

Kitzhaber, Sizemore engage in first debate

By Michael Hines
Editor in Chief

Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber took most of the heat in the Sept. 14 televised gubernatorial debate, but he also received the most crowd support.

In the debate, which was held at Lane Community College, Kitzhaber was attacked for issues ranging from his environmental record to his view on taxes.

The debate's format was criticized by Republican challenger Bill Sizemore both before and after the event for not including a segment for the candidates to ask each other questions.

One of the common topics was higher education in Oregon.

Pacific Party candidate Blair Bobier argued that the "tax-and-spend" approach may be the best way to fund schools.

"We can't be spending money on education if we're spending so much money on prison construction," he said. "There's only so much of the pie to go around."

Sizemore said he wanted to keep higher education affordable for qualified applicants.

"However," he said, "I must point out that newspapers across this country are full of news stories about all of the scholarships that go unclaimed because there are not enough qualified applicants to qualify for the financial aid that is already available."

Sizemore alluded to the idea that some of the financial aid may not be claimed because of the

poor state of Oregon's primary and secondary education.

Libertarian candidate Richard Burke said he would adopt a tuition freeze.

"Then I would increase faculty salaries by cutting administrative and bureaucratic costs," he said. "The administration is very top-heavy in our university system."

Burke was the only candidate to address student fees.

"Every time we sign up for tuition, we pay student fees which fund all sorts of organizations. Some are valid, some are not, but I think they should be made voluntary," he said. "This would take away hundreds, or in some cases even thousands of dollars off the cost of tuition."

The average college student in Oregon has a \$20,000 debt when he or she graduates, Kitzhaber said, calling it "unacceptable."

"I will do two things," he said. "The last budget I froze tuition. I will continue that into the 1999-2001 budget."

In addition, Kitzhaber said he would propose a low-interest college loan fund for all students who have achieved the Certificate of Initial Mastery in high school.

Sizemore had earlier confronted Kitzhaber in his opening statements.

"Today, 25 percent of our high school students are dropping out before they finish high school," he said, "condemning them to a life of poverty, welfare, low income, low-paying jobs."

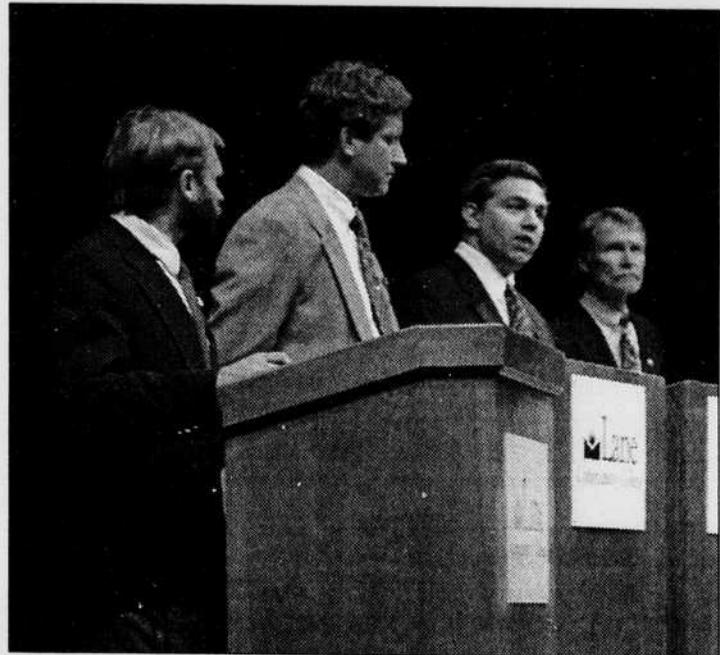
Sizemore further announce that he has an eight-point plan "turn the schools around in our state."

"This plan offers common-sense solutions that do not place a heavier burden on the tax payer, but instead put solutions where a school can make meaningful changes without increasing costs," Sizemore said. Some examples he gave were giving teachers more freedom to keep discipline in the classroom, returning the classes to fundamentals of education and putting phonics back in education.

"Hopefully, tonight you will see a clear contrast between John Kitzhaber and myself," he said. "He is proposing solutions to our problems that are tired, worn-out solutions of the past. He's constantly asking for more money, that he can solve all of our problems if we have more money. I firmly believe that the taxpayers of this state are paying enough money to have first-class schools, good roads, parks, etcetera."

Kitzhaber often referred to his "Oregon Challenge."

"First, we need to give our children and the entire work force the education and skills they need to succeed in the 21st century," he said. "We must make our schools the best in the nation, not only by demanding that our children master the basics, but they can also demonstrate what they have learned in the real world. We need to ensure that no qualified high school graduate is denied the opportunity for a college education."



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The four candidates involved in the debate were (left to right) Blair Bobier, Bill Sizemore, Richard Burke and Gov. John Kitzhaber.

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