

Oregon Daily Emerald

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Wednesday, August 20, 2003

SINCE 1900 UNIVERSITY OF OREGON EUGENE, OREGON

Volume 105, Issue 17

OUS, SEIU clash over labor deal impasse

The classified workers' union rallied Thursday, highlighting their conflict with OUS; key points of contention include perks and medical coverage

By Jared Paben
Freelance Reporter

The crowd's chant echoed through campus Thursday afternoon as a river of pickets and purple SEIU shirts crept along the sidewalks from Oregon Hall toward Johnson Hall.

"Impasse, my ass!" the crowd chanted, along with "No more cuts, ifs, ands or buts!" and a multitude of other slogans.

They were the University's classified employees, members of the Service Employees International Union 503 Local 085, marching to protest the stalled negotiations between their group and the Oregon University System after it declared an impasse on Friday, August 8.

The union represents 1,250 University classified workers — who include food service workers, custodians, housekeepers, groundskeepers, computer technicians, librarians, office specialists and others — said Star Holmberg, the University bargaining table representative for the union. If an agreement between OUS and the group is not reached by September 16, union members may strike — a move that could paralyze crucial University services less than two weeks before fall term begins.

The problems are rooted in disagreements about the proposed two-year contract involving everything from health insurance to layoff procedures to employment perks.

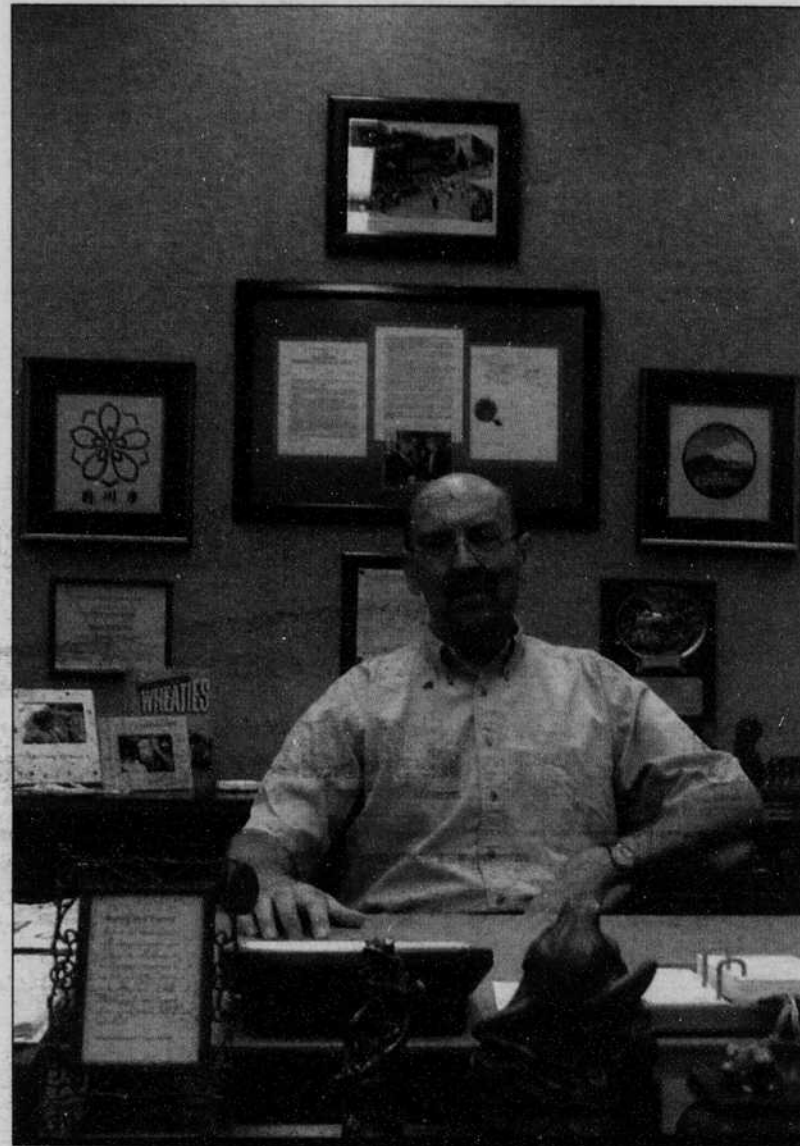
Union organizer Rachel Kirtner said OUS has failed to promise fully paid health insurance to full- and part-time employees, and OUS is trying to insert language in the contract allowing it to discontinue employee perks such as tuition breaks, bus passes, discounted tickets to sporting and cultural events and others.

Kirtner said OUS has also proposed flexibility to change employee schedules at will and seeks to freeze the wage steps, meaning employees would not be able to move into a higher wage bracket for two years. Currently, OUS is required to pay overtime for any work more than eight hours in a day. Under the proposals, OUS would pay overtime only if an employee worked more than 40 hours in a week, allowing it to potentially schedule 12-hour days for employees, Kirtner said.

Lastly, OUS wants to narrow the area in which a laid-off worker could "bump" into another position — take a job from another classified employee with less seniority —

Turn to **Labor**, page 16A

LAW SCHOOL SPECIAL



Scott Meisner finds that the problem-solving skills he learned at the University's School of Law are highly applicable to his civil service work as Eugene's Ward 7 city councillor.
Jessica Waters
Emerald

Legal eagle

Eugene Ward 7 City Councilor Scott Meisner earned a law degree from the University; he calls law "a great system of thinking" that he finds highly useful him in his daily work

By Ayisha Yahya
Reporter

A law degree means different things to different people. For Scott Meisner, it gave him the analytical tools demanded by his position of Ward 7 city councilor.

Meisner, who graduated from the University's School of Law in 1984, is serving his second term on the Eugene City Council. He said the council is a favorable environment for working on many issues that concern him, such as land use. Before his tenure as a city councilor, Meisner served on the Eugene Planning Commission.

The City Council is "an opportunity in a very tangible way to make a difference," Meisner said.

Meisner, 54, said going to law school opened his eyes to all the things one can do with a legal education and a legal mind.

"Much of law school is about how to approach problems and how to think about them and analyze them, and that certainly still serves me," Meisner said. "City councils are, on a daily basis, presented with problems, and (law) is a great system of thinking, it's a great way to prepare for that." He added that law students should approach law imaginatively.

Now, 19 years later, law school faculty still remember Meisner.

"He was a good law student and has done admirably as a politician of the city," Professor Dominick Vetri said.

Meisner, who already had a master's degree from the University's now-defunct School of Librarianship, said he didn't work as a trial lawyer after graduation, but instead focused on being a

Turn to **Lawyer**, page 7A

Legislature aims to cut higher ed financing

The proposed \$680 million for higher education is 15 percent smaller than the last biennium's budget; officials say students could feel the effects by winter

By A. Sho Ikeda
Reporter

The Oregon House of Representatives passed a \$680 million higher education budget last week which, if approved by the Oregon Senate, may result in increased tuition and fewer classes for University students.

And at a time of record enrollment and increased competition for acceptance into a state university, the budget is bad news for students from low-income families.

Vice President for Academic Affairs Lorraine Davis said that if the House budget is approved, students could feel the effects as early as winter term, adding that changes may include increased tuition and fewer classes. She also warned that the University may be forced to accept fewer students in the future.

"There will definitely be some impact," Davis said. "This budget is certainly not adequate for us."

Rep. Phil Barnhart, D-Central Lane and Linn counties, said he was not pleased with the House's efforts, calling it "an atrociously bad budget."

Barnhart said he was concerned for students who may not be able to afford the potential increases in tuition and fees.

"Education is the great opportunity maker in the United States," Barnhart said. "With this kind of funding for education, many students will not be able to go to college."

The budget is considerably smaller than the nearly \$800 million allocated to higher education in 2001.

Students may now face paying 64 percent of the cost for attending the University in the next two years, while the state would pay for the remaining 36 percent. Four years ago, the state instructional subsidy was 51 percent, and students paid for less than half the cost of instruction. The state will only pay about \$3,700 per student this year, compared with \$5,000 two years ago, Barnhart said.

Rep. Pat Farr, R-Eugene, said moderate Republicans in the Oregon Legislature have been working hard with Democrats to create a budget to help Oregon universities. He said the Senate's higher education budget would give \$691 million to higher education, \$11 million more than the House budget.

Farr added that a larger higher education budget would result in tax increases for Oregonians.

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