

OSPIRG ON THE BALLOT

Letters to the editor

OSPIRG full of empty promises

I am a student at Portland State University, and I am becoming familiar with OSPIRG on this campus. Some of the same problems apply to OSPIRG at the University of Oregon.

OSPIRG claims to be for the environment, but who wastes more money on posters than OSPIRG (at PSU, they don't even appear to be on recycled paper)? OSPIRG also claims to support campaign finance reform, but when it's on the ballot, it outspends the opposition four times over!

OSPIRG likes students to think they are the last hope for environmental causes, and lots of students think that giving OSPIRG money equals doing something good. But when was the last time OSPIRG actually proved it was effective?

There are many environmental groups that are funded voluntarily and are much more successful than OSPIRG, such as the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Oregon Trout, the Cascadia Forest Alliance and the World Forestry Center. Do you see those groups misleading students about how their money is spent? Those groups don't require students to pay for them.

OSPIRG likes to say it involves students, but the groups I've mentioned will gladly take student volunteers. Why doesn't OSPIRG let students make that decision for themselves?

Simply, they are afraid that people will realize that OSPIRG is full

of empty promises, and that if students paid more attention, they would realize OSPIRG is not what it claims to be. Students should vote no on OSPIRG, because they are being taken for a ride.

Ken Oke
Portland State University
freshman
speech communications

OSPIRG: a fighter and a winner

If there is any issue that calls you to vote in the general elections next week, it should be to vote yes for OSPIRG. OSPIRG is always on target in its campaigns. I am from Alaska, and preserving one of the last real areas of wilderness in the country — the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — is one of my top environmental concerns.

OSPIRG is making protection of the refuge its top national campaign. The other big issue that it is working on is cleaning up the Willamette River. Progress on this issue is going to take more than kids cleaning up trash on the stream walks; it's going to mean hiring staff to work with students to uncover the root causes of the pollution and then finding solutions to those root problems. OSPIRG gets results by having staff work on these issues year-round.

I want that, and so I am going to vote to fund the work that OSPIRG does. I want the Willamette cleaned up. I want the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to be protected. I want a group to focus on hunger and homelessness in Eugene. I want OSPIRG because it

will not stop working on these issues until they are solved.

I am voting yes on OSPIRG because these battles need fighting, and OSPIRG is in the business of winning them.

Erin Pursell
junior
political science

MCC's doors are open to all

The Multicultural Center is on the ballot this year for the first time. Our support can really make a difference for the MCC and everyone on campus. The MCC represents a strong community that welcomes everybody, not just students of color. Its goal is to spread "diversity" and awareness of other cultures through events, workshops, guest speakers, etc.

It is very important for students to see different people's perspectives on issues, and without the MCC, this would be very difficult. Many student groups come to the MCC when they need money to finance an event. The MCC sponsors these groups but usually cannot contribute enough money because of its small budget. These events are almost always free and are always open to everyone. If this ballot measure passes, the money would not go only to the MCC, it would also go to many student groups.

MCC is asking for a mere 37 cents per student per term, which would yield about \$18,000 to allocate to student groups, such as the Black Student Union, APASU and MEChA, for events next year. This money will support events that are

open to everyone. Just as our game tickets are open to everyone, the MCC is open to everyone.

I encourage every student to support the MCC and pass this measure on the ballot. It's our duty to this university and society to keep the MCC properly funded and running.

Give the MCC a chance to show what it can do by voting!

Nicholas D. Madani
freshman
business

OSPIRG: a statewide leader

It's again that time of year in which students jockey over support for or against certain ballot measures in the ASUO elections. I'd like to add a fresh perspective to the OSPIRG debate.

If you don't read the paper every day, then it can be hard to see the work that OSPIRG performs not only on this campus, but in our community and across our state. Last fall, OSPIRG was an invaluable ingredient in an ASUO recipe that registered more than 5,500 students to vote.

In addition to motivating students to exercise their democratic rights, OSPIRG is a leader across the state. By hiring staff and reaching out to the community to work with citizens to clean up our waterways, protect the air we breathe and for consumer protection, students here improve the quality of life for the community as a whole. These actions demonstrate that University students are invested community members, and we should be invested community

members, as it's our duty to create a positive future for Oregon.

For many, including myself, OSPIRG has taught valuable skills outside of the classroom. These skills have provided students a foundation to make an impact on the world we live in. Support the OSPIRG ballot measure.

Brian Tanner
senior
political science

OSPIRG effective for students

I am writing to strongly endorse the OSPIRG ballot measure. Through my involvement with statewide and national student organizations, I have seen the effectiveness of OSPIRG.

Whether it has been registering students to vote, advocating for higher Pell Grants, fighting ATM fees or protecting student fee control, OSPIRG has achieved concrete victories that benefit students.

OSPIRG is a non-partisan organization that brings students from universities and community colleges together to work on issues students care about. This has resulted in a very positive reputation for OSPIRG on campus, statewide and national levels.

I encourage everyone to find more out about OSPIRG and vote yes for OSPIRG in the ASUO election.

C.J. Gabbe
student senator
senior
planning, public policy and management

OSPIRG: still recycling UO students' fee money

GUEST COMMENTARY

Owen Brennan Rounds

Like drizzle in the Eugene forecast or an almost-great season for the football team, OSPIRG seems ever present at the University of Oregon. But unlike the weather or dreams of the Rose Bowl, students can actually have an impact on OSPIRG's future.

In his Feb. 20 column ("OSPIRG: A model for citizens"), Eric Pfeiffer regaled Emerald readers with OSPIRG's quaint history with Ralph Nader. But OSPIRG's true legacy is in its ability to take student fees and funnel them to a group that lobbies government. For years, it has done a remarkable job of hiding this fundraising model from students and the administration.

Their model is very simple, very effective and reveals that OSPIRG is hardly a student organization. According to the Oregon Department of Justice, there are three OSPIRGs

in the state of Oregon. One is the StudentPIRG, whose budget is up for approval in next week's election. Another is the OSPIRG Foundation, Inc. The third is the Oregon State Public Interest Research Group. They share the same office, phone number, staff and name.

According to paperwork filed with the DOJ, the three OSPIRGs also have similar missions:

StudentPIRG: "To engage in non-partisan analysis, study or research of issues of general public interest and to make results available for the public."

StatePIRG: "To engage in non-partisan analysis, education and research on such topics of environmental protection and other issues of the general public interest, and to advocate on behalf of consumers and the environment."

OSPIRG Foundation Inc.: "Promote environmental preservation and consumer rights."

While their similarities blur the lines of distinction, the three OSPIRGs exploit one

salient difference in order to bilk University students out of more than \$100,000 each year by organizing themselves under different IRS filing codes. The StudentPIRG may accept public money in the form of student fees, but federal law prohibits it from using public money to lobby. The StudentPIRG simply reports its "non-partisan analysis, study or research."

But the StatePIRG's IRS status, while prohibiting it from collecting public money, allows it to lobby government. Both the StatePIRG and the OSPIRG Foundation, Inc. have missions to "advocate" or "promote" environmental and consumer issues.

In a lawsuit brought against the University regarding OSPIRG's funding, it was discovered that the StudentPIRG pays an inordinate amount of money for a space in the StatePIRG's office. Both groups also used the same office equipment — even the same stationery — and had the same staff of professional lobbyists and lawyers, all paid for by the StudentPIRG. Student fees subsidized the lobbyists, lawyers and their entire office.

The lines between the various OSPIRGs disappeared during depositions. Kalpana Krishnamurthy, the former chair of the StudentPIRG's state board, confirmed the group's lobbying. And while that admission would have seemed to seal StudentPIRG's fate, the most revealing information came from the deposition of University President Dave Frohnmayer. OSPIRG's ability to obfuscate its organizational model was so effective that even Frohnmayer did not know there were multiple OSPIRGs in the state of Oregon.

The StudentPIRG has been hiding its fundraising technique for years, to the benefit of the StatePIRG's lawyers and lobbyists. University students may learn to enjoy Willamette Valley drizzle or the reliability of the fighting Ducks, but they don't have to tolerate being lied to by OSPIRG.

Owen Brennan Rounds, class of '95, is the former editor of the Oregon Commentator and a writer living in New York City. He filed a lawsuit along with several other students in 1995 challenging the constitutionality of OSPIRG's funding.

Yes for OSPIRG means yes for political change

GUEST COMMENTARY

Melissa Unger

Students are voting yes for OSPIRG for many reasons; the big one is that all too often, big-money special interests are allowed to pollute the Willamette River, rip off consumers, raise tuition and corrupt our government.

OSPIRG stands up to these special interests and gets results. By joining professional staff with the idealism of college students, OSPIRG works statewide to make a difference. There're lots of ways we can do that, and the best example is our recent work to protect our national forests.

In 1997, OSPIRG joined a number of environmental groups in an effort to protect our national forests. At the time, President Clinton's plan was in its early stages — the plan merely proposed to stop road building in a limited number of forest areas, and the Northwest's forests and Alaska's Tongass National Forest were not included in the original proposal. The idea was that if the environmental community joined together, we could really protect a significant chunk of pristine national forests forever.

On campus, students began to educate and organize around the issue. After a year and a half of organizing, President Clinton proposed his second draft plan for forest protection. This one included the Northwest, but it didn't stop

logging or mining in places such as the Mt. Hood National Forest and the Willamette National Forest, so the fight continued.

OSPIRG field director Tiernan Sittenfeld began working closely with decision-makers on state and national levels to show support. Students stepped up their organizing on campus; they held call-in days, released reports and worked with other student groups and student leaders to call on the president to do as much as he could to protect our forests.

After another seven months, the president released his third draft plan — this one was even better — but it still didn't protect the Tongass. So we still weren't done yet. We had 30 more days to influence

the president's final decision, so once again we took to the streets and educated the public just a little bit more. We gathered an additional 50,000 public comments nationwide, we met with the president's staff and when the final plan came out, it was nearly everything we could have wanted. It permanently protected 58.5 million acres of forest, 1.9 million acres of which were here in Oregon. We saved the Tongass National Forest in Alaska.

It was four years of hard work and a good example of what students and staff working at the statewide level can do. The hard part is what comes next: Our current administration is working to counteract the work we all have done. In order to fight to stop these

problems, we need your help.

Over the next two weeks, people may have questions about what we do, how we do it and how we're funded. Don't hesitate to call us, e-mail us, whatever. If you want more information about the work we do, visit www.OSPIRGyes.com, our Web site. It has everything from campaigns to budgets to recent articles.

We're happy to answer questions, and we're confident we can make a difference over the next couple of years. Now more than ever, we need to stand up for our environment and consumers. Vote yes for OSPIRG.

Melissa Unger is the OSPIRG board chair and a senior history major.