

Lariviere gets support, resistance at Capitol

Senators, students voice opinion on bill to restructure University government

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NEWS REPORTER

SALEM — ASUO members and others involved in campus government trekked to the Oregon State Capitol Tuesday to voice concerns about proposed Senate Bill 559, which would further University President Richard Lariviere's efforts to restructure the way the University is governed.

Lariviere proposed the restructuring in May 2010, along with a proposal that would finance University operations with public money matched with private donations (Senate Joint Resolution 20). Both the restructuring and the change in financing were proposed together in the white papers as Lariviere's solution to several problems the University has been wrestling with, most notably the severe state budget cuts to higher education in recent years. The Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development held a hearing on both of these Tuesday to hear public testimony from a wide array of attendees, including state senators, Lariviere, student leaders and community members.

The public comment period started with state Sen. Chris Edwards stating support for the bills.

"I decided to make this bill my top priority, as I look at the opportunity we have to make substantial change," Edwards said.

At the hearing, Lariviere gave several reasons in support of his bill, fighting for what it could do to stabilize University funding.

"We're at a point where if we don't take steps, we will never be the Oregon we have the potential to be," Lariviere said. "We have the potential to chart a course for change that will improve our state."

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UO Foundation President Paul Weinhold, joined by two other members of the foundation, also urged support for the bills.

"Given the gravity of the problem, the danger lies in doing too little ... the change from a state agency shouldn't be the limit of our actions," Weinhold said. "Oregon is worth it, and Oregonians are ready for it."

Jill Eiland, a member of the Oregon State Board of Higher Education, testified against the bills and in favor of the Oregon University System reform proposal (SB 242), citing concerns of fragmentation in the bill. Eiland spoke in favor of keeping one board for the entire state system. Yasmin Ibarra, student body president at Western Oregon University, also testified against the bills.

"We know that the state is starving for revenue; this is not bold, but risky ... this is not

the time to step from risky to recklessness," Ibarra said.

Ibarra sat with ASUO President Amelie Rousseau; both are members of the Oregon Student Association board. Earlier this year, the OSA board voted unanimously in opposition to the reforms.

"Higher education needs a change, but to only focus on goals of one institution is not bold; it's tunnel vision," Rousseau said.

State Sen. Larry George was confused by Rousseau's opposition to the bills as a University student.

"I'm trying to get at what your real objection is; I have to make a decision," George said. "But from a UO student perspective, private dollars are coming in to support your university; I'm not getting your opposition."

Rousseau responded to these claims by saying that with private dollars there are strings attached in cases where private companies' wishes take precedence over the University's

public mission. University freshman Manny Garcia specifically mentioned universities' contracts with Coca-Cola and the University's contract with Nike.

"It's really ridiculous to think that private investors will give up enormous sums to match (public investment with) strings attached," Garcia said.

Ian McNeely and other members of the University Academic Council were present in favor of the bills. The council recently released an endorsement of the proposal, which should be voted on in the University Senate during its next meeting.

On Thursday, the committee will hear from SB 242, OUS's alternative to Lariviere's restructuring.

"This committee, since we started this year, we have spent more time on higher education than K-12 and that's the first time that's ever happened," said Sen. Mark Hass, chair of the committee.

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