



American Association of University Professors
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Senator Steiner and Representative Sanchez, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, Vice-Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is David Johnston, and I am an instructor of physics at Oregon Tech, our state's polytechnic university, at the Portland-Metro campus located in Wilsonville. I also represent my union, Oregon Tech AAUP, on AAUP Oregon's Legislative Committee. As a member of the community, and on behalf of the more than 6,300 members of the American Association of University Professors in Oregon, I urge you to support better higher education funding in Oregon's budget for the next biennium. Specifically, we call on you to appropriate \$1.05 billion for the Public University Support Fund, \$855 million for the Community College Support Fund, an additional \$25 million to provide crucial support to the Technical and Regional Universities and Portland State University, and \$400 million for the Oregon Opportunity Grant.

Oregon's public universities and community colleges are severely underfunded; we are 45th in the nation when it comes to state investment for higher education, and as of 2021, every state that borders ours invests more in their community college and public university students than Oregon. This statistic is particularly troublesome for our students, when you consider the fact that our state also ranks near the bottom when it comes to funding for student financial aid.

Without sufficient financial support from the state, Oregon's public universities will close budgetary gaps using the same strategies that universities nationwide typically rely on: raising tuition, slashing services, suppressing wages, and chipping away at working and learning conditions. For example, Oregon Tech's Tuition Recommendation Committee recently approved a 5% tuition increase. Annual tuition increases of this size are not sustainable and leave the dream of a college degree out of reach for too many students. Additionally, limited resources, outdated equipment, below market salaries for faculty, and high tuition also make it difficult to attract faculty, staff, and prospective students.

We can and must do better for Oregon's students and workers. My own institution, Oregon Tech, serves a vital role for Oregonians, particularly rural Oregonians, but the pandemic, rising tuition, and a host of other challenges has caused enrollment to drop and pushed our university community to the brink. Many of our departments operate on a shoestring budget, which leaves students with

fewer resources and older equipment. That's a problem at a polytechnic university that stresses hands on learning and applied research. Oregon Tech is not alone in this. Western, Eastern, and Southern Oregon Universities, as well as Portland State University, have all been disproportionately impacted by rising budgetary pressures and dropping enrollments. With \$25 million in sustainability funding, Oregon's regional and technical universities can stabilize, rebuild, and refocus on the core mission of educating the next generation of working Oregonians.

Finally, I'd like to highlight a couple of bills that would improve the lives of Oregon's present and future educators. I ask that you support the part-time faculty healthcare fixes in HB 2611A and authorize access to SNAP benefits for graduate employees by supporting SB 609A. American universities rely on graduate employee and adjunct faculty labor, but these valuable employees struggle to make ends meet due to a lack of support from both their institutions and the state. This legislative session, we can change that, and I urge you to do so by supporting HB 2611A and SB 609A.

My students have dreams and aspirations, and we need to support these future scientists, engineers, and professionals so that they can contribute to our state and community at their fullest potential.

Thank you for your dedication to Oregon's university and community college students, staff, and faculty.

David Johnston
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