

Student group meets to work for peace in Central America

By Deborah Janes
Of the Emerald

A group of University students has intensified its efforts to work for peace in Central America in anticipation of President Reagan's request for \$100 million to fund the Nicaraguan rebels fighting the Sandinista government.

During a Monday night meeting, a handful of students known as the Latin American Support Committee outlined possible options to encourage the U.S. congressmen from this area to vote against the upcoming Contra aid request and opt for a peaceful approach to resolving conflict in Central America.

LASC, now in its 10th year, works to educate other students about Latin American issues, according to Co-chair Greg Rikhoff.

"North Americans often have an incredible misunderstanding that Central America is our backyard instead of seeing them as sovereign nations with their own dignity and culture," Rikhoff said.

To counter that misconception, LASC has co-sponsored cultural events this year such as a Nicaraguan dance troupe and a Chilean folk singer. In addition, the group holds weekly information meetings to discuss recent developments in the region and plan what action to take.

Sometimes as students we forget we can do anything, but with this group we can bring the energy together and realize we can have an impact," said member Stacey Sorensen.

To facilitate this action, LASC recently started a letter lobby to voice student opinions

on the upcoming congressional vote on the Contra aid. LASC has provided writing materials and information at a table in the EMU to generate on-the-spot letters by students.

"The letters can elucidate the issues students think are important, such as opposition to Contra terrorism activity, U.S. intervention or funding," Rikhoff said.

Students particularly should be interested in the funding issue, said Chris Orsinger, a staff member for the Council for Human Rights in Latin America who helps facilitate LASC meetings.

Reagan's budget calls for reducing student financial aid by \$200 million, while asking for \$100 million for the Contras, Orsinger said.

LASC has focused on encouraging Sen. Bob Packwood and Sen. Mark Hatfield to not only vote against Contra aid, but to take an active role in opposing the funding.

"With these powerful men in key positions in the finance committees, we want them to throw their weight around to push for the Contadora plan," Rikhoff said.

The Contadora peace initiative, designed in January 1983 by leaders from Mexico, Venezuela, Panama and Colombia, calls for removal of all foreign military bases and advisers from Central America and renewed efforts to reach a peace settlement.

Because the Nicaraguan government has recently suspended some civil liberties, more congressmen may be willing to embrace military aid to the Contras, said Rikhoff.



Photo by Derrel Hewitt

Greg Rikhoff and Julie McFarlane, co-chairs of the Latin American Support Committee, met with others Monday night to discuss current issues concerning Central America.

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cost for the system, over a 10-year period, will be \$30 million. He said the project will be funded by savings gained through the implementation of the new system.

After a vendor's bid is accepted, implementation of the computer system will take between three and five years, officials said.

Four state institutions currently keep their information in a centralized computer in Corvallis, but the 10-year-old computer system, the System Support Service, is outdated, Chereck said.

"It's just an old system that needs to be replaced," Chereck said.

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