

Student group questions foreign policy

■ The MIC Working Group will discuss government decisions and military relations

By Emily Gust
Oregon Daily Emerald

Congress' approval of a \$1.3 billion aid package to Colombia earlier this year caught the attention of senior journalism major Seth Quackenbush.

Supposedly meant to "fight the war on drugs," the package delegated funds for several different purposes, including human rights work. The biggest chunk of the \$1.3 billion went to the Colombian military for the destruction of drugs.

But Quackenbush sensed some inconsistencies in the government's action and its decision to give so much money to the military.

"What the government was saying didn't seem to explain what was going on," he said.

For instance, a bill that would have moved nearly a quarter of a million dollars from the Colombian aid package into rehabilitation efforts in the U.S. was defeated in Congress.

A study commissioned by the Clinton administration in 1995 found that rehabilitation was the most effective of four ways to combat the domestic drug problem. In contrast, source-crop eradication — destroying the drugs where they are grown, as in the case of Colombia — was found to be least effective.

In search of an explanation, Quackenbush joined forces with University alumna and Survival Center volunteer Agatha

Schmaedick to create the Military Industrial Complex (MIC) Working Group — a forum for students to discuss U.S. foreign policy and military involvement.

The idea of a military industrial complex has existed for years. Former President Dwight Eisenhower warned against its influence in his farewell speech of 1961, and political critic Noam Chomsky has talked about it as well.

As Quackenbush described it, the military industrial complex is a "web of relationships" that have developed out of the mutual interests of the militaries and industries around the world, especially in the United States.

"A lot of private industries have profited enormously through making weaponry for the U.S. military and so

they have a tremendous interest in keeping it pumped up even if it's unnecessary," Quackenbush said. "The reason we're producing weapons is no longer for national defense. It's to keep the money flowing."

Schmaedick extends the definition to cover more than just the military weapons industry; she said that key industries such as oil, apparel and cash crops are also connected with oppressive militaries around the world.

Military Industrial Complex Working Group

What: A new student group stemming from the ASUO Survival Center. It is a forum where students can talk about U.S. foreign policy and military involvement while exploring the connections between world industries and military powers.

When: Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m.

Where: Ben Linder Room, EMU

"Maintaining this mutually self-serving relationship is more important than respecting the rule of law and governments of the world," Schmaedick said.

The group's focus will be on educating themselves, Schmaedick said. That does not mean, however,

that it will avoid activity altogether.

A plan is in the works to send six students to Georgia in November for the School of Americas (SOA) protests. SOA is a military training school that has been connected with human rights violators worldwide.

On Oct. 27, the group is sponsoring a speech by an East Timorese woman named Ajiza Magno, who is studying economics at the University. The speech, which Schmaedick said will cover military violence and labor standards in East Timor, will take place at 7 p.m. in Room 100, Willamette Hall.

Schmaedick's personal focus is East Timor, an issue she has been working on since she was 13 years old, but she emphasized that she wants the group to come up with topics that the members are interested in.

University alumni Takeshi Sengiku, a former co-director of the Colombia Support Network in Eugene, said that his interest in the MIC stems from wanting to know more about U.S. foreign policy while also finding out which companies dictate what happens in other nations.

"One of the things that somehow fascinates me is the structure of the U.S. foreign policy, its military aids and the relationship among all nation states in the international arena. [It is all] so far away from us [as] individuals," he said.

Debate

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About 25 students and community members from organizations including the College Republicans, OSPIRG, Black Student Union and Coalition Against Environmental Racism (CARE) gathered together in the EMU basement to observe the debate and discuss their differing views on the issues the candidates spoke about.

Many members from different political parties believed that Gore made the strongest overall impression this round, in contrast to the two previous debates.

Ben Zublin, sophomore geology major and Democrat, said Gore's confidence won him the debate and Bush's answers weren't substantial enough to hide his uneasiness about many of the issues.

"Bush was stumbling many times and had a hard time constructing answers," he said. "Gore did a good job connecting with the people emotionally, particularly on issues such as education. Bush was good at handing out trite generalizations and platitudes, but there wasn't a lot of substance in what he was saying."

Casey Singleton, co-chair of the College Republicans, said that Bush was less confident in this debate because the issues discussed weren't his strongest areas.

"This was Bush's weakest performance, even though he won the others hands down," he said. "He still drove home the points he needed to — for example, his belief in giving money back to the people ... But in general Gore has more experience in this forum."

Michelle Averbeck, a freshman journalism major working on the Nader campaign, also said that Bush's lack of knowledge about specific issues was one of the reasons he lost the debate.

"Bush ducked the issue of affirmative action," she said. "I believe that's because he doesn't even know what the definition of affirmative action is ... He isn't informed enough to be the president and that showed."

But Averbeck also believed that though Gore appeared cool and collected, some of his answers were insincere, and this was a turnoff to her. She mentioned that Gore used his background of growing up on a tobacco farm to promote himself as an American farmer but later said tobacco companies should be regulated.

"Gore tried to emphasize that he keeps his words and promises," she said. "But the fact is that he has a history of fraud and denial. He changes his platforms to suit his cause and then denies that he ever felt differently."

Lynn Teresa Williams, volunteer for CARE and environmental studies major at Lane Community College, was impressed by Gore's ability to answer questions in a straightforward manner as opposed to Bush's "roundabout" responses.

"I wish Bush would be more up front about issues such as affirmative action and tax cuts," she said. "When he's not, it tells me that he's not telling me the truth about what he's going to do. I'm single, and from Gore's answers about tax cuts, I felt like I would actually get some help."

Nader

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Nader, the Green Party candidate for president, said excluding him again would put the bipartisan commission "in hot water again."

He was denied access to the Oct. 3 event in Boston even though he had been given a ticket by a local college student.

It was that event that prompted the lawsuit in U.S. District Court in

Boston against the Commission on Presidential Debates, the commission's two co-chairmen, a commission "security consultant" and a state police sergeant.

Nader called the lawsuit the first step in dismantling the commission.

"By the time I'm finished with the debate commission, its ranking in political opinion polls will be below the ranking of used car dealers," Nader said.

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This event co-sponsored by the UO Dance and Women's Studies Departments and the Hult Center for the Performing Arts' Community Involvement Program.

