

Sales tax impact seems unclear

By Doug Nash
Of the Emerald

In higher education circles, the only thing clear about the proposed 4 percent sales tax is that its impact on students is unclear.

Economists, state government officials and student organizations all agree that data is lacking in terms of the legislation's effects on the campus population.

Indeed, Robert Smith, University economics professor, says data is not only nonexistent, but impossible to collect.

"It is a very difficult job," he says. "You can't gather data on that. All you can do is make a prediction."

The reason for this, Smith continues, lies in the unpredictability of the future tax structure. Without knowing what the sales tax will look like in its final, voter-approved form, collecting data on its demographic effects is an impossible task, he says.

"You can make a sales tax be as regressive as you want and you can also make it progressive. You really have to know what the tax structure will be," before conducting impact studies, he says.

Ross Anthony, economics Professor, agrees the lack of concrete data creates some difficulty in making predictions, but believes some overall general conclusions can be reached.

"I think it's going to affect students in a number of ways," Anthony says. "Clearly they will be paying sales taxes that they wouldn't have otherwise paid."

Anthony notes that the 35 percent property tax relief plan will only help students who rent apartments.

"I think students will end up paying more than they have in the past," he says.

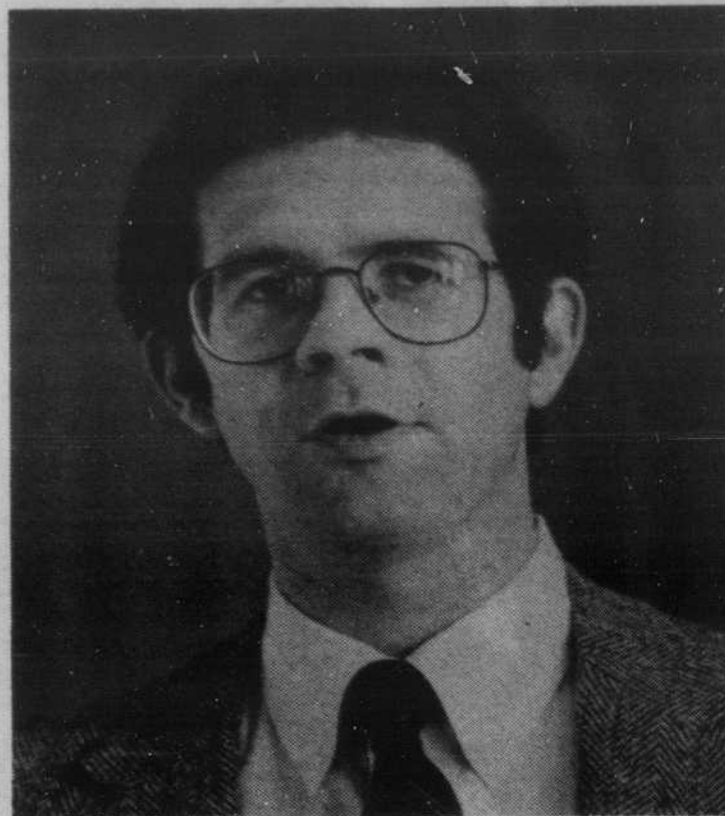
But Anthony says the new tax package could also provide a better method of funding higher education. While the present plan seems to "vacillate" on the success of Oregon's timber industry, a sales tax might not be so dependent on business interests, he says.

"What I hope happens is that the University will have a more stable funding base."

ASUO Pres. Mary Hotchkiss shares Anthony's belief that the sales tax is "another thing students will have to pay," but is not at all convinced that it will provide a better funding base for higher education.

"It would be nice if this money were channelled into higher education. But I'm not inclined to be jubilant yet," she says.

To the college students' lobbying arm in Salem,



Emerald photo

Ross Anthony, economics professor, says the sales tax will affect students.

even Hotchkiss' reserved opinion is premature.

"We're going to have to sort of plow through the bill to find out what they've exempted from the sales tax," says Sherry Oeser of the Oregon Student Lobby. "Because it has such a tremendous impact on the way universities are funded, I think it's an issue the OSU will take a stand on."

Oeser says her organization will try to predict the proposed tax's impact on students. But defining students as a demographic group is easier said than done, according to Donald Johnson, associate director of the Bureau of Governmental Research.

"The student population is very diverse," Johnson says. "Some of them are going to get hurt and some of them aren't going to feel it at all."

It seems those wishing to gather information on the sales tax's financial effect on students may have to wait until they have already been affected, Johnson says.

"I'm afraid you've picked a very interesting topic to which there are no answers."

IFC OKs Neuroscience program goals

The Incidental Fee Committee heard a preliminary proposal regarding a computer system for the ASUO, approved the goals of a new program, moved on four money-related requests and refused to make a motion on another request for funds Wednesday night.

ASUO representative Bill Hallmark introduced a plan for placing a computer system in the ASUO executive suite. The plan contained a purchase cost estimate of \$5,800, but excluded

maintenance cost estimates or proposed future savings. The committee asked Hallmark to return at a later meeting with all pertinent information.

Students in Neuroscience, a recently recognized ASUO program, presented its program goals in hopes of attaining funding for the current year. The group did not present a budget for this year because of a misunderstanding last year according to Chuck Black, spokesperson for the group.

The committee struck a clause from the goals that requested money for social affairs, then moved to accept the goals and told Black to return with a budget request.

Hallmark also requested moving \$3,004.00 in existing ASUO accounts into the ASUO winter symposium account, a reserve account. The committee complied. Money cannot be withdrawn from a reserve account without IFC approval.

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