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Student leaders question group's actions

Friederich von Carp
 Oregon Daily Emerald

Student leaders spoke out against OSPIRG after a group organizer refused to admit reporters to a meeting with a student senator.

Matt Rabin, lead campus organizer for the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group, ejected two reporters representing the Oregon Daily Emerald and the Oregon Commentator from a meeting in the group's office Wednesday afternoon.

OSPIRG had arranged the meeting with Student Senator Sarah Keech, who invited the reporters to attend. Keech sits on the ASUO Programs Finance Committee, which will hear OSPIRG's budget request on March 2.

"We're here to discuss matters of funding that don't concern [the press]," said Kalpana Krishnamurthy, OSPIRG State Board Chair. "This was supposed to be a meeting between Sarah and us."

"All we talked about was what OSPIRG does on campus. That should be public information," said Keech, who met with six OSPIRG representatives for almost an hour. "What are they trying to keep a secret — what they're doing? If you want to get your activities out to people, tell the press."

ASUO Vice President Mark Rhinard criticized OSPIRG for banning the media from Wednesday's meeting. "Any sort of discussion, whether it be on their activities or on the funding process, should be open to anybody," he said.

Bill Washburn, who sits on the University's student-faculty Environmental Issues Committee, discussed the incident with Keech.

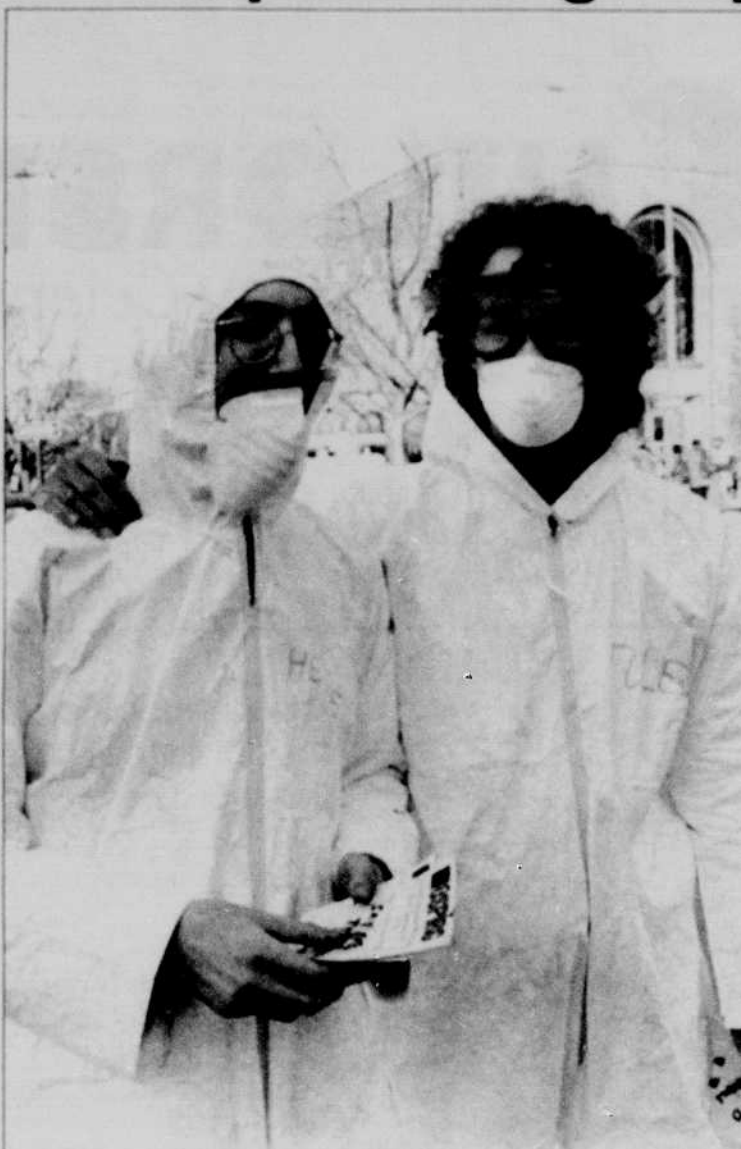
"Their overall ideals may be OK, but the way that they're operating is what's contentious here," Washburn said. "I don't see that OSPIRG is really putting their energies into hands-on campus work. If we're paying them so much we should see them more. It seems like every campaign they're involved with is done through some other organization."

Afterwards, Krishnamurthy said the meeting had been "really helpful. [Keech] gave us some good pointers on how to improve our student outreach." No OSPIRG representative was available for further comment.

Making accusations

Keech, who hopes to reduce or eliminate the OSPIRG's use of incidental fees, claimed that the group members mislead her as to the extent of OSPIRG's on-campus activity.

"They're trying to pull the wool over our eyes. I've personally never seen most of the things they said. For being the third-highest student fee-receiving



Herbie and Jules of O.S.P.I.R.G. distribute flyers inviting people to a meeting about toxins.

group, they aren't visible enough." Among ASUO programs, OSPIRG receives more than all but two groups, the ASUO Executive office and child care.

"I think they're more closely aligned with the state PIRG than they claimed to be. They said they're not affiliated at all," Keech said in reference to the Oregon State Public Interest Group, which broke away from the original student group for tax purposes. The student group, which shares its Portland headquarters with the state organization, employs key state-PIRG employees as consultants.

Rabin has said that the bulk of OSPIRG's \$137,775 allocation is sent to the group's Portland headquarters. He said that the four campus chapters gain efficiency in purchasing equipment and services by pooling funds.

"I asked how much money comes back to the campus, and they had no exact number," Keech said. "All they said is they get 'more bang for the buck,' which doesn't make any sense to me."

Student Senate President pro tempore Martin Fisher, who represents the law school, called

OSPIRG "a sham ... that gets way too much money." He offered a possible solution to Keech's objections.

"OSPIRG sends a large portion of its budget — between 60 and 90 percent — up to Portland. They claim that this money comes back to campus in the form of professional assistance. If that's the case, then OSPIRG has to be claiming that it's receiving the services of someone equivalent to paying them \$60,000 to \$100,000 per year. The kind of services that are being rendered here are not the kind of services the market charges \$100,000 a year for. They should hire these people as independent contractors, and pay them just for services rendered here."

"I asked them how many active members they have," Keech said, "and they said they expect about 100-150 people at the general interest meeting. They made it sound like a staff meeting."

Rabin characterized the general interest meeting, which was held Monday night, as "a time to ... do some recruiting." He said that many at the meeting were students who are not members.

OSPIRG to work on Earth Day image

Tasha Eichenseher
 Oregon Daily Emerald

The Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group discussed projects it is working on this term at a general interest meeting Wednesday night.

OSPIRG's lead campaign is "Free the Planet," which revolves around Earth Day issues. April 22 honors the 25th anniversary of Earth Day. According to Rachel Hewitt, a member of OSPIRG, the observance has become a corporate-controlled celebration.

"We're going to bring it back to the way it was and have a grassroots Earth Day," Hewitt said.

OSPIRG will continue to work on helping the homeless, supporting the endangered species act, promoting recycling, and protecting ancient forests. The group will include all of these in its environmental education project, where students teach in elementary and middle school classrooms.

During April the student organization will participate in a national hunger cleanup. This is the largest student service day in the country, said Kalpana Krishnamurthy, chairwoman of the OSPIRG state board.

OSPIRG members will work with groups such as Whitebird Clinic and Eugene Emergency Housing during this event, as well as getting students to volunteer at soup kitchen and organize clothing and food drives.

Recycling efforts this term will include trying to convince the University to use more recycled paper. OSPIRG will focus on educating the University about paper companies that are logging ancient and old growth forests, according to OSPIRG's ancient forests project coordinator.

More than 100 students came to the meeting. They decided which of the six issues that OSPIRG presented interested them and then met with that particular issue's coordinator. Responsibilities were delegated to students and dates were set for further meetings.

The issues to be worked on this year were decided by OSPIRG members at the end of last year.

OSPIRG educates students about environmental and human interest issues, and educates them on how to affect public policy and make a change, said Kalpana Krishnamurthy.

"We are giving people a set of skills to express their views with later," she said.

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