

3/3/2014

**Testimony from Senator Michael Dembrow**

RE: House Bill 4019

Colleagues,

We have heard again and again about the benefits of post-secondary education and training, the necessity of getting more people into colleges, universities, and career schools.

But given the high cost of higher education, and more and more people getting into debt and having to default on their loans, it is imperative that Oregonians be allowed to make the best possible choices, the most informed choices, when they are deciding where to invest their time, resources, and future obligations. They need to be making those decisions not based on who makes the best sales pitch, who has the snazziest advertising, but based on evidence and data, presented to them in a clear manner that allows them to compare institutions in an apples-to-apples manner.

HB 4019 is all about smarter choices for Oregon's students.

This is a project that we've been working on since early last session, bringing together a broad array of stakeholders, representatives of the public and private colleges and universities, non-profit and for-profit, on-site and online, along with OUS, CCWD, and the HECC. We spent a lot of time coming up with the right metrics and trying to do the best job of meeting three goals simultaneously: getting students the information they need to make informed choices; making sure that the information is provided to them in a clear and consistent manner, and making sure that we weren't putting too much of a burden on the schools and as much as possible getting the reporting to align with reporting that was already happening.

I'm happy to report that with the -7 amendments, we have a program that meets those three goals and that has broad support among the stakeholders.

At the end of the day, we realized that it did not make sense at this time to have an Oregon-created fact sheet. We were trying to do that, but it was just too expensive and time-consuming. It made more sense for us to use one of the federal or national databases that already have metrics being reported for each of the institutions, with key information regarding cost, graduation rate, loan cost, loan default rate, and other indices. The HECC will determine on a regular basis which of the national databases is best. Right now, two of the contenders are the College Scorecard from the U.S. Department of Education and the College Navigator from the National Center for Education Statistics. They don't have everything we wanted, but they have most, in a format that's easy to use. At some point, when the HECC is fully up and running, we may well want to have them pursue an Oregon-specific system, but for now this is very workable and will be useful.

As you'll see from the amendments, students will get the information that they need at the time of application. They'll either get a link to the page where their data is located, or a PDF of the page, or a print copy. The databases will also allow them to compare one school's data to another in a very easy way.

Finally, the bill also includes common-sense prohibitions against misleading advertising and recruiting practices that could cause potential students to make choices that are not in their best interest.

With the -7 amendments, we are looking at a minimal fiscal on this bill. Colleagues, what you have before you is a consensus bill and a good step forward.