

# Kerans powers citizen's utility board campaign

By Jim Moore  
Of the Emerald

Speaker of the House Grant Kerans, D-Eugene, told a group of OSPIRG canvassers in the EMU Forum room Tuesday that an initiative allowing Oregon's voters to decide whether to form a Citizen's Utility Board will be drafted in August. And he asked the small but enthusiastic group for their support in obtaining enough signatures to see it put on the ballot.

"Make sure virtually every household in this state is aware of, and supports, CUB," Kerans told the consumer advocacy group members.

Kerans, who studied political science at the University from 1969-72, was the

main sponsor of House Bill 2934, which called for formation of a citizen's board to represent utility ratepayers.

That bill was defeated by the combined efforts of the state's utility companies, which according to Kerans, is "the most powerful lobby in the state of Oregon."

"There's a way to beat the utilities," Kerans told the students. In the next nine and one-half months, he asked them to collect the signatures needed to place the CUB initiative on the ballot.

About 60,000 signatures are required to accomplish that goal, according to OSPIRG representative Daniel Malarkey. The research group

intends to collect more than 90,000, he said.

A CUB is necessary in Oregon, said Kerans, to act as a defense of ratepayer's rights at rate proceedings. He cited the many recent rate increases as evidence that representatives of the utilities have dominated previous hearings.

Public Utility Commissioner John Lobdell, who has questioned the need for a board, has not been a strong advocate of ratepayers, according to Kerans. The role of the commissioner is to act as a judge, said Kerans, and in recent proceedings ratepayers have had no representation.

A CUB would be supported by voluntary contributions from citizens who choose to

join the group. A board in Wisconsin, after which Oregon's CUB is being patterned, has solicited funds through the mail by including requests with utility bills.

That procedure has been questioned by some Oregon consumers because they feel it's unfair to make utility companies pay to support something not in their best interests.

But Kerans challenged that idea by pointing out that utilities include the cost of postage in rates, that they use profits to pay for efforts to increase rates and that the same plan in effect in Wisconsin hasn't created problems.

If the initiative makes the ballot, it will be passed because it is the only fair way to represent the ratepayers, Kerans said.

## City organizes a 'Eugene Celebration'

After 3 months of initial planning, city officials and volunteers are putting the pieces together for the upcoming "Eugene Celebration," a three-day festival scheduled for September 30 through October 2.

The celebration, which coincides with the first anniversary of the Hult Center for the Performing Arts, will include an opening ceremony, a parade, 12 hours of free entertainment at the Hult Center, a vintage car show, winetasting and live music on the downtown mall.

Visitors also can watch or compete in various contests: a fast talker contest, waiter's obstacle course, a type-off and a celebrity horseshoe competition.

At a press conference Tuesday, Mayor Gus Keller called the event "a celebration of our community by those who know it best — those of us who live here."

Keller said the event should bolster tourism, an important goal in developing the area's economy.

The celebration is publicized as an event that "gives residents an opportunity to celebrate the rich diversity of Eugene while offering visitors a chance to share in the spirit that makes Eugene a unique place."

City Council member Cynthia Wooten, chairer of the event's organizational task

team, praised the project as a "joint venture between the city of Eugene's business and community leaders." Giving special recognition to the 125 volunteers who are helping plan the event, Wooten projected a need for 1000 volunteers by "celebration time."

Celebration budget director Thomas Schott expects the festival to cost about \$65,000 but says it should raise \$30,000 to \$35,000. The city's downtown commission is donating \$8,500, he says.

The task team needs to raise \$25,000 from the private

sector, and Schott is optimistic about reaching that goal.

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