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A&M student lobby group uses pragmatic approach

By **JERRY OSLIN**
Staff Writer

Texas A&M's student lobby, the Legislative Study Group, has been criticized by other school's student lobbies for being too pragmatic.

But it is this same pragmatism that has enabled LSG to build a working relationship with Texas legislators. "People take stock in what we (LSG) say because we are not a radical group," said Chris Gavras, LSG tuition coordinator. "We don't go to extremes on an issue. We work with the legislature to get the best things for students."

Michael O'Quinn, LSG administrative director, agrees that realism is the key to effective lobbying.

"We are pretty well respected by the Legislature because we are realistic and that makes us different from other student lobbies," he said. "If you walk in and tell the Legislature that you want this or you want that, they won't listen to you. You have to be flexible on the issues. If your not, you're not going to be allowed any kind of input."

Chip Strickland, an aide to state Senator Kent Caperton, D-Bryan, said he is impressed with LSG's knowledge of the Legislature.

"They know what's going on," Strickland said. "They have a good sense of the Legislature's workings. You have to advocate a reasonable position before anybody will listen to you. And they do that without compromising their beliefs."

He also said LSG does a good job of informing legislators on issues concerning higher education.

"They are very effective in giving information and they do a good job on researching the issues," Strickland said. "They are well informed. They have a professional attitude and are effective at being a spokesman for students."

George Torres, aide to Rep. Wilhelm Delco D-Austin, said LSG's strength is in their ability to provide information.

"They have done a good job of providing information to people in Austin," he said. "That has been their strength so far. Whenever we have needed information on higher education issues, they have been right there with hard, accurate information."

Meg Brooks, director of the University of Texas' student lobby, said she is impressed with LSG's professionalism.

"When you deal with the Legislature, you have to look and act professional and LSG does these things," she said. "They have their stuff together."

"Whenever we have needed information on higher education issues, they have been right there with hard, accurate information." — George Torres, aide to Rep. Wilhelm Delco D-Austin

By being from A&M, LSG has some built-in advantages and disadvantages, Brooks said.

"There are a lot of Aggie legislators, and they would much rather talk to someone from A&M than from Texas," she said. "But there is a built-in disadvantage being from A&M though. They can't go to the capitol everyday and talk to legislators."

Although LSG is only in its third year of existence, it has had significant impact on recent tuition-raising legislation, O'Quinn said.

"Two years ago there was a bill before the House that would have raised tuition," he said. "We knew that tuition would be raised eventually, so we offered an amendment to the bill that would have tied the Legislature's hands as to how tuition would be raised. It got through the House but the Senate killed it."

LSG was criticized by U.T.'s lobby for going along with a tuition increase, O'Quinn said, but it enabled LSG to "get a foot in the door of the Legislature" and made it possible for them to have input on future legislation.

Brooks said she disagreed with LSG's position on the tuition increase two years ago.

"They made a mistake two years ago. I don't think they were representing the real attitudes of the students," she said.

Brooks said the mistake was because of LSG's inexperience at the time.

"They were a young group and didn't have a lot of experience," she said. "They talked to the wrong people and followed the wrong advice."

During the Legislature's special session last summer, LSG was instrumental in postponing a tuition increase, Gavras said.

"During the special session last summer, some people tried to sneak by a tuition increase, and we learned about it the morning that it was supposed to go to committee," he said.

"Johnny Hatch (director of LSG) drove to Austin that morning and testified before the committee. He

persuaded them to wait on a tuition increase so there could be more research done on it. Without Johnny's lobbying, tuition would have been raised last summer."

If LSG can't stop legislation that hurts students, it will work for the bill that hurts students least, Gavras said.

"There is going to be a tuition increase," he said. "If we argued for a no-tuition increase, people wouldn't pay any attention to us and we wouldn't have any input. We are arguing for the Delco plan because it hurts students the least."

The Delco plan, proposed by Delco, the House Higher Education Committee chairman, has two options for raising tuition.

The first option calls for increasing resident tuition in 1986 to \$8 per semester hour and increasing nonresident tuition to \$120 per hour. In 1987, resident tuition would be raised to \$12 per hour. Non-resident tuition would remain at \$120 per hour.

The second option calls for an increase of resident tuition to \$10 per semester hour in 1986 and an increase of non-resident tuition to \$100 per hour that same year. Resident tuition would be raised to \$12 per hour in 1987 while non-resident tuition would stay the same.

Gavras said the option that produces the most money will be accepted.

Delco's plan also calls for a grandfather clause that will exempt students currently in college from the increase, but Gavras said the Legislature probably will not accept the grandfather clause.

"The bottom line is that \$121 million must be collected from tuition revenues over the next two years," he said. "There is no way that they can raise that kind of money with a full grandfather clause."

Delco's plan also calls for the money raised by college tuition to be put in a special fund so that it goes back to higher education. Currently, the money raised from tuition goes into the state's general fund which is used to pay for other state programs besides higher education.

"We are going to fight hard to make sure that the money paid by college students stays in higher education," Gavras said.

LSG is supported by funds from Student Government and from the Association of Former Students.

Big

(continued from page 1)

or neck-aches. He also told participants to remember their noses.

"Put it on the left or put it on the right—just don't break it," Bryant said. "And remember, this is just practice for next year's Texas A&M

—Texas game."

An accurate count of participants wasn't available, but John Hatch, Corps coordinator for the event, said more than \$10,000 was collected.

"I think this is the beginning of a new tradition," Hatch said. "I think Student Government may pick this up and run it just like they do The Big Event."

Diane Maxwell, area coordinator for MDA, said a film of the event may be part of a MDA promotional film. The film will be shown during local breaks of the Jerry Lewis Telethon, and may be shown nationwide, she said.

"We broke the record," Maxwell said. "I don't see any way it could not be in it."

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