



Last year, student debt exceeded \$1 trillion nationwide, for the first time exceeding national credit card debt. In Oregon, students are taking on 2/3 of the cost of their education and the average debt for a student is \$25,000. As long as we continue to see a disinvestment in higher education, we will continue to see the burden of the cost of a degree become too much for students, making it less likely for them to graduate or even enter college. To make matters worse, as universities are forced to make opportunistic cuts such as eliminating programs or limiting class availability, students are being forced to stay in college longer, further burring themselves in debt. By the end of this year, I will be \$13,000 in debt, my parents will be \$24,000 in debt and I'm only half-way done with my education. If the disinvestment continues, I will not only be forced to stay in school for a fifth year, but I will be faced with taking out private loans to cover the cost.

This is unacceptable and a real hardship on my family. Despite tuition going up 80% since 2001 at Southern Oregon University, our institution is forced year after year to make more cuts, cuts which limit the quality of education at this institution. And this is not a unique situation; in the last decade tuition has skyrocketed at each Oregon University. Students should not be faced with either not incurring an unimaginable amount of debt before they're 25, or having a quality education. Our higher education institutions should be accessible for all Oregonians regardless of their socio-economic status.

Today I am asking you, thousands of Oregonians and students are asking you to increase the funding allocated to universities for the first time since the start of the recession. And do just give us barely enough funding to stay on life support, give our schools and us students a real chance. We are asking you to fund universities at \$850 million because that would keep tuition to inflation in the next biennium and it's the only funding level that will get us on track to achieving 40-40-20.