

THE OREGON IDEA

SUPPORTING STUDENTS, COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES TO BUILD A BETTER OREGON

Testimony of Katrina Kahl
on behalf of The Oregon Idea
re: OUS Budget

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
March 27, 2013

Co-Chairs Komp and Monroe and Committee members, I am Katrina Kahl.

I am a proud product of Oregon's education system – a graduate of David Douglas High School, of Portland Community College and of Portland State University. That pathway of educational attainment led to a graduate degree from UC Berkeley and a ladder of career opportunity which has brought me to my current position as Director of Communications with the Oregon Health Care Quality Corporation. Along the way in that career path, I've also had the opportunity to work with organizations such as the Earth Institute at Columbia University, the United Nations Development Programme and The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research.

When I attended Portland State University in the mid-1990s, I and my fellow students struggled to keep up with tuition increases that had nearly doubled in the early part of the decade. Since then, tuition costs have more than doubled again. I came from a family that at times relied on food stamps, free school meals and other forms of government assistance to meet our most basic needs.. If I had faced tuition at today's levels then, I am not sure that college would have been a viable option for me, nor can I be sure that I would have persisted in my education and obtained a degree. And I am nearly certain that without a degree I would have been trapped in a cycle of poverty, relying on the safety net and living in fear of sickness and economic instability.

I am proud to be among the 30 percent of Oregonians with a college degree, and I am happy to be contributing to our state by working for an organization that strives to make health care better for all Oregonians. I am living proof that our goals of 40 percent of Oregonians with a four-year degree and 40 percent with a two-year degree or certificate are not only achievable, but that they can lead to productive and successful careers for our people.

If there is one thing that your budget can do for those who come after us, it's this: Don't make it harder for Oregonians to complete their educations, find their career paths and contribute to our state.

I'm personally saddened by the increasing reliance on student loans to fund a college education. I truly believe that the burden of debt placed on college students today stifles innovation and hampers business development. The opportunities that have made my life and career so successful have come because I received a world class education in Oregon at an affordable price. And so when people ask how a young girl goes from government assistance to Berkeley and beyond, I tell them she does it via Oregon's public schools, community colleges and state universities. I hope that all Oregonians will share in my pride for our education system and will help to preserve it.

The Oregon Idea asks only that you keep up with the efforts of our students, who are paying more and borrowing more than their predecessors, to complete their educations. To match their efforts, we should set as a goal not raising tuition above the increase in median family incomes in the years ahead. In that spirit, I support the Oregon Idea's proposal to provide the funding needed so that our universities can keep up with student demand and keep tuition where it is now in proportion to household incomes. Let's not make it harder for those who come after us to pursue their dreams for education and opportunity.