

SPECIAL REPORT

Funding: Student advocates fear bill will end up as rider

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use state dollars for a ballot measure; you ought not use incidental fees, which once paid, turned into state dollars, for political purposes," Oakley said.

And OSA fears proponents adding the bill as a rider to another bill.

"People will write something worse and tack it on as a budget note and have it affect state scholarship commission," Dennis predicted. "They are not going to give up on this issue."

The scholarship budget is currently stalled in committee. There, it has the possibility of gaining a budget note regarding incidental fees, which will explain how the money is spent, said Tamara Dykeman, legislative director for OSA.

"The budget note they'll probably write will be worse than HB 3644," Dennis said. "It'll be much harder for us to defeat and, consequently, it will probably pass. Then it will be a budget note, which carries the weight of law."

And a budget note will go into the state budget, which makes it politically harder for Gov. Kitzhaber to veto it, Dennis said.

"The governor won't veto a whole bill because of a budget note," ASUO President Bill Miner said.

At this point, OSA is attempting to get "the most favorable budget note," Dykeman said.

But not only incidental fees are at risk from this predicament, Dennis predicts.

Dennis said he is afraid SB 5530, which deals with Oregon's need-based grants, is now in jeopardy because of the work

OSA did to first defeat, then claim neutrality of HB 3644.

"OSA was in a precarious place... chances for us getting that money for the grants is slim to none," Dennis said.

OSA is seeking to find an additional \$6.1 million from the state legislature to ensure all students eligible for the need grant can receive it. Without that money, about 7,000 students won't get grants that would have, Dennis predicted.

But Oakley doesn't necessarily agree with Dennis' predictions.

"They're going to get student need-grant money," she said.

However, Oakley questions if that money is necessary.

"I have a concern about students who get that money but are lobbying against [HB 3644]," she said. "On one hand, they say they need money, but on the other, they say they don't mind paying \$140 a term for incidental fees, so just how big is the need for a need grant? It sure makes me look at it a little different."

Dykeman said she hopes the situation with HB 3644 won't effect SB 5530.

"That's up in the air right now," she said. "We're hoping that the two issues will be judged on their merit. So far, that's what's been indicated. If people are mad at you, it's difficult to get them to do you favors. But, it doesn't look like they're going to punish us."

Through all this, OSA has admitted philosophical problems with HB 3644, but has opted to take a neutral stance on the bill.

"We, philosophically, have had a problem with any changes that would affect students nega-

tively, or take away students rights," Dennis said.

When the final version of HB 3644 was drafted, OSA stood neutral because the language in the bill would not have restricted the use of incidental fees more than it already is, Dykeman said. According to an existing state statute, no student organization can contribute money to political organizations.

"We are restating that we will be neutral for the language in HB 3644, which may be the same language in the budget note. It's the best we can get," Dykeman said.

While OSA has philosophical problems with the bill, Miner said proponents of the bill may not fully understand the incidental fee process.

"I don't think they understand it as well as students do," he said. "They've taken the time to educate themselves and get students involved, and I respect that. But there is still a lot of accusations made that are unfounded."

One such accusation is by Larry Harvey, chief of staff for House Majority Leader Lynn Snodgrass. He said the idea of creating a law to curb the use of incidental fees came about for two reasons: students complaining of high tuition and the alleged discovery of these fees being used to pay faculty salaries and debt acquired through bonds.

"These fees, we were under the impression, are supposed to be used for student organizations," he said.

However, Grattan Kernas, director of government relations for Oregon State System of Higher

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Education, said Harvey was wrong.

Kernas said incidental fees are not used to pay off bond debt or pay faculty salaries. In actuality, the building fee is used to pay off bond debt.

Bobby Lee, chief legislative aide to Sen. Susan Castillo and former ASUO president, said the bill wouldn't solve the problem of high tuition, as incidental fees only make up 10 percent of student costs in relation to tuition.

"People get confused by incidental fees and tuition," he said. "Everyone's tackling incidental fees, but no one is finding a way to reduce tuition. Why don't they tackle lowering the big part?"

And Lee contends the question about what would be considered political is too vague.

"Some could even say the campus newspaper is political," he said.

Yet Harvey thinks the bill is straight forward.

"All that it says is that you can't use public funds for politi-

cal campaigning, why would there be such a terrible objection to that," Harvey said.

But Miner has an objection. "I strongly believe that the bill should not have passed, because it would have been a set-up for a bigger battle in the future," Miner said.

And while OSA is anticipating the legislature's next move, others can't understand HB 3644 didn't pass on the House floor.

"I'm surprised," Harvey said. "The committee put a lot of work into it, and the committee voted unanimously to send it to the [House] floor. Members of the committee voted for it [in committee] and then on the floor some of them spoke against it. That doesn't say much for the process."

"Usually, when the committee votes unanimously to send it to the floor, it doesn't meet that much resistance on the floor."

And the committee did invest a lot of work into the bill.

The bill went through 15 different amendments, while Dennis and Harvey tried to come up with an agreement.

"The whole thought of spending all that time and energy - days and weeks on it - the whole thing was a distasteful, horrible experience," Dennis said. "We should have never been talking about it."

The state scholarship bill will be heard on Wednesday, and while Miner said he does worry about this issue, he thinks everything will turn out for the best in the end.

"If we continue to fight and be pro-active, I think we'll get what we need," he said.

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