

Activist trio bikes for votes

■ A new voting campaign held along a cross-country bike route makes a stop on campus today

By Lindsay Buchele
For the Emerald

After visiting Kenya, college graduate Brian Goldberg realized just how much America's youth takefor granted.

He watched as the young people in the East African country walked three days just to cast their votes, trying desperately to make a difference in a country where the government reigns supreme, despite how its people vote. Goldberg worried that young Americans don't appreciate their own right to vote.

"The youth in Kenya had dreams, but didn't see any way to reach these dreams because of the economic status and corrupt government in their country," Goldberg said. "We [Americans] can achieve our dreams, and voting is the way our generation has a voice."

The "generation" Goldberg refers to is the 18 to 24-year-old U.S. citizens who currently have the lowest voting percentage in history. In 1972, following the Vietnam War, the number of youth registered to vote was 50 percent. Today it has declined to 20 percent.

Ready to change this alarming statistic, Goldberg recruited longtime friend Benjamin Bruder and Bruder's former classmate Jonas Parker to start Bike for Youth Votes. Both were ready and willing to assist in spreading awareness about youth voting.

"Voting is a privilege and responsibility we have and need to take advantage of," Bruder said.

The first challenge for the 23-year-old friends was to find the best way to reach at least a portion of America's youth, Bruder said. They decided to cycle down the West

Coast due to its optimal weather conditions and large progressive cities. The next challenges were more complicated.

"This has been a lot of work," Parker said. "Getting voter registration forms was the easy part, but we had to put the whole trip together."

Getting up to speed on the latest political issues, deciding a route, making contacts with schools and the media and finding a way to finance the trip took the trio four months to complete.

The trio will be making an appearance at the University today to run a Voter Registration Drive.

By biking from the Canadian to the Mexican border (approximately 1,776 miles), Bike for Youth Votes plans to run voter registration drives, visit high schools and colleges, meet with local political organizations and attract media coverage. The journey started on Sept. 15, and, as a result, around 200 young people have been



registered to vote. The response has been encouraging, Bruder said.

"We're really the perfect age for this," Bruder said. "The youth are getting a message from other youth rather than older people and politicians."

Remaining "non-partisan," the group feels they are less threatening than politicians pushing their views on young voters.

"There are basically two reasons why young people don't vote," Goldberg said. "The first is they don't think their vote makes a difference. The second is they feel disconnected from the government

and don't understand the government's part in their lives."

Cycling down the western United States is changing these activists' lives as well. While one of the three drives (a car is necessary to transport papers and supplies), the other two travel bicycle routes along highways and roads. Averaging 50 miles a day, they attempt to stay with friends and sometimes end up camping out. Thanks to their sponsors, however, they aren't without the necessities of life.

"The sponsors have provided money for food and gas," Parker said. "Two of our sponsors are Cliff Bark and Balance Bar, and they've been giving us their products, which help with our energy levels."

The cyclists are also self-proclaimed "big athletes" who have been biking since childhood. Parker and Bruder live in Colorado and are active in outdoor sports as well.

Being so active has lent the group an "energy," said ASUO vice president Holly Magner.

"They [Goldberg, Bruder, and Parker] contacted us and let us know they were going to be in the area," Magner said. "We jumped on this awesome opportunity to have fresh faces and fresh new energy recruiting voters. They just care so much about the issue."

Despite their energy, Bruder says this will probably be the only trip the group will make.

"After this trip, we'll probably move on to our respective careers and have other things going on in our lives," Bruder said.

With that in mind, the group will work hard on this trip and hope for continued success as they move into California.

"We expect a good response in California, because it will be getting closer to election time," Parker said.

SFC, Austin said, so there is a chance it may receive full funding.

The amount of funding for various groups is not the only unresolved issue surrounding this year's budget process. Austin foresees other complications when it comes to fee distribution. For example, the ability of student groups to request funds through ballot measures, which they could

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Melinda Grier
General Counsel
University of Oregon

do in years past, may be put in jeopardy.

He said the ballot measure system allows groups that are popular to get more money than those that aren't. If that were to happen, equal groups would not receive equal funding, which he said goes against the Southworth decision.

And finally, there is the question of how the decision will impact the incidental fee itself.

University General Counsel

Melinda Grier said she doesn't believe the decision will result in students paying more to the fee, because students will continue to look at the programs and decide which ones they want to fund.

"There are always more requests than there are money for," she said. "We've always taken the view that any group can apply for funds, and then we look at what the activities are."

Despite the overwhelming presence of questions, groups that wish to have funding for the next school year must begin thinking soon about their choices.

Already some groups are contemplating future action.

Chris Pratt of the College Democrats said that the group intends to ask for funding when the opportunity arises.

In contrast, the College Republicans have decided as a group not to ask for funding, Austin said.

"I don't think it's right for anyone to pay for something they don't agree with," he said.

The Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship is steering clear of the incidental fee issue for the time being.

"I don't think we're at a place where we're able to deal with any adversarial issues that may be out there," said Jack Hammond, director of Chi Alpha. He added that he didn't think the fellowship would ask for funding "until our students have a stronger conviction for their fees going to Chi Alpha."

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fering views, but similar programs, would be considered equals when it comes to funding.

With such a large opportunity on the horizon as the ASUO gears up for the impending budget process, there are more questions than answers floating around.

ASUO President Jay Breslow said that until the Clark Document, which contains incidental fee guidelines for the University, is updated in November, it is unclear what groups will be able to receive funding and how the process will work.

Even so, some student organizations are still planning to try.

Austin said that Justice for All, an anti-abortion student group that supports the use of graphic material, will request funding during this year's budgeting process. The funding will go in part to sponsor the Genocide Awareness Project, which JFA brought to campus last year.

The issue, he said, is not whether JFA will receive funding, but how much funding it will get.

Generally, first-year student programs are given \$300 for their yearly budget.

But Students for Choice, an abortion rights organization on campus, has received funding through the incidental fee for years. JFA is essentially equal to

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