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SB 5525

Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz, and Members of The Ways and Means Education Subcommittee,

For the record, I am Scott Ashford, dean of the College of Engineering at Oregon State University. I am here today to ask for your continued support of the Engineering Technology Sustaining Fund.

This summer, I will conclude my tenure as Dean of the College of Engineering. I leave with immense pride in our many accomplishments:

- We are the 7th largest College of Engineering in the nation.
- We award more computer science degrees than any other institution in the country and usher over 2,400 engineers and computer scientists into the workforce each year.
- We rank among the top 5 public R1 universities for the percentage of faculty who are women.
- We welcome over 500 companies to campus each year to recruit our engineers.
- We invest heavily in student success, distributing nearly $3 million in scholarships and implementing programs to support student progression and completion.

These achievements would not have been possible without the 24 years of investment through the Engineering and Technology Support Fund (ETSF).

Originally, ETSF was distributed through the Engineering and Technology Industry Council (ETIC), a strategic investment to expand Oregon's engineering and programs, enhance research facilities and labs, recruit top faculty, and dramatically increase the number of engineering graduates. The state's public universities with engineering programs exceeded every metric set by the council—tripling engineering graduates, tripling research expenditures, and significantly expanding fundraising efforts. One important note, while the primary investment was made for engineering programs, all the universities including the regionals received some funds.

Beyond these metrics, the faculty recruited during the ETSF era have made extraordinary contributions. Consider Dr. Jonathan Hurst, who testified on Tuesday. Dr. Hurst was hired in 2008 and is now the co-founder and "Chief Robot Officer" of Agility Robotics, one of Oregon State University's most successful spinout companies. Agility's robot Digit is at work in warehouses nationwide and was named one of Time Magazine's best inventions of 2024. The company is scaling up production and keeping it all in Oregon.

In 2015, the legislature transitioned from funding program growth to sustaining universities' strategic investments. Today, ETSF continues to enable us to produce high-quality graduates, maintain critical investments, and address key priorities such as recruiting and retaining a diverse

and inclusive student body and faculty. We are grateful for the sustaining funds, but that foundational support for program expansion, facilities, and faculty allowed it all to happen, and you will find that to be true for every Oregon engineering program.

ETSF plays a vital role in ensuring our graduates are in high demand. Our placement rates remain strong, with graduates securing positions at leading companies—from Intel, the state's largest employer, to Oregon-grown companies like A-DEC and university spin-outs like Agility Robotics. Starting salaries for our graduates range from $50,000 to $100,000, depending on their expertise. Recent projections from the Oregon Department of Employment show an increasing demand for engineers across all fields in the state. Oregon engineering programs will be critical to meet the growing workforce demand, and we will need support and a significant lead time to do so.

As I conclude my time as Dean, I encourage you to visit one of Oregon's Colleges of Engineering, meet with leadership, students, and faculty, and see firsthand how engineering education has evolved since ETIC's inception. One pressing example is faculty start-up packages—the funds for lab equipment and graduate research assistants to give new faculty research programs a running start. When ETIC was first launched, start-up funding was crucial for hiring faculty and equipping labs. In 2008, a start-up package for a semiconductor experimentalist was $80,000. Today, that cost has risen to approximately $600,000. If Oregon's engineering programs are to remain competitive—recruiting top faculty to educate students and collaborate with industry—the state should revisit a funding model like ETIC, ensuring clear metrics for investment. I do not doubt that Oregon's universities will meet those metrics.

Oregon's engineering programs are a critical driver of innovation, workforce development, and economic growth. Continued investment in these programs will ensure that we remain at the forefront of engineering education and research while meeting the evolving needs of industry and society.