

METROPOLITAN



John Fisher, Democratic District Leader for District 17, takes questions from Linda Berg, at workshop on party organization. (Photo: Don K. Hovell)



Rep. Wally Priestley directs question to panel at "Citizen Advocacy in the State Legislature" workshop. (Photo: Don K. Hovell)

Political advice given: Build coalitions

by Ross Danielson

Do your homework, work at the local level, and build coalitions. These were a few key recommendations from legislative specialists who served as workshop leaders at the Saturday April 9 workshop on legislative advocacy at the state legislature. Aimed at interested North and Northeast Portland citizens, more than fifty participants spent the day at the PCC Cascade Campus to improve their understanding of how individuals and groups can promote their ideas and interests in the state legislature.

Merris Sumrall, the featured afternoon speaker, emphasized the need to keep things simple: find three reasons for your position and three reasons to oppose this position; then practice giving or refuting arguments. In giving testimony or visiting with legislators, be prepared to deal with the stereotypes which relate to your issue or constituency.

For example, Ms. Sumrall said, if you are supporting measures on behalf of welfare recipients, be sure to present images to counter the stereotype of the "welfare rich," even though this may be personally offensive to you.

Tell the truth was another rule of thumb. Don't be afraid to say you don't know something in talking to legislators. Then try to get the information and send a follow-up letter.

Ideally, one should start early with a legislative idea, well before the legislative session. An important next step is to find a legislator who will "champion" the idea.

For most people, an important first step will be to seek advice from groups and individuals who have already had experience or who may have a paid lobbyist. A perfectly good first step if you have a concern that might relate to the state legislature might be to contact one of the people who attended or organized last Saturday's workshop.

Gail Castillo explained her role as leader of the Hispanic Political Action Committee (HPAC).

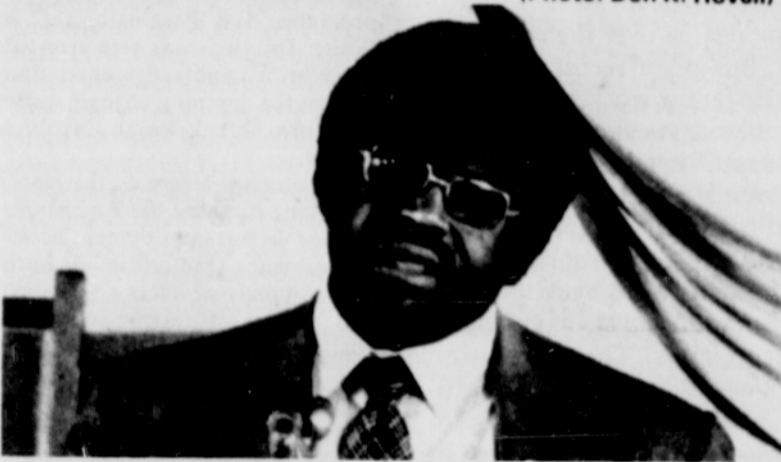
HPAC has initiated legislation which would make it illegal for local law enforcement personnel to engage in activities aimed at enforcing immigration laws. Brown-skinned and "Mexican-looking" persons are frequently subjected to harassment by local law officers who say they are searching for illegal immigrants. The proposed legislation would stop this form of harassment.

The Coalition for the Medically Needy is perhaps the largest coalition of its kind, said Dana Anderson. It seeks to combine the focus on the medical needs of the "new poor" with the "old poor," and aims to enlist Oregon in the federal program which expands Medicaid support to many of the medically needy who do not otherwise qualify for federal or state assistance.

Nick Barnett reviewed the role of neighborhood and community organizations as a beginning point for identifying issues that require legislation. Speaking out against cynicism, he said that you can "change City Hall" and the state legislature as well.



Sessions on lobbying and participation in the legislative process were well received. Evaluation forms revealed that eighty-five percent of the participants were well satisfied and had obtained useful information, while the vast majority said they would like to attend additional workshops. (Photos: Ross Danielson)



Fred Milton, workshop organizing committee chairman, welcomes participants. (Photo: Don K. Hovell)

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