

## Make college system a public corporation

The Oregon State System of Higher Education, the governing entity for the state's eight colleges and universities, wants to become a public corporation. Unfortunately, some state legislators see such a move as a concealed power grab and a potential step toward the privatization of once-public institutions. Such assumptions are misguided if not uninformed.

Under the proposal, the state system would gain the independence to manage its business affairs without the burdensome and costly day-to-day oversight of state legislators and bureaucrats. It would also relieve the system of having to pay a portion of state projects that have nothing to do with higher education. In all, the state system could save over \$10 million per year and offer access to more students.

As the Oregon Revised Statutes are written now, OSSHE pays for a portion of state projects that contribute nothing to educating students. The state system, along with other state agencies, currently pay for the landscaping at the Capitol Mall in Salem. And OSSHE regularly pays assessments on state construction projects — like the new parking garage in Salem. The public corporation proposal would exempt OSSHE from paying for the lush green backdrops when legislators hold outdoor news conferences. Cutting out costly and non-educational assessments could save approximately \$2.5 million per year.

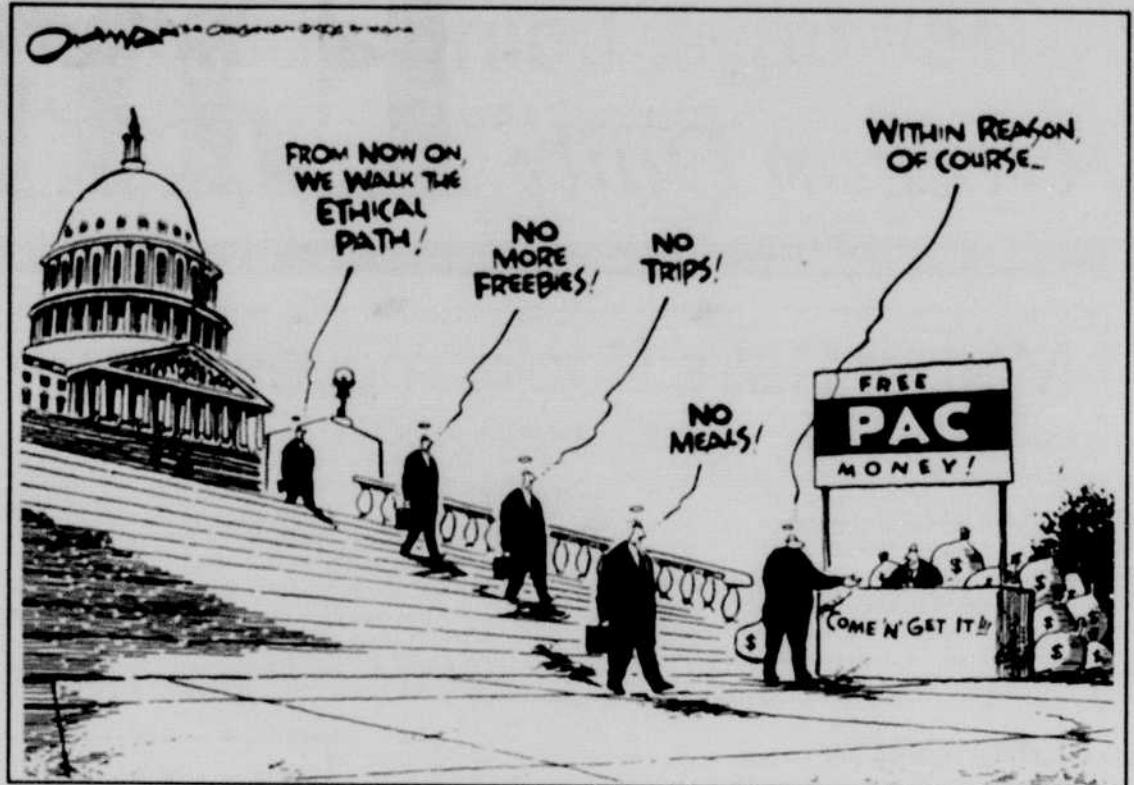
The proposal would also allow the state system to negotiate its own contracts with various entrepreneurial entities. For example, current procedures dictate that colleges and universities buy computers only from Firm A because the state has an exclusive contract with that company to purchase a certain amount of units at a bargain price. The problem with this scenario is that it removes the elements of responsiveness and competition. Under this process, universities cannot take advantage of many of the educational discounts offered by other computer companies, not to mention that the state-approved computers are often obsolete by time they reach their destination.

Additionally, OSSHE must get permission from the Department of Administrative Services for nearly every purchase related to education. Instead of letting experts — whether professors, deans or institution presidents — decide what materials would be educationally valid purchases, the Legislature wants those decisions left to bureaucrats within the DAS. Certainly, this is for oversight purposes, as all state agencies follow the same redundant process.

The proposal includes a strong post-audit function that would uncover any misappropriation to soothe those legislators distrustful of the state system.

Many legislators who will vote on this proposal are worried about losing control of higher education. As it stands now, the Legislature only funds about 20 percent of OSSHE's \$2.4 billion budget, but wants full control of higher education. OSSHE itself generates the other 80 percent through tuition, fees and federal grants. Being the majority stockholder in this "company" should allow the state system more autonomous decision-making power.

OSSHE should become a public corporation. The savings alone justifies the experiment. Since the passage of 1990's Ballot Measure 5, the state system has cut several academic programs and shaved administrative costs to the bone. Eliminating redundant administrative rules within state government is the logical next step.



### COMMENTARY

## American Party not for sale

By Kathy Sniezko, Jeanne Wojack Dellinger and Mike Bonner

The Lane County American Party is a grass-roots organization with a moderate political program that emphasizes the key issue of campaign finance reform. We emphasize reform because it seems to us that Oregonians cannot effectively address the problems of our state government until we address the core problem, which is the corruption of our elected officials by special interest money.

Back in the early 1970s Oregon politicians obeyed strict limits on campaign contributions and expenditures. In the wake of Watergate, the Oregon legislature got fancy and passed an expenditure limitation of \$25 per voter.

The result didn't sit well with the court. In May of 1975, Oregon's Supreme Court handed down its disastrous *Deras vs. Myers* decision. The court ruled that political money was the same as free speech, and not subject to legislated limits.

This gave candidates the green light to raise and spend unlimited campaign money.

In the years that followed, corporate lobby and professional interest groups soon took control of legislative campaign finance. Groups wanting to buy legislators now give staggering amounts of money to them. There are no conditions on how this money may be spent. Critics of the system call it legalized bribery.

We believe that Oregon's system of special interest campaign finance is improper and the root of the erosion of faith in our state government. How can citizens respect the work of legislators whose pockets and purses bulge with questionable cash?

Nearly two decades after *Deras vs. Myers*, the lobby is footing the bill for most Oregon political campaigns. The evidence is freely available from Oregon's Secretary of State. Reports of contributions and ex-

penditures, or C & E's, may be examined by any person requesting a look at them.

As American Party candidates, we recently paid a visit to Room 141 in the State Capitol Building in Salem to study the C & E reports for many Lane County candidates.

The Lane County C & E's made pretty juicy reading. Most incumbent legislators and many aspirants have no compunction about accepting checks from wealthy interests.

Retiring Oregon House Speaker Larry Campbell went into the 1992 general election with a cash balance of \$123,152. He raised another \$75,000 from airlines, banks, utilities, life insurers, oil companies and many other lobbies.

The incredible array of folks who gave money to Campbell infused the concept of diversity with a whole new meaning. By November, Campbell had spent over \$100,000, ending with \$95,000 in the bank. Presumably it's still there.

State Senator Bill Dwyer raked in \$56,000 for May's 1994 primary race. Included among the Dwyer donors are banks, Philip Morris tobacco, developers, utilities and insurance companies.

Even the newest Lane County legislative candidates go along with the practice of taking special interest money.

Though he is said to support campaign finance reform, State Senator Peter Sorenson nevertheless managed to grab some \$32,556. He spent \$29,420 of it running unopposed in May's primary. Big checks from oil companies like Atlantic Richfield found their way into Sorenson's kitty. Known bottle bill opponents like Oregon Soft Drink PAC gave Sorenson sums in excess of \$2,000.

In House District 40, Democrat Floyd Prozanski won a wide open primary battle while spending \$22,500. Self-service gas proponent Commercial Cardlock pumped Prozanski a hefty \$2,000.

Decisions about self-serve gas

ought to be made openly by voters, not by a quiet flow of lobby money to candidates.

Some politicians will argue lobbyists aren't really buying votes. They say lobbyists are merely ensuring "access." That's like saying you don't go to the store to buy tomatoes; you just go there to access them.

Lane County American Party candidates are rejecting the special interest system of campaign finance. We will refuse all PAC money and any individual contribution in excess of \$100. We're saying no to all lobby, corporate, union, business and bundled contributions as well.

Constituencies like unions defeat themselves by playing the special interest money game. In the long run, they can't compete with massive corporate money.

Newspapers also encourage the special interest game by rarely mentioning the connection between candidates and their financial backers in news stories and editorial endorsements.

Our campaigns will be financed solely by individuals, using the state tax credit in a more aggressive manner. Presently, only about 4 percent of Oregon taxpayers use the credit.

Our goal is to end the special interest financing of Oregon political campaigns by defeating its Lane County practitioners.

The American Party program overall is politically moderate. Besides campaign finance reform, it advocates social tolerance, fiscal responsibility and environmental awareness. We want our schools to have the resources to educate our children. We believe many human service programs perform a valuable safety net function and must be preserved.

Most of all, we wish to bring freshness, honesty and vitality to Oregon's political debate. Our slogan is simple: Not For Sale. We invite all who share our views to join our cause.

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## Oregon Daily Emerald

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