

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE EDUCATION

SUBCOMMITTEE

House Bill 5031 – Oregon University System

Aaron Reyna, University of Oregon Alumni

Co-chair Komp, Co-chair Monroe, and Committee Members, I am Aaron Reyna. I am an Alumni of the University of Oregon and the Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) AmeriCorps Program, a service program run out of the University of Oregon's Community Service Center. In an economy in which the best jobs demand well educated employees, our community colleges and public universities offer pathways to success for our children and our state. The University of Oregon's Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) AmeriCorps Program is a prime example of the direct correlation between higher education and how it benefits communities across Oregon. The mission of the RARE AmeriCorps Program is to increase the capacity of rural communities to improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions, through the assistance of trained graduate-level participants, from across the US. We live and serve in our rural communities for a duration of 11 months.

As a two year Alum of the RARE AmeriCorps Program, I have seen the impact this program has on rural communities spanning the State of Oregon. In Pendleton Oregon through my position with the Columbia Blue Mountain RC&D I assisted farmers and rancher with obtaining federal energy efficiency and renewable energy grants, finding strategies for making small acreage more profitable, and spearheading our outreach efforts toward historically underserved communities. In my position with the City of Jacksonville Oregon which is considered a National Historic Landmark District, I doubled the number of historic preservation projects we funded from the previous year, I have personally been a part of and witnessed how a service learning program like this can act as an on the ground force multiplier through leveraging financial and intellectual assets in order to Improve the local community and thus the State. This program and others like it leverage state dollars, bringing in external resources that benefit Oregon's communities. Indeed, Oregon's public higher education institutions have a rate of return on investment that is nearly unmatched by other state investments. I ask that you consider this and fully fund the Oregon University System.

It has been an honor to have the opportunity to serve my community, state and nation, and I hope that the state's financial stewardship will allow others in the future to have the same opportunity. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,



Aaron Reyna