

Student groups combine forces to mobilize influence of students

By Betsy Clayton
Of the Emerald

For the first time the ASUO and OSPIRG have joined forces to create a stronger student-lobby network that helps make students aware of important issues and involves them in the 1987 legislative procedure.

The Legislative Action Alliance is a coalition of students from the two organizations working on issues of environmental protection, affordable education and civil rights. The goal of the alliance is to build a better Oregon by not only creating awareness of these issues but by getting students to act on them.

The main emphasis of action is to have students write letters to their legislators in Salem, said Maureen Kirk, the Oregon State Public Interest Research Group state board chairwoman. The alliance is doing this by utilizing students' dual constituency, she said.

"Probably 8,000 to 10,000 University students have homes in other areas of Oregon. So we can look at the way legislators from specific areas are voting and then contact those students from that area," Kirk said.

Those students who are interested then would be asked to write a letter to their legislator, she said.

"Because they have homes elsewhere, students are actually constituents of two legislators," said Victoria Perkins, the state affairs coordinator for the ASUO. She explained that students' ideas and input are important to their legislators because they show an interest from the University as well as from the area the legislator represents.

Since the end of February OSPIRG and the ASUO have been distributing a Legislative Action Alliance brochure that tells about current issues. Inside each pamphlet there is a reply card that lets the alliance know the student's home town and local addresses.

Kirk said the alliance then can organize students into districts, educate them on relevant issues and tell them when it would be timely to write letters.

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'The legislating process runs from January through June or July so we can call students and tell them how to write letters, who to write to and when to become involved.'

— Maureen Kirk

who to write to and when to become involved," Kirk said.

"I don't think people realize they can make a difference in the decision-making process," Perkins said. She pointed out that legislators get less mail than people think and a few letters on a particular issue can change a legislator's opinion.

ASUO President Steve Nelson is very supportive of the Legislative Action Alliance. "We (the ASUO and OSPIRG) will put in the same amount of hours, but we'll have greater success just because it will be that much more visible," he said.

In the past OSPIRG has had

its own legislative programs and the ASUO has had its own letter-writing campaign. Together the two will make the work easier, Nelson said.

A top issue that the ASUO has been concerned with is financial aid cuts. The ASUO is pushing for increases in the Oregon State Scholarship Commission's budget for expansion in need-based financial aid rather than merit-based aid.

"Reagan's proposed budget has cutbacks of 45 percent. That's one issue I think it's really important for students to write to legislators about," Perkins said.

Working on a state superfund to clean up toxic waste is one of the issues OSPIRG is emphasizing, Kirk said. The state superfund would establish a program to monitor and clean up abandoned hazardous toxic waste sites, she said. There are well over 100 of these types of sites in Oregon, she added.

The Oregon Legislature meets every other year to set up two-year budgets. "Some people don't know that it is a legislative year and that the bills the legislators go through each session might affect their lives," Kirk said.



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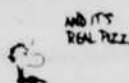
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