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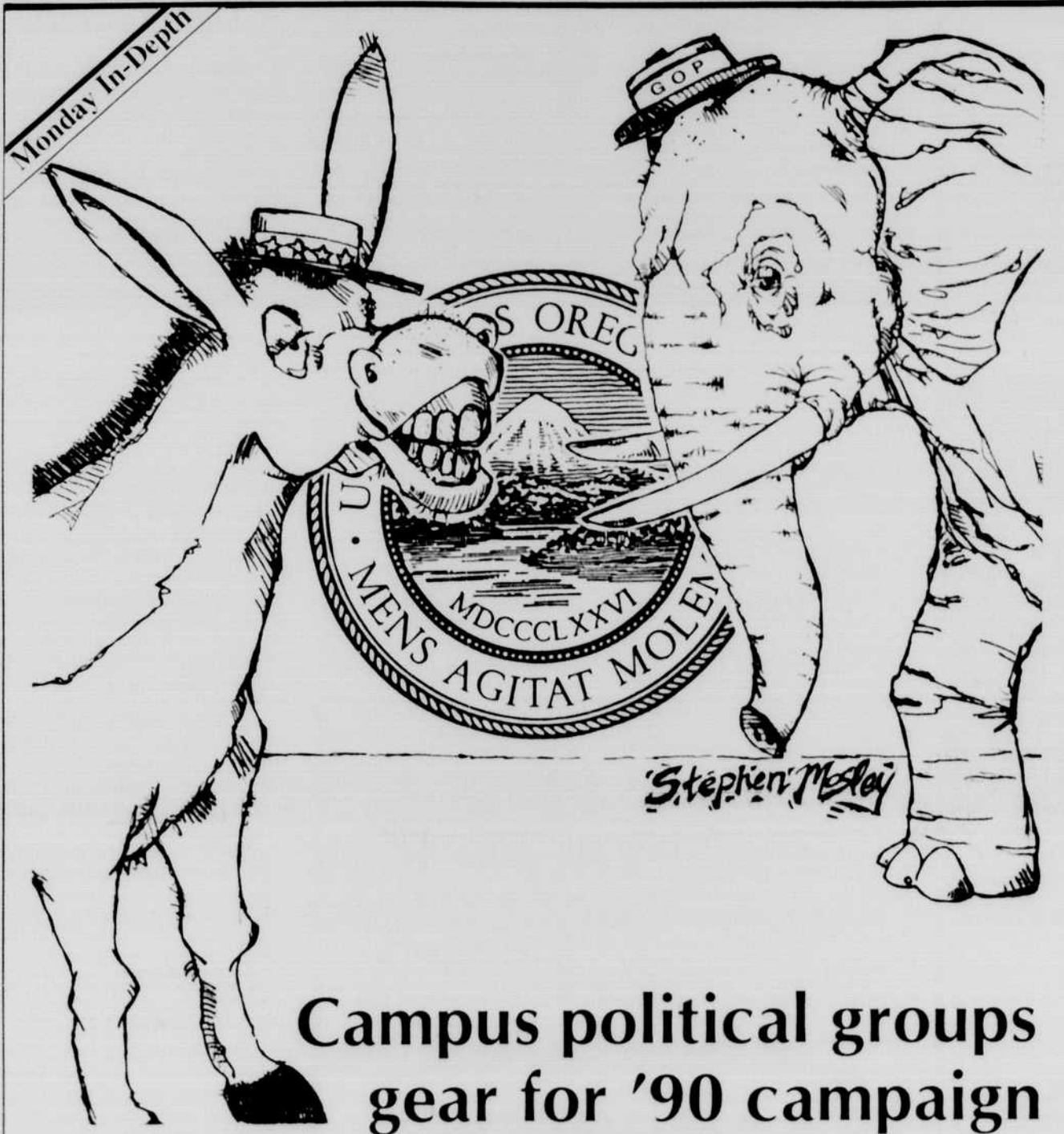
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Monday In-Depth

Campus political groups gear for '90 campaign

The elephant and the donkey are alive and kicking in the University political arena.

By Denise Clifton
Emerald Associate Editor

At a time when most students are focusing on finals and spring break plans, others with a political awareness are thinking of elections and issues.

More than 200 students have taken sides and joined either the College Republicans or the University Democrats, two groups that try to promote their partisan politics on campus, local and statewide issues.

"If you feel there is nothing you can do to affect how the world is going, you're wrong," said newly elected University Democrats chairwoman Heather Wright. "You can get involved. Students can get involved and make changes."

Although only about 10 percent of each group's members are currently active on a regular basis, both organizations have made good on their goals to participate in and influence the direction of state and local politics.

Members of the College Republicans recently returned from the Dorchester Conference, a statewide



Photo by Steve Card

The political philosophies of Heather Wright and Garth Fernandez have placed them on different sides of the ideological fence.

GOP policy convention, where they debated current issues with legisla-

tors and government officials.

"This is where the public — and students — can have some input and vote on the issues, such as higher education and environmental issues. And the feedback helps the legislators," said College Republicans chairman Garth Fernandez, who attended the conference. "You can really debate the issues with the people who are making the policy."

The College Republicans also keep in touch with state legislators, although the group has never done any lobbying, Fernandez said.

"We have the contacts in the Republican caucus that we can alert them to certain bills, and alert them to situations where there could be some legislation affecting education and the students," said former College Republicans director Eric Stinemates.

"Raising hell"

The University Democrats participate in off-campus politics as well. In fact, the student members are notorious for "raising hell" in heated debates at monthly meetings with the Democratic Party of Lane County.

At the Jan. 25 DPIC meeting, members of University Democrats submitted a resolution condemning

Apathy's the enemy of both party bosses

By Joe Kidd
Emerald Reporter

Although they head opposing parties, Garth Fernandez and Heather Wright admit they share a common enemy: political apathy among University students.

Coming from different backgrounds and moving toward opposing political goals, Fernandez and Wright lead the College Republicans and the University Democrats, respectively. Their differences are more than just political.

A tornado of liberal posters and banners surge around Wright's desk. The 18-year-old leader of the University Democrats works from a corner of Suite 1 in the EMU. A 12-inch illustration of Ronald Reagan waves from one of her bulletin boards, the ex-president standing in his underwear, a red hammer and sickle drawn on his briefs.

But in Fernandez's office, organization cries out for mercy.

Fernandez, 23 and a former Democrat, runs the College Republicans from orderly Room 16A in the EMU. Photographs of President George Bush and three other politicians and a pair of bumper stickers make up the few adornments on these white walls. One sticker, "China has gun control," indicates the political leanings of this group.

But putting office settings and ideology aside, they are both working toward a common

'If you believe you can make a difference, that's when you begin to make a difference.'

— Heather Wright

goal. They combat an indifferent attitude many students have about politics.

"The apathy rate among students, 18 to 24 years old, is huge," Fernandez said.

"Political parties are looked down on," Wright said. "People are disenfranchised with politics."

Wright and Fernandez direct their groups, hoping to lure more University students into the world of politics. How they got to their positions, however, are tales of two very different political awakenings.

"I was a sophomore in high school during the Iran-contra scandal," Wright said, explaining that concerns over the Reagan administration's policies jolted her into political action.

"Reagan's politics affected my family," she said. Despite the economic growth of the 1980s, "Both of my parents had to work to make a decent living."

After participating in a mock Democratic convention with students from other high schools, Wright said she realized she enjoys politics. "I found I could do politics," she said. "I could work with people and do it well."

Wright, who will major in political science, graduated from Beaverton High School last year. After coming to the University last fall, she became active with the University Democrats, filling the role of community liaison council.

Two weeks ago she was elected to UD chairwoman after the previous head, Robert C. Kenneth, resigned to put more time into managing *The Student Insurgent*, the new left-wing campus monthly.

Wright said her personal goal is to convince students that they can actually change the political scene. "If you believe you can make a difference, that's when you begin to make a difference," she said.

Wright said she hopes to present that message to students through the various activities of the University Democrats.

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