

PERSPECTIVES

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OSPIRG: A model for citizens



SAINTS AND PROFITS

ERIC PFEIFFER

Editor's disclosure: Eric Pfeiffer is currently on hiatus from the Emerald, as he is Bret Jacobson's campaign manager for the ASUO Executive election. This column and his next, appearing in two weeks, were written before he took the job as campaign manager. Pfeiffer will not be writing about the ASUO Executive election.

One of the most enduring debates on this campus has been the ideological and legal battle fought over the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group. A little searching through the archives of the Emerald shows headlines from decades ago, such as "Funding of OSPIRG questioned."

This week you might have seen the open struggle between OSPIRG petitioners and members of HONESTY, a group of students trying to keep OSPIRG off the upcoming election ballot. Right now, OSPIRG members are preparing for this year's election, when they will ask student voters for more than \$144,426 to fund its chapter of the national PIRG at the University.

The PIRGs were started in 1971 by Ralph Nader, and predominantly fill their ranks with those who would describe themselves as liberals or as belonging to the left wing of the political spectrum.

Many liberals are very disheartened that Nader may have contributed to the defeat of Al Gore in this year's presidential election.

There has been a growing dislike for the character and motivations of Nader among a large portion of centrist and liberal democrats. Most Democratic congressmen and senators won't re-

turn his phone calls. Even Massachusetts liberal and former Gov. Michael Dukakis said he wanted to choke Nader! But don't let your feelings about an aspiring politician get in the way of your support for a group that actively engages the most integral component of our society, the citizen.

Yet, it is with no reservations that I encourage all of you to strongly support OSPIRG's campaign.

The University is a very challenging place, full of obstacles and rewards, but it's not the real world. We're living in a place where there shouldn't even be an argument over the fundamental value of cultural organizations and active groups that promote new ideas across the board.

Take a moment to think about the cause that means the most to you. Now, unless it entails large amounts of fertilizer and a federal building, aren't you glad there is a group of people that you can share your cause with? It makes sense in a community dedicated to the education of its patrons that we should foster different interests, even if they aren't cohesive with our own basic political ideology.

Yes, every student should demand accountability from their

student fees down to the very last cent. Full disclosure is essential to the vitality of publicly funded programs. When a group has proven its integrity and merit time and time again, however, shouldn't we just let them do what they do best? Yes, we should, because college is perhaps the only time when most of us will live in an environment where the growth of the human experience is nurtured and sustained.

When you get out of college you can fight high taxes, invest in things you feel good about and play as much golf as the country club will allow. Whatever makes you feel complete.

But while you're here, learn to accept the fact that you attend school at a liberal arts university in a town that gives the title "campus icon" to a man named Frog.

Ultimately, I do think students who have a very personal disagreement with a particular group should be able to have their fees withdrawn from that organization. Even Darth Nader said that would be "hyper-democratic."

However, it doesn't mean they should take that money back. Instead, return it to the general fee sur-

plus and let it be redistributed to other groups. Regardless, I'm not here arguing the legality of OSPIRG — that's why we have a Future Lawyers Association and a Constitution Court.

Some people will tell you that OSPIRG will survive without its funding. Of course it will. I also thought maybe this month I wouldn't pay rent, because my apartment isn't going anywhere. Even better, I don't think I need to pay my utilities, grocery bills, health insurance or tuition. We all know those things will be there tomorrow no matter what I do.

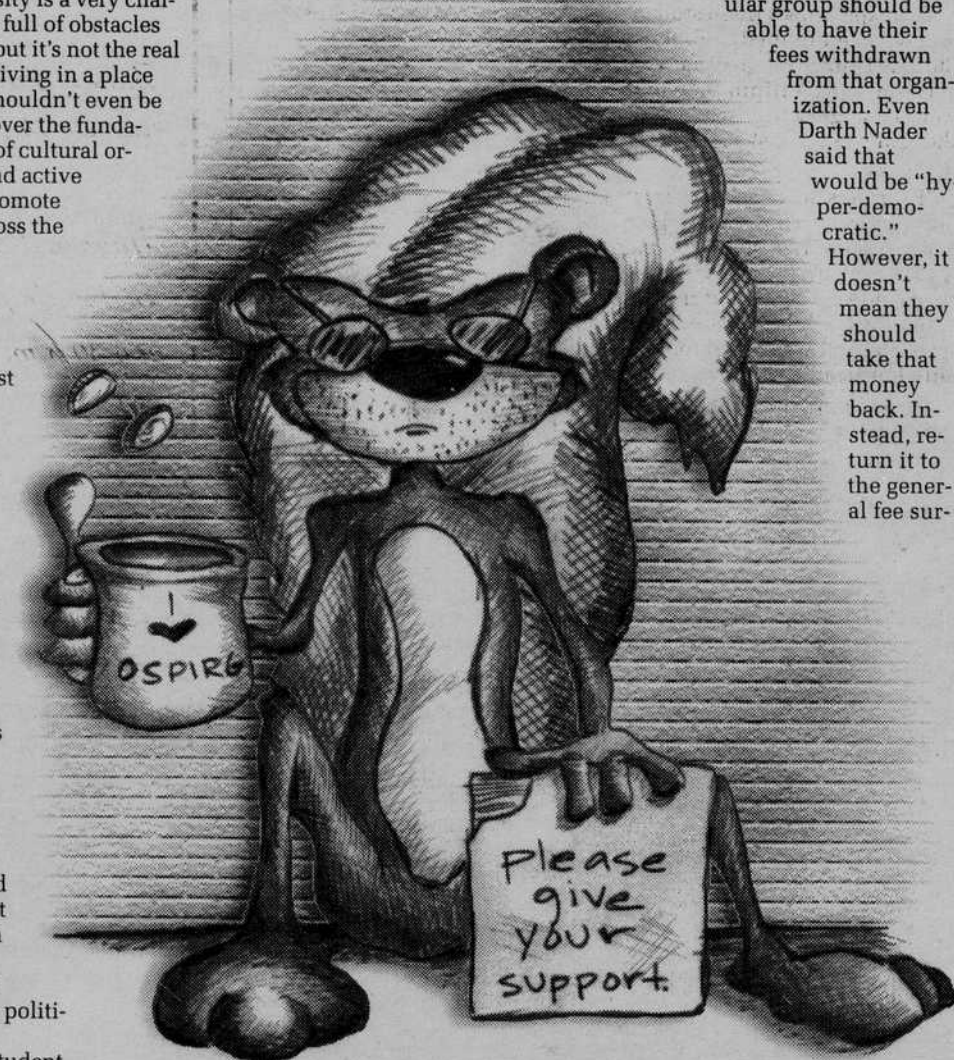
This brings us to the simple argument for why you should sign the pledge and support OSPIRG. Great things come from the heart, but they require the investment of resources to make them a reality. Time is a valuable resource, and so is money.

Whether you call yourself a liberal or a conservative, but especially if you call yourself a conservative, you have the obligation as a citizen to protect the land we live in. One of the few guarantees that our Constitution entitles us is a national defense. However, the defense of our environment goes beyond building the biggest missile shield money can buy. It goes deep into the ideal of being an active citizen and preserving the place you call home.

That means building communities, neighborhoods and relationships. It reaches into the depths of the Alaskan soil, the coasts off our ocean shores and the dwindling forests in a state like Oregon.

I encourage every student at the University to support OSPIRG's right to be on this year's ballot, and then to vote yes on OSPIRG. Besides, don't you REALLY HATE ATM fees?!?

Eric Pfeiffer is a columnist for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached at epfeiffe@gladstone.uoregon.edu.



Bryan Dixon Emerald

Letters to the editor

Meningococcal disease is not preventable

I extend my sincere condolences to Mike Kepferle from Maryland on the devastating loss of his son to meningococcal disease ("Dieringer tragedy demands response," ODE, Feb. 15). I understand that he would like to reach out to share information with parents here in Oregon.

It is very important to clarify that the meningococcal serogroup B infection that caused the death of Jill Dieringer was absolutely NOT a preventable illness. Serogroup B accounts for over 70 percent of cases of meningococcal disease in Oregon. The quadrivalent meningococcal vaccine does not protect

against Type B disease at all.

In the United States, invasive meningococcal infection is most common in infants (20 cases/100,000 per year). In Oregon since 1993, there have been 75 to 130 cases of meningococcal disease every year. There were only six cases that occurred in students attending four-year colleges (1.1 cases/100,000 per year).

Maryland had an attack rate in college dormitory residents that was three-fold greater (3.24 cases/100,000 per year) and also a very high rate of vaccine-responsive disease strains. Legislated mandatory vaccination may be a successful strategy in Maryland. Data suggest that vaccination is much less likely to be effective here.

ACIP is not recommending vaccination of all college freshmen or

even of all college students living in residence halls at this time. Educate yourself about meningococcal disease. Ask your physician or health care practitioner for an individualized recommendation about immunization.

Helen Miller, M.D.
Eugene

Jell-O wrestling is our prerogative

It was with a great deal of sorrow that I read Jeremy Lang's article last Monday ("ASUO hopefuls embark on 2001-02 campaigns," ODE, Feb. 12).

Mr. Lang has made the assumption that the Eric & Brian Campaign for ASUO Executive is nothing more than a joke. Nothing could be further from the truth. While we have run an admittedly light-heart-

ed campaign thus far, in no way should this invalidate our ideas for improving student life.

In a nutshell, our platform consists of three issues: The creation of a new scholarship fund from the student incidental fee, improvement of campus safety after dark and realizing the potential of every student to be a leader.

If we want to banish a few vampires on the side or settle Constitution Court disputes with Jell-O wrestling, well, that's our prerogative. I guarantee it would make campus a more interesting place to live and study.

To clear up another misconception, Brian Boone is not a staff writer at the Oregon Commentator. He is an associate editor. Eric Qualheim is not affiliated with the Commentator at all, and like another

candidate, he is a former employee of the Oregon Daily Emerald.

Our Web page, at gladstone.uoregon.edu/~equalhei/elec.html, offers a complete look at our platform.

We would like to encourage everyone to examine our ideas before the election Feb. 26.

Eric Qualheim
sophomore
journalism

CORRECTION

In the ODE story "Students lobby in Salem, learn legislative ropes" (Feb. 19), classified staff should have been included in the list of people who will attend the Oregon University System rally in Salem on March 6.

The Emerald regrets the error.