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UNIVERSITY

USSA starts lobby for federal support

By Eric Buckhalter
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

The nation's only student-run lobbying organization for education convened at the University this past weekend and kicked off its campaign calling for more federal support of education.

The United States Student Association, the oldest and largest student organization, had its board of directors meeting at the University to discuss its action plan for the "Re-cut the Pie — 1 Percent More for Education" campaign.

For the 1994 fiscal year, Congress allotted 1.8 percent, or \$30 billion, of the federal budget to finance primary, secondary and post-secondary education. The USSA will lobby Congress and President Bill Clinton to increase education's slice of the federal pie by another 1 percent, or about \$15 billion, for the 1995 fiscal year.

Stephanie Bloomingdale, USSA's field director, said the time is right to capitalize on the "Re-cut the Pie" campaign.

"As a nation, we can't afford a mere 1.8 percent spent on education, it is too important; we have to spend more," she said.

Bloomingdale said the campaign will support the progressive amendment introduced by Sen. James Jeffords, R-Vermont, which will increase the education budget by 1 percent every year until it is 10 percent of the entire federal budget.

As the Cold War threat diminishes, Bloomingdale criticized the large amount (\$240 billion) the nation continues to spend on defense.

"We spend more on defense than Russia, Libya, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, North Korea and China combined. Of course we don't want to get bombed, but we must be more reasonable about where we put our money," she said.

"With another \$15 billion we could send 800,213 students to Harvard, or 3,355,714 students to Michigan State University, or 53,571,428 students to West Valley Community College in California," she said. "Or we could buy Centurian Attack Submarines at about \$1.3 billion a piece."

Looking to the future, USSA members are pressuring elected leaders to make education one of

the nation's top priorities. Bloomingdale said that battling crime and unemployment begins with a solid educational system, one which she said deserves more federal interest.

"It's been too long since the nation has concerned itself with education," Bloomingdale said. "We're not asking for higher taxes; we're asking that more tax dollars be spent on education. We want a bigger piece of the pie."

"I think it's important that we as students work on bettering this nation's system of education," she said.

USSA President Tchiyuka Cornelius said the organization's opponents depend on the issue at hand. USSA members noted that one opponent of cutting defense spending is Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Georgia, who USSA Vice President Stephanie Arellano said is looking for other areas to cut.

Nunn said that some students take advantage of the government's Pell Grant Program and are often fraudulent in repaying educational debts, Arellano said.

"Few students commit fraud," Arellano said, "and this is not an excuse to cut the program, it is an excuse to reform it."

One federally implemented program the USSA scrutinized is the Direct Lending Program, which would cut out the role of banks, which charge lending fees. The government would loan money directly to students, and repayment of this loan would be based on a fixed percentage of a recipient's income after graduation.

Arellano said that graduates who don't make a lot of money could have a difficult time paying off the loan as a percentage of their income.

The USSA will send a negotiating team of five students to take part in the Direct Lending Program's rule making process which begins this month.

USSA members will take part in the National Student Lobby Day March 22 in Washington, D.C., where they will hold a variety of meetings and rallies in support of its "Re-cut the Pie — 1 Percent More for Education" campaign. Students interested in taking part were urged by Cornelius to call (202) 347-USSA for more information.

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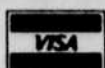
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