

Independent UO plan draws crowd

Richard Lariviere proposes to operate the university with bond money and a board

By **BILL GRAVES**
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SALEM — Almost as unusual as the plan President Richard Lariviere pitched to legislators Tuesday to make the University of Oregon independent was the number of people who showed up to watch.

The crowd filled the Capitol hearing room and spilled into a neighboring room linked by video as people lined up to weigh in on Lariviere's proposal to operate the UO with bond money and its own governing board.

Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, and chair of the Senate education committee, said this is the first legislative session he has seen in which lawmakers are spending more time on

higher education issues than on public schools.

Lariviere, several legislators, some UO faculty and students and business leaders supported Senate Bill 559 to establish the UO as an independent public university governed by its own board. The State Board of Higher Education governs Oregon's seven public universities. None has its own board.

The same people supported Senate Joint Resolution 20, which would ask voters in 2012 to decide whether to amend the Oregon Constitution so universities could use bond money to partially fund their endowments. Lariviere has proposed creating a \$1.6 billion endowment financed evenly by state bonds and private donations. Interest on the endowment, projected to average 9 percent a year, would be used operate the university.

The state Board of Higher Education and six students, including the student body presidents

of the University of Oregon and Western Oregon University, and representatives of the Oregon Student Association opposed the bills. The students, many of whom wore red tags on their shirts that said "Keep UO Public," also presented a petition opposing the bills signed by 1,200 other students.

Lariviere argued the bills create a "new partnership" that would free the UO from the state bureaucracy, increase the university's accountability with its own board and prevent further budget cuts, financial uncertainty and spikes in tuition.

Over the last two decades at the UO, enrollment climbed 38 percent, state support dropped 43 percent when adjusted for inflation and tuition climbed 241 percent, he said. Without change, UO tuition will hit \$17,000 a year by 2020.

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