

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

My name is Chris Early, and I am a social studies teacher at Umatilla High School, and I am the Senior National Education Association Director for Oregon. I am a proud EOU grad and EOU dad. First, I would like to thank the Ways and Means Committee for bringing its Road Show to eastern Oregon. Too often, many folks here feel we are treated with less-than-benign neglect from our state leadership and folks from the more populated areas. As a 30+ year resident of the dry side, I appreciate you coming to La Grande today. With the rise to power of a new Federal regime, public education in Oregon and nationwide is under threat like never before. The US Secretary of Education was appointed with the expressed purpose of closing the department she leads. Elon Musk and his DOGE minions have gone at USDOE records, contracts, and programs with machetes, and privatizers wait in the wings to feed off the remaining carcass. We have an opportunity here to make a bold statement in the face of such attacks; a statement that says that the public good matters. Our children and their future matters. Hope matters. The Governor and the Oregon Department of Education started down this road yesterday, when it affirmed in the face of this regime: "Oregon remains fiercely committed to its values of diversity, equity and inclusion, and we celebrate our differences and common humanity. Our moral and ethical obligation is to stand up for public education. We want to assure Oregonians that their children can learn and thrive in safe, welcoming, and supportive environments." Since the 1990s, our public schools have been made to compete with other demands for state funding despite a state Constitutional requirement that schools be fully funded. We even have created a measure that lays bare our falling short of what our kids really need. We have a Quality Education Model, which tells the resources we need to meet the goals we have for our schools and students. We have failed every biennium since it was created. We even fashioned a second metric to normalize our failure. We call it the Current Service Level: what it costs to do exactly what we are doing now. By definition, this means nothing will ever get better. Members of the Committee, we must do better. We must make that bold statement. For this biennium, OEA and its 42,000 members call for funding public PK-12 education at \$12.35 Billion and Community Colleges at \$1.11 Billion. This must include a removal of the punitive Special Education cap that does not reflect present realities. Furthermore, we must set a course for the next few biennia to achieve the mark we have set for ourselves. We must fund public education at the QEM level. This will likely mean revenue enhancement. So be it. There are more millionaires in Oregon than ever before. Surely, a well-prepared workforce will bring value to Oregon's businesses make it worth it. Again, these times call for taking a courageous stand against the attacks from outside. Let us take that stand. Let us, as our song says, "fly with our own wings." Let us do right by our schools and Community

Colleges and our kids by funding them sufficiently, ultimately to the QEM level. Thank you.