

Submitter: Paul Nauert  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Dear Ways and Means Joint Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony at the Ways and Means Roadshow at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande on the evening of Friday, April 11, 2025. For the record, I am also submitting the following text version of my remarks --

I teach history at EOU. My family farms in the Grande Ronde Valley. And I am a proud gay American.

I fully believe that fully funding higher ed funding is the most important matter before your committee — and the most important matter for our democracy.

And by “the most important matter” I mean literal matter! — the grey matter of the human brain and the training of grey matter in colleges and universities in the ways that allow a complex society to operate.

Our students, after training their minds as critical thinkers and creative problem-solvers, become the healthcare workers who care for us. They become the teachers who educate our children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews. They become the engineers who build and maintain the infrastructure that allow us to commute to work and communicate with loved ones over distance. They become the first responders and soldiers who defend us. They become the farmers and ranchers who feed us.

Humankind sets itself no challenges that it cannot resolve. But we need to be honest: the challenges we have set for ourselves in this century are immense: accelerating climate crisis, skyrocketing inequality, and a world on the edge of total war.

We can, should, and must be doing much more to assist our students, upon whose shoulders and minds these immense challenges will fall and are falling disproportionately.

Fully funding public higher ed through bills like SB 604, HB 3182, HB 3183, HB 2669, the Oregon Opportunity Grant program, and increasing the Public University Support Fund by at least \$275M to \$1.275B as well as the Community College Support Fund by at least \$120M to \$920M would mean some of the following:

-More time for students to train their minds rather than rushing from four or five or more jobs and going into heavy debt, as do many of my students.

-Greater student focus in a literal sense since students would be less hungry. Many of my students depend on SNAP benefits, which will be likely be heavily cut in the next federal budget. I have personally had to purchase Safeway gift cards to feed students. But I cannot do that for every hungry student in Oregon.

-Greater resourcing of learning tools not at the level of luxury — but at the level of basic necessity. For example, my department and many colleagues lack the funding for printing out basic handouts, such as study guides for exams.

Many of the inherited institutions of the twentieth century, such as the mass expansion of higher ed and democracy, bought at the price of a world war against fascism that killed over 60 million, are being torn down around us by our national leaders with little control, and much horror, among all of us here at the state level on Oregon. All that is solid is being melted into air.

However, we have more power than we realize in shaping whatever new world will follow this season of arson from above. A world of greater justice and sustainability begins with fully funding higher ed. Every single state priority we've heard about tonight [at the 4/11/25 Roadshow hearing in La Grande] will benefit from more gray matter, more highly trained for critical thinking and problem-solving from researching serious diseases to improving agriculture to addressing the climate crisis to engaging houselessness.

Let's do all we can to nourish the most important matter at the heart of it all — our common wealth embodied in gray matter, especially that of our students across Oregon. Fully fund higher ed!

Thank you.