

OSPIRG's victory not yet official

Their victory is plagued with controversy over campaign spending issues

By David Ryan
Oregon Daily Emerald

Pending the outcome of grievances recently filed, the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group will return next fall after a year of absence, a product of its supporters' work to get votes and the failure of its detractors.

But a controversy exists because of a speech by Ralph Nader on campus the day before the ASUO elections and what OSPIRG detractors say is a huge difference in the amount of money both sides spent.

According to Taylor Sturges, ASUO elections coordinator, The Committee to Re-establish OSPIRG spent \$1,198 on their campaign, while the Honesty Campaign spent \$167.65 toward an anti-OSPIRG campaign, about a sevenfold difference between the two groups. Another student group, Truth, Caring and Honesty, spent \$56 aiding the OSPIRG campaign.

Merriah Fairchild, OSPIRG state chairwoman, said the money the group spent on its campaign is about the same as any candidate for the ASUO Executive might spend.

ASUO Executive candidates Wylie Chen and Mitra Anoushiravani spent \$1,400. Their opponents, Matt Swanson and Dan Reid, spent \$1,600 on their campaign.

Also, she said money for The Committee to Re-establish OSPIRG's campaign came from the

donations of OSPIRG members, their parents and donations from community members.

OSPIRG received 134 endorsements from University faculty, ASUO members and candidates, Democratic legislators and student groups.

Kenneth Best, an ASUO Senate candidate who endorsed the group, said he thought OSPIRG had listened to last year's criticisms.

"People thought they were a little confronting last year," he said. This year "they were more informational instead of in-your-face."

Jamilla Singleton, another ASUO Senate candidate who endorsed OSPIRG, said the group's honesty won her over.

"I thought they were very honest," she said. "They allowed us to attend their meetings and ask them any questions we might have."

One of the major criticisms of OSPIRG in last spring's election was the group's devotion to off-campus issues, including its use of full-time employees in Portland to research and lobby for the group's causes.

Rep. Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene), said he had supported OSPIRG because its members presented him with information about student concerns.

"Students don't just live on campus," Prozanski said. "There are issues that affect students in the wider community."

But Jason Gathercole, Honesty Campaign member, said OSPIRG was unfairly helped by Nader's speech.

Gathercole and Scott Austin, another Honesty member, filed grievances against the ASUO. OS-

PIRG's victory will not be official until the grievances are resolved by the ASUO Constitution Court.

ASUO President Geneva Wortman told the Emerald at the Nader speech that the ASUO Executive had done some "creative budgeting" to pay Nader's speaker's fee.

Wortman is also quoted in an April 24 Register-Guard article as saying, "We worked really hard this whole year to re-establish OSPIRG."

Wortman also said in the same article that the ASUO had paid \$4,000 to go toward Nader's \$5,000 speaker's fee. The Earth Week Committee paid the rest.

ASUO Executive Rule 82.4 states the Executive cannot use student fees to support the campaign of any individual, party or public office.

Regardless of how many students attended the Nader speech, Gathercole said, the Emerald's April 21 headline "Nader champions OSPIRG at rally" may have encouraged students to vote in OSPIRG's favor.

"If we had the resources to bring an anti-OSPIRG Nader to campus it would have affected the vote," he said.

Gathercole said the Honesty Campaign might also have been more effective if the group had known how much money the Committee to Re-establish OSPIRG had planned to spend on its campaign.

"We didn't have the numbers until three hours before the election was over," he said.

He said he thought if students knew how much money the group was spending it might have affected the vote.

Ballot measures attract more votes than Executive

The low turnout may reflect students not relating to the issues

By Jason George
Oregon Daily Emerald

Although the voter tally did not vary much from last year, the circumstances did.

This year, 2,483 students voted in the general elections, and 2,355 students voted in 1998. That's about 15 percent of the student body voting, using the enrollment statistics from spring term 1998 and winter term 1999.

Both years were quite an increase from 1997, when 1,166 students voted in the general election.

"It would be nice if more people voted, but this turnout was nice," said Taylor Sturges, ASUO elections coordinator.

The election results this year had some interesting points. For example, the ballot measures attracted more votes than the candidate races.

"It is kind of wacky when more people vote for the ballots than the Exec," said Matt Swanson, who ran as a candidate for vice president.

Swanson explained the problems with the race for president.

"I think the ballot measures got people to care about

the environment and workers' rights," he said. "The Exec didn't."

The measure most voted on was for the re-establishment of OSPIRG, with 2,322 voters. OSPIRG state chairwoman Merriah Fairchild said OSPIRG worked all year preparing for this election. The measure collected 1,437 votes for OSPIRG and 966 against.

"We had two techniques this year," she said. "One, all year we were building a strong coalition with other groups. Two, we tried to organize a grass roots campaign by getting people out to answer questions and staffing phone banks."

Some students said they did not feel strongly about anything on the ballot.

"I didn't really care about anything," said Patrick Nork, a senior psychology major. "I would vote if I felt anything directly affected me."

Spencer Hamlin, who submitted the measure concerning the removal of Gardenburgers from campus, said it is unfortunate that some students do not feel connected to the issues.

"If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem," Hamlin said.

The Gardenburger measure received a total of 2,224 votes both for and against.

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