

April 13, 2015

Dear Subcommittee Members:

My name is Joe Lowndes. I am an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Oregon, where I have taught for the last twelve years. I am also the Chair of the Committee on State Issues in Higher Education for United Academics, the faculty union at the University of Oregon.

Four decades of declining investment in public higher education in Oregon have taken a toll on our universities, which in turn has taken a toll on our economy and our democracy.

Year after year of leaner budgets have done a number of things:

- It has held college degrees out of reach of a great many Oregonians who could have thrived with this education.
- For students who do manage to come, they, and often their parents, take on mountains of debt that they are saddled with for a great many years.
- In order to attract full-paying students, universities have to invest in things like fancy climbing walls and luxury dorms at the expense of the core mission of teaching and research.
- Universities are unable to attract and retain good faculty members, because we are paid so much less than comparator institutions. This means that the quality of both teaching and research is threatened with decline.
- Schools are forced to cut permanent faculty lines, depending instead on an ever-growing number of low-paid adjuncts.
- Less public funding means a dependence on more private donations. We are grateful for this money, but often the people of Oregon have no say in how and where that money is spent.
- I could continue here at great length (which professors of course like to do) but I won't.

After World War II the United States built a prosperous, stable middle class and became the world's wealthiest nation and through the great expansion of - and investment in - its public universities.

This fact has been taken for granted for too long, and years of relative neglect have begun to erode a once proud university system for the people of Oregon.

Oregon needs much, much greater investment in its universities. These institutions produce the graduates who can build our economy, who can solve the increasingly complex scientific, environmental, social, and cultural challenges we face, and who become a knowledgeable, democratic citizenry. It is time to reinvest in public higher education.

Thank you.