

Good Afternoon Senators and Representatives,

My name is Sarah Chivers. I am an adjunct instructor at Chemeketa Community College and Portland State University. I teach sociology and community development courses that center the experiences of marginalized communities and create shared knowledge in the struggle for social equity.

My teaching is rooted in practice. I teach about power structures and help students identify the people who make decisions that impact their education, community, and future. Part of my coursework builds civic engagement by connecting students to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) and Board of Trustees (BOT). Four years of observations and critical discussions among students in my classes has shown me that the crises of our institutions of higher education in Oregon are in large part the failures of the leadership of Boards of Trustees.

An example is at PSU where the total costs of attendance including tuition, fees, books & supplies costs, and living costs have increased over 24% since 2011. It is the Board of Trustees that is ultimately to blame because it has the final accountability for Portland State's finances and sustainability. Financial decisions are made through the Finance and Administration Committee led by serial entrepreneur Irving Levin, who has served on the BOT for seven years. Mr. Levin was selected by former Governor Goldschmidt because of his wealth and career success in building a company (Genesis Credit) that provides credit to people who cannot get credit through primary lenders.

Mr. Levin's track record at helping students finance their education is extremely questionable. Since 2008 his company "originated and serviced hundreds of millions of dollars of student loans that regulators [determined] were predatory and deceptive." Furthermore, he served on the BOT during the tenure of President Rahmat Shoureshi, who committed multiple ethics law violations and resigned with a significant severance package. Mr. Levin has a track record of putting financial self-interest ahead of PSU and students. Clearly, Mr. Levin's financial decision-making skills are profitable for businesses, but this is not the way we should treat public education in our state. Public education is a common good that should be made accessible to all, not a tool for wealthy people to get wealthier.

We need fundamental changes to the power structures of our HECC and BOT. We need to put decision-making in the hands of educators who are equipped with the knowledge and training to increase the sustainability of our universities for student retention, graduation, and career success. SB 854 is critical to transforming governing boards. I strongly support this bill.

Respectfully,
Sarah A. Chivers, PhD

Sources:

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