

Vote: Candidates say students need to care

■ Continued from Page 1

said Ed Dennis, executive director for Oregon Student Lobby. The proposed across-the-board cuts in Congress could have a tremendous effect on the cost of higher education even though higher education accounts for only about 3 percent of the federal budget, he said.

One of the major reasons to participate in the election is the effect the new senator could have on what Williamson calls "access issues," which are things that help or hinder students in their college education.

For example, many returning students rely on the welfare program to get through school. But many who enter college out of high school are not aware of the situation for these students because they rely on their parents for support. She said these issues hinge on communication between groups of students, so everyone knows what the needs of the different groups are.

The affirmative-action debate is another area that affects student access to the University, she said. Health care is another. Without these things many people would miss the opportunity to attend the University.

"We're citizens, and any program that affects people affects students," Williamson said.

Students should educate themselves on these issues, Dennis said, because with the way incumbency works, the new senator could be in office for 20 to 30 years.

"It's much more difficult to get rid of someone once he or she is in," he said.

Packwood did not vote favorably for students, Williamson said. He did not have a good relationship with the students, which was reflected in his voting record. About 10 years ago he removed a law from the tax code that allowed students to deduct interest on student loans from their taxes. Williamson and Dennis said they want the next senator to be more student-friendly.

This election is also a good opportunity to dispel the myth that all college-aged students are slackers, Williamson said.

"Students need to prove that we are a force to be reckoned with," she said.

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You have a responsibility to participate; your education, your loans and your housing will be dealt with in the political process.

— Norma Paulus
Senate candidate

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Voting in numbers empowers students to make changes in the government, she said. But students will not be able to have an impact on the race unless they vote.

"We don't have a political-action committee, and we don't write checks to candidates," Dennis said.

By not voting students are short changing themselves, Williamson said. When students and representatives of the University community go to Washington, D.C., to lobby for higher education they need to have student votes behind them.

"It is much different for me to go into a lobby session and say 'listen to me' when they know students did vote," she said.

Even the candidates running for the senate seat agree that students should be aware of who represents them.

Senate candidate Norma Paulus said that as eligible voters, students should participate in a process that decides their future.

"First of all you have a responsibility to participate in the political process," Paulus said. "And your education, your loans, housing for students — all of those issues will be dealt with in the political process, and the future of the state protects the environment and a healthy economy."

By not voting the students are losing their voice in democracy, said Senate candidate Peter DeFazio, who pointed to some of the decisions Congress will make in the next few months that could profoundly affect the lives of students. He included abortion, civil liberties and taxes among them.



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