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OSPIRG holding campus voter registration drive to draw students to polls

By Paul Ertelt
Of the Emerald

College students have reputations for political apathy that many claim undermines their political clout. But one student organization is trying to change that with a massive voter drive Monday.

The campus chapter of the Oregon Student Public Interest Group, in conjunction with ASUO, has already registered about 1,500 students, and plans an all-out effort on Monday, which has been declared National Student Voter Registration Day by a national coalition of public interest groups.

"It is often said, but that doesn't diminish its truth, that the success of our democracy depends on informed citizens exercising their privilege to vote," University Pres. Paul Olum said.

On Monday, OSPIRG will have voter registration tables in the EMU lobby, in front of the library and in the lobbies of several campus dorms and other University locations.

"We want to make it as easy as possible for people to register," says Donna Lawrence, board chair of the campus chapter of OSPIRG.

Students must register and vote if they want to be taken seriously by their representatives, says Carol Benedick, statewide spokesperson for OSPIRG.

"Elected officials are not

group hopes to register 30,000 students in the state.

Though OSPIRG is nonpartisan and does not endorse any political candidates, the group is taking strong stands on several ballot issues.

OSPIRG supports Ballot Measure 3, which would create a Citizens Utility Board to represent utility consumers at rate hearings before the Public Utility Commissioner. Supporters of the measure say the CUB will help keep utility rates down.

OSPIRG opposes Ballot Measure 2, which would limit property taxes. This measure would limit the funds to support higher education and could lead to cuts at the state's universities, opponents of the measure say.

"All initiatives affect students because students are part of society," Lawrence says. "Students need to realize they are part of the system. They can't sluff off their responsibility."

"October 1 is the big day," Lawrence says. "But I hope it will be the kick-off and not the end of voter registration (on campus)." Voters can register until the day of the election.

All U.S. citizens who will be 18 years old on or before the day of election and will have resided in the state for 20 days prior to the election are eligible to register in Oregon. Those who have changed address or have changed their name since they last voted must reregister.

D a v i d Sprague, administrator of Lane County Elections, recommends that students from other states and counties consider registering in their home counties and voting with absentee ballots. This will give

them a chance to participate in local issues that may concern them, he says.

Out-of-state students who register in Oregon forfeit their home residency, which may affect tuition rates if they decide to return to their home state to continue their education.

Those wishing to vote outside of Lane County should write to their county clerk as soon as possible requesting an absentee ballot, Sprague says. The request must be signed by the voter. All absentee ballots must be received by the county clerk by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

Help offered to freshmen

By Lori Steinhauer
Of the Emerald

For many freshmen, going to college means freedom from parental supervision. However, as school moves into full-swing — complete with homework and dormlife — days at home with the folks suddenly don't seem so bad.

Students leaving their families for the first time are facing social, academic and financial changes, making the first weeks of adjusting to the new environment sometimes lonely and difficult.

Still, many times feelings of isolation could be avoided if a student knew either a friend to talk to, or the right resource to consult for a particular concern.

"The majority of students that drop-out of school do so in the first three weeks. They're not making it. They're scared to death, and they don't know who to ask (for help). A lot of them feel they don't meet anybody who cares about them," Acting Director of Orientation Kathy Pyfer says. "Our goal is to keep students in school by letting them know the University cares about them."

According to Pyfer, the Orientation Office instigated the New Student Host Program (NSHP) and the Early Orientation and Registration Program (EORP) several years ago, to "inform new students of the resources available to them before the questions come up, and to get them involved and meeting new friends."

"Students who are involved at campus are the students who stay in school," Pyfer says.

Any form of involvement — making friends in class, participating in dorm activities or working in student organizations — can help students create a social network and a sense of belonging to keep them from getting lonely, Pyfer says.

In the past several years, the University has tried to create a stronger sense of community for incoming students in order to reduce the drop-out rate, says Director of Admissions and Records Jim Buch.

In addition to the NSHP and EORP, peer advising programs and luncheons for new students and faculty in the residence halls have helped to make the University a more congenial place to study and live.

The programs have proved successful as the freshman drop-out rate has fallen from about 18 to 20 percent in past years to 10.6 percent now, Buch says.

Regardless of whether they stay or go, freshmen who have just left home have left



Kathy Pyfer

their comfort zone.

"All freshmen go through leaving home for the first time, leaving their parents, leaving their friends they've grown up with. So making friends is one of the most important things to them right away," says Larry Spencer, who is the Area Director of the predominately freshmen dorm complex, Hamilton-Bean.

"A lot of them haven't been on their own before. They're homesick. They're wondering if they can make it," Acting Dean of Students Shirley Wilson adds.

Residence hall living is completely different from the lifestyle freshmen left back home.

"Privacy is always a concern," says Dave Just, a second-year resident assistant in Hamilton-Bean. But, he adds, "You learn how to get along with people. You can't be that selfish down here."

Just says that compromises constantly need to be made, with roommates or neighbors in conflict. Finding solutions to problems often lies in the hands of the resident assistant.

He recalls a bass player and a drummer

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Photo by Paul Ertelt

University students Kelly Clarke (left) and Carolyn Botcheos fill out voter registration forms during registration.

leaders; they are sheep," Benedick says. "They follow their constituency, and if their constituency is students, they'll follow students."

Nationwide, of 47 million unregistered voters, 14 million are between the ages of 18 and 24, according to a report by the National Student Conference on Voter Registration.

OSPIRG is also organizing voter registration drives at the state's community colleges, Oregon State University, Portland State University, and other Oregon campuses. The

Student lobby board members disapprove of Ballot Measure 2

By Julie Shippen
Of the Emerald

The Oregon Student Lobby Board of Directors is unanimously opposed to Ballot Measure 2, the 1.5 percent property tax limitation plan that will be on the Nov. 6 ballot.

The Lobby opposition to the ballot is based on the disasterous effects the proposal would have on public education financing, says Myrnie Daut, the organization's research director.

"(Although) the ballot measure will not directly affect the State System, it will indirectly affect it... by placing a drain on the State General Fund," Daut says. "And that is

where we get our dollars."

It is estimated that 70 percent of all the local property tax collected goes to education, Daut says. School districts, the largest consumer of property taxes, would lose \$303 million per year, she estimates. In addition, community colleges, education service districts, cities, counties and fire districts will also lose substantial amounts of their funding base if the measure passes.

Ballot Measure 2 would also restrict both the ability of the legislature to pass new taxes and the ability of voters to increase their own tax rates, Daut adds.

Although the State System of

Higher Education receives no property tax revenue, the threat posed by Ballot Measure 2 is that the state will be forced to provide relief to the local taxing districts from its General Fund, the State System's primary funding source. If this happens, there will be a tremendous reduction in the funds available to support the State System and other state agencies, she says.

The Oregon Committee is leading the campaign against Ballot Measure 2 and hopes to have coordinators on every campus. For more information on the measure, contact ASUO Pres. Julie Davis, current OSU chair, or ASUO State Affairs Coordinator Rebecca Roby.