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PRIMARY DUTIES

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

Voting may seem tedious or irrelevant, but the ASUO has power over your wallet and your interests



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

They've assailed you from street barriers, shouted at you through megaphones and grabbed you on the street corner. You might know some of them. You might wish you'd never met any of them.

They are the ASUO candidates, and now is their time.

Despite the bright yellow shirts and lime green balloons, you probably haven't voted. Last year, less than 10 percent of students voted — a pattern that has held true in previous years.

In fact, the street-corner shouting and vigorous sticker application may have driven you away from the ballot table. Well, it's time to go back.

The ASUO workers may occasionally be irritating, but they aren't irrelevant. During the year, the assorted offices that fall under the title Associated Students of the University of Oregon allocate massive sums of money. That money comes from incidental fees paid by students — fees totaling hundreds of dollars per person.

Simply casting a ballot won't save you from paying the fees nor will it drastically alter the way in which money is allocated or collected. But it can create a shift in government, and even minor shifts have a significant impact on most students.

Despite the noisy spotlight currently being cast upon the ASUO Executive candidates, the president and vice president are not the most important people on campus for most students. The key figures in most of our lives are the people who run the programs and participate in the groups we're interested in.

The ASUO as a whole and the Executive in particular may not seem very connected to these groups.

But the complexity of University politics means the Senate, the Programs Finance Committee and the Executive all

have an effect upon the on-campus activities of students. Those programs that are at the core of so many students' lives are funded through the incidental fee and the ASUO officials who allocate it.

Equally significant for students are the ballot measures that will be decided next week. Allocations for Lane Transit District service, the Designated Driver Shuttle and OSPIRG are among the issues on the ballot. Even students whose primary concern is getting to and from the bar and knowing what pesticides might be in their food once they arrive ought to have some interest in voting.

Even so, unfortunately, students will probably avoid the ballot tables once again this year. It doesn't make a lot of sense.

Students who don't vote aren't necessarily apathetic. But they are foolish. You don't have to think the ASUO is the most important group on campus to think voting is important. In fact, the more you care about the things you do and the activities you participate in, the more you should worry about the elections.

The future of your group's funding — or the funding of a group you rely upon — may rest with that ballot. If the only way the ASUO affects you is by taking your money, you're probably a pretty boring person.

And if you're a boring person, you probably have plenty of time to worry about where your money goes — the most fundamental reason of all to vote.

Being frightened away from the EMU by the fliers and festivities is understandable. Fortunately, there are nice quiet tables all over campus where you can tell the people you might not care about the things you do care about.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fliers patronizing

I don't understand the purpose of all the campaign fliers I see around campus. Do candidates think if I see "Vote for X" a million times I will vote for them? I find that attitude rather patronizing.

Instead, I propose candidates engage my intellect. The fliers could present a cogent summary of their platform and information where I could find a complete description of their plans. This summary hopefully would avoid catch phrases such as "progressive" or "diversity" and contain meaningful and specific statements. Maybe they could even put the date of the election, which would be much more informative than most of what I have seen on the fliers.

I would like to think that student politics have a higher intellectual standard than public politics, but I have yet to see this.

Derek Schutt
Graduate student

OSPIRG enthusiasm

For winter term, we were barraged with students seeking to register for an internship with OSPIRG. The enthusiasm was quite remarkable considering that OSPIRG is nothing new on campus. Students essentially relayed to us that they saw OSPIRG as an opportunity to get involved with the promotion of environmental awareness and public accountability. Students have updated us on their reactions to their experiences with OSPIRG and the great majority have spoken of learning very valuable skills and insights to complement their studies or

career ambitions. A few offered constructive suggestions, as do most interns with other sponsors, but almost all supported OSPIRG's mission on campus. Based on the response of the environmental studies interns, we hope that students will support the continuation of OSPIRG's presence on campus at the University of Oregon.

Alan Dickman
Coordinator of Internships
Environmental Studies
Andy Peara
GTF, Co-coordinator of Internships
Environmental Studies

OSPIRG not democratic

Let me start this letter by emphasizing that I have been and always will be a strong supporter of students controlling student fees. It is a ridiculous notion for me to consider anybody but students controlling a fund that they pay into exclusively.

OSPIRG is not the "democratic, student-oriented organization" that our ASUO president would have us believe. OSPIRG is not run by students but is run by a "campus organizer" instead. This is a professional staff person paid to come here and run this "student" program. Every other year OSPIRG becomes extremely visible, through posters and phone calls, so they can renew their funding through the ballot. They are only "vital" if you consider posters and phone calls a sign of vitality. The reason they go to the ballot every other year is because they know that with an 8 percent turnout, it

shouldn't be that hard to get enough votes to win.

In relative terms to the amount of money they receive, vital is not a word that immediately comes to mind. Please consider that there are several student-run groups on campus that receive a tenth of what OSPIRG gets, and yet they do twice as much and often more. Those are groups run by students, not professional staff.

I support what OSPIRG does but I don't want them, or anyone else, to represent OSPIRG as a group that is continually fighting the good fight for students' autonomy. OSPIRG primarily works on streamwalks, homelessness awareness and pesticide campaigns. While these are important issues, they have nothing to do with lobbying Salem and/or Washington about students' rights, and I can't see anyone mistaking these things.

Finally, if OSPIRG is so pro students' rights, then why did they vehemently oppose an initiative which would have allowed students to vote on whether groups receiving students' money should have itemized budgets? Instead of arguing the issue, they personally attacked senators in favor of referring the measure and used scare tactics to convince the other senators to vote that measure down. Where was students' power in OSPIRG's agenda then? Without an itemized budget that is controlled by students on this campus, I can't see giving them our money, and I would urge all of you to vote NO on OSPIRG's measure.

Robert L. Wasson
ASUO Multicultural Advocate

OSPIRG key voice

Driven by the ideals of students, OSPIRG has become one of Oregon's leading voices on consumer and environmental issues. The unique joining of student energy and leadership with professional continuity and expertise has enabled OSPIRG to have a profound impact on issues that affect our quality of life today and for future generations to come.

OSPIRG protects the environment: For more than a decade, OSPIRG has released landmark reports about recycling and the potential risks to human and ecological health from toxic chemicals released into Oregon's environment.

OSPIRG fights for consumers: For 23 years, publications and outreach efforts such as the OSPIRG Renter's Handbook, ATM fees reports, annual bank surveys and the dangerous toys surveys have been important resources for University students and other consumers.

OSPIRG serves the community: For the past 13 years, students and staff have organized the Hunger Cleanup Work-a-thon and other service events, raising resources for local, national and international relief agencies.

Every two years, students are asked to continue funding your OSPIRG chapter at the University through the student incidental fee on the ASUO ballot. On election day, keep your chapter strong — vote yes for OSPIRG.

David Koch
Programs Finance Committee Chair