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Bill may alter distribution of grant funds to students

Some argue House Bill 2927 would hurt students the Oregon Opportunity Grant is intended to help

By Lindsay Buchele
Oregon Daily Emerald

Low-income students who have at least a 3.0 grade point average and have obtained the state's Certificate of Initial Mastery will have priority for the Oregon Opportunity Grant under a bill the Oregon State Legislature is considering.

Each year, the grant program gives \$17 million to more than 17,000 students who come from low-income families, and the only criteria for applicants are financial need and full-time school attendance. If House Bill 2927 is ratified, it would drastically change the way this money is distributed.

"It became clear to me that there is no accountability required of those who qualify for the grant," said state Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Canby, who sponsored the bill. "There should also be an age criteria, where those who are just coming out of high school have the best chance of receiving a grant."

Schrader said he is currently in the process of rewording the bill. The bill previously read that all those applying for the grant had to have a 3.0 high school GPA, which Schrader said would have elimi-

nated 75 percent of those eligible.

John Wykoff, the legislative director for the Oregon Student Association, said the current wording of the bill discriminates against low-income students.

"This bill is well-intentioned, but the result would keep low-income students from attending a college or university," Wykoff said. By adding a GPA requirement for all applicants, fewer students can be helped, said Tom Turner, the director of special services for the Oregon Student Assistance Commission.

"This bill will limit the number of high school seniors who could apply for this grant," Turner said. "Even those who do meet the high school GPA requirement have to keep a 3.0 GPA all through college."

Both Turner and Wykoff agree that high school students with a 3.0 GPA and above come from middle and upper-middle-class families that don't need the financial aid as much as the lower income students.

"Merit-based scholarships tend to go to kids who already have the means to go on to higher education," Wykoff said.

The University already requires a 3.0 high school GPA for students to gain admittance, so the students who receive the grant and apply to

the University already need at least that GPA. But they are not required to maintain a 3.0 to keep the scholarship.

"There are plenty of students who may be continuing at the University who have a GPA somewhere between a 2.0 and a 3.0 who will lose their grant if this bill passes," Turner said.

Schrader said he listened to what both the OSA and OSAC said when deciding to reword the bill and is trying not to cut anyone out of receiving the grant.

"There should be a way to encourage accountability without cutting anyone out," Schrader said. "By giving first crack to those who have a B average and who are just coming out of high school, that will make the students who have the need more accountable."

State Rep. Vicki Walker, D-Eugene, agrees with the changes Schrader is making to the bill, but she still wants to get student feedback before voting. She said she was able to go to the University because of the grant, and without it, she would not have had that opportunity.

"There are a lot of kids who come from disadvantaged families, but they have great minds," Walker said. "It's important to know how to get this grant to those who need it the most."

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Iran's president tours factory

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia — The president of Iran on Thursday toured a Russian factory that makes nuclear reactors, amid U.S. protests that the plant is helping Iran develop nuclear technology.

Dressed in flowing robes, President Mohammad Khatami visited the Izhora factory in St. Petersburg, trailed by aides and Russian officials. He stopped to admire workers polishing a huge, cylindrical reactor core for Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant.

The core will be shipped to Iran

in the third quarter of this year, state-controlled ORT television news said. Khatami told plant directors Iran will sign a contract for a second reactor core once the first is delivered, ORT reported.

Russia signed a contract in 1995 to build the first reactor at Iran's Bushehr power plant. It is to be completed by 2003 for an estimated \$800 million. The United States has strongly objected to the project, fearing the technology could be used to develop nuclear weapons. Moscow and Tehran maintain the plant will be used only to provide

energy and will remain under international control.

In the past, Washington has imposed sanctions against Russian companies accused of providing missile technology to Iran.

Earlier this week, Khatami and the Iranian delegation toured Russian space mission control in Korozyov outside Moscow and expressed interest in buying both military and civilian aerospace technology.

The Associated Press

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