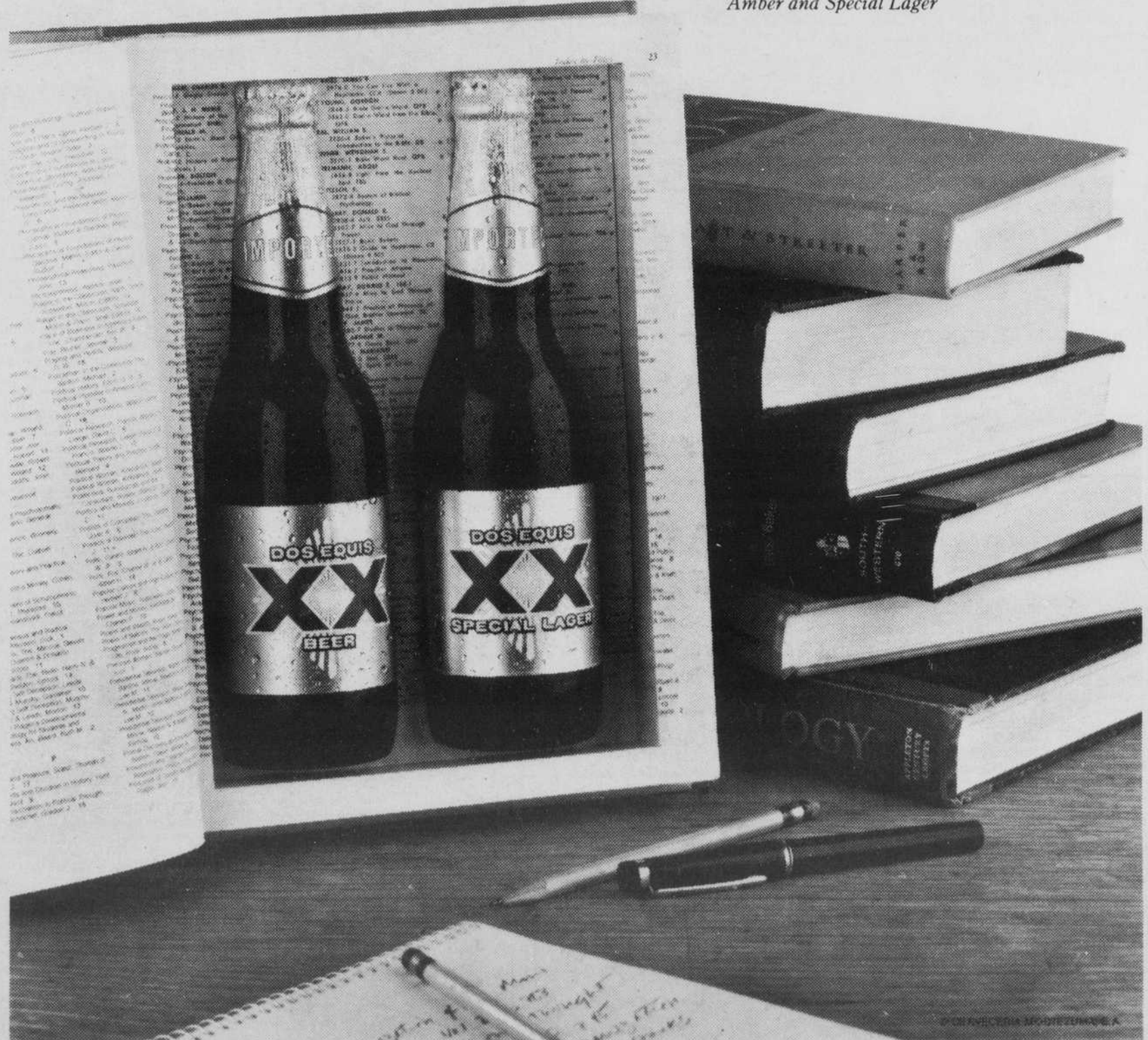
"Fifty-thousand dollars isn't really that much money," McMillan says, suggesting it may not be enough to directly subsidize all the parents needing childcare assistance.

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