



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

February 10, 2014

Chair Harker and Members of the Committee,

Thanks you for providing an opportunity for me to testify today on HB 4018-3.

As a member of the Special Legislative Committee on University Governance and Operations, the State Representative from Klamath Falls, and as a citizen of Oregon who understands the connections between education and jobs and a healthy economy, I have a deep interest in the topic of university governance.

I want to begin by telling you that I support House Bill 4018-3 and then give you a little background on why it is important to me and my district, and to all of Oregon.

As a member of the Special Committee, along with my colleague and co-chair Representative Buckley, I have studied both the report on university shared services and listened to many proposals for university governance, including the Technical and Regional Governance Model, proposed by the TRU presidents. There is an overwhelming amount of information about how the dissolution of a unified higher education system and a move to a decentralized system will affect all of the universities and especially the technical and regional universities. These are complex and highly-charged issues, because they affect our students, the faculties, the alumni, donors, and our communities so directly.

In each of our communities, we identify with and take pride in our local schools – we wear their colors; we go to their games; we celebrate their achievements, students' project, internships and jobs; and we benefit from their volunteer work, cultural events, and the dollars they bring into our local economies.

We know what it might mean to our communities if we lost the investment of state and tuition dollars or even the pride of having a university in our towns. These universities define us – especially in rural Oregon.

As you all know, Oregon Tech is in my district, and is a cornerstone in my community. What benefits Oregon Tech, benefits everyone in my district. Yet I care about more than Oregon Tech. I care about all seven of our public universities because each is unique, each contributes to student success and I believe each needs a group of people dedicated to their success.

I would have preferred to be here today endorsing a stronger bill than HB4018. I would have preferred to urge your unanimous support to provide the authority for the technical and regional

universities to be governed by university governing boards, in the same manner as the three large universities received last legislative session. My community has spoken loud and clear to me about this issue. They want Oregon Tech, and all the regional universities, to have boards of trustees that are dedicated to their success, understand their unique missions, are connected to their communities, and stand ready to help them grow and thrive and address the fiscal challenges of operating in rural communities.

However, I understand that some of my colleagues on the Special Committee, and some members of the legislative assembly have concerns about pre-empting the State Board of Higher Education's process, which has also been studying the governance issue, or they have concerns about possibly moving too fast with the decision.

That is why I believe that HB 4018 with the -3 Amendments is a reasonable approach that gives the State Board of Higher Education more options for developing recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, and gives the Special Committee the ability to work with the technical and regional universities on mutually agreed upon ways to resolve any concerns that legislators might have about their ability to thrive under the leadership of a governing board. Finally, it provides the technical regional universities with a greater degree of certainty than they have today.

I strongly urge you to support this bill now and ultimately, to support the governance model proposed by the technical and regional universities.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gail Whitsett". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed text "Thank you."