

Dear Senate President Wagner, Speaker Fahey, and members of the Oregon State Legislature,

I am a native Oregonian who has personal experience with the benefits of physics education at Oregon State University and I am reaching out to express my support for the OSU STEM Learning and Research Center capital project proposal. This project will support the basic science education of all students at Oregon State University, including future physicists, chemists, engineers, teachers, business people, even artists and writers. It will also include laboratory space for physics research that is directly related to Oregon's economic development, including research in key areas such as, on materials used for clean energy and semiconductors.

Having grown up in Hermiston and been the first member of my family to go to college, I count myself lucky to be an alumna of OSU. I graduated in 1986 with a bachelors in physics. My time at OSU laid the foundation for my future success, first in obtaining my doctorate in physics from the University of California at San Diego and then moving on to study law at UC Berkeley, Boalt Hall School of Law. After my graduate studies I was glad to return to Oregon where I practiced patent law, becoming a partner at a firm in Portland. While working as patent attorney I invented a technology that prevents serious injuries on table saws, relying heavily on the things I learned at OSU (plus a little farm boy practical know how!) I founded the company SawStop to commercialize the technology and it now employs over 150 Oregonians (including many also educated at OSU), not to mention having saved over 10,000 hobbyists, students and workers from serious injuries on table saws and bringing hundreds of millions of dollars of revenue to Oregon. Without the education I received at OSU in the Department of Physics, this technology would not exist and none of these benefits would have flowed from it.

Over the last 25 years of my involvement with SawStop, I have had the opportunity to observe not only the value I received from my time at OSU, but also the remarkable education many of the engineers we've hired received there. I have personally seen how education in physics and engineering at OSU has sharpened minds and enabled them to go onto create products that make a difference in thousands of lives, not to mention providing great paying jobs in our state. I've also had ongoing engagement with the Department of Physics over the years and have seen them lead the way nationally on developing new systems and techniques to further improve physics education – some might even say make it less painful! The STEM Learning and Research Center will expand access to improved educational opportunities and I expect pave the way for ever more innovation – in education itself and among the students who will benefit from it.

As a very well educated farm boy who went on to become a successful small business owner, I have seen how investment is required to support future returns. I believe this project is the sort of investment that is critical to the future of OSU in particular and the state in general and I hope you join me in support of a prosperous future.

Sincerely,

Stephen Gass, Ph.D., J.D.
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West Linn