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Education challenged by Right

Ben Moebius
Oregon Daily Emerald

A public education seminar last Friday on how to resist the Right drew criticism for its political agenda.

The day-long event, titled "Upholding Public Education in Oregon: Understanding and Resisting the Assault from the Right," was scheduled as an in-service workshop for area educators, who were paid to attend.

"I feel outraged," said Kathy Phelps, regional director of the Oregon Citizen's Alliance, "and I think many people across the political spectrum would also feel outraged. If the OCA had a similar conference many liberals would be upset. I think both are inappropriate."

Marion Malcolm, a staff member of Clergy and Laity Concerned, a group that helped sponsor the workshop, defended its political focus.

There are hundreds of conferences being held statewide [Friday], she said, and no one is required to attend this one.

Shirley Gold, a state senator who chairs the Senate revenue and School Finance Committee, was a keynote speaker at the workshop. She said her purpose was to make educators aware of right-wing influence on public schools.

According to Gold, the Right is moving to undermine public education in an effort to move children into private, mostly religious schools. Public edu-

cation is vital to our nation and children who attend private schools lack the social skills to deal with outside society, she said.

Phelps viewed the idea that conservatives are trying to dismantle public education as "absolutely absurd."

"People are going to private schools, even secular people, because they are dissatisfied with public education," Phelps said.

There is no massive move to force Christianity on children, she said.

More than 100 participants attended the workshop, including about 40 teachers. Sheila Simmons, a graduate from the University and a member of the National Education Association's Center for the Preservation of Public Education also spoke at the workshop.

Simmons said all views and ideologies should be expressed within public education, but she criticized some right-wing beliefs for infringing upon people's lives.

Roscoe Caron, an eighth grade teacher at Kennedy Middle School in Eugene, said the conference was organized to be inclusive of all views.

The process of learning to work together to reach a viable solution is valuable to people of all political persuasions, Caron said.

At least 12 other workshops were offered in Eugene schools Friday. Most ideas involved the use of technology in the classroom.

GOVERNOR

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have the right to tell people how to run private businesses. When a panelist asked him whether his reply meant government should not interfere with a landlord's right to put a "Whites Only" sign on his lawn, Vander Ploeg said yes.

Hickam said every citizen of Oregon should have equal rights, yet "no group should have special rights." He asked, "How can you say you're going to represent the people by closing the door on half of them?" when asked whether he supported the views of the OCA. Hickam said he was "value neutral" or had no stance on Measure 13.

Vander Ploeg's response to economy-related questions was to cut government by 50 percent, turn over agencies to the private sector, and rely heavily



MICHAEL SHINDLER/Emerald

From left: Gubernatorial candidates John Kitzhaber, Ed Hickam and Dan Vander Ploeg participate in a Eugene debate.

on charity to fund programs that citizens and students desire.

Kitzhaber expressed a desire to protect the state natural resource base while expanding "opportunities" for vocational

training. Hickam called for a mass audit of government spending but warned against "too much dependence on government to solve all our problems."

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