



April 16, 2025

Good evening, Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

For the record, my name is Dr. Jesse Peters, and I am the President of Western Oregon University. Our main campus is located in Monmouth, Oregon, and our Center for Graduate Studies is in Salem. Since 1856, Western Oregon University has been educating and training students to meet the needs of Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about a critical issue facing Oregonians in every district: the future of our state's public universities and the students whom we serve. This topic is personal to me. I am a first-generation college student, and my parents grew up as sharecroppers in rural Georgia. I know first-hand the transformational power of Higher Education.

I also grew up on a farm, and my parents, though they did not attend college themselves (my father did not even complete high school), always valued education and the opportunities that came with a college degree. They saw it as a pathway to social mobility and personal choice, as a way to access a positive and productive path through life.

At Western Oregon University, over 80% of our student population are Oregonians. They come from rural communities and large cities, and 50% are first-generation students who strive to give back to their communities. We serve students who aspire to become educators to teach future generations, first responders who keep our streets safe and secure, social workers who care for our communities, and even future (and current) legislators.

At its core, Western Oregon University, like all our public universities, exists to create opportunities. Of course, opportunity for our students, but also for the communities and businesses that depend on a well-trained and skilled workforce. Western Oregon University and Oregon's six other public universities foster critical thinking skills, drive innovation, and develop the talent that keeps Oregon competitive in an increasingly competitive global environment. Our graduates strengthen local economies, contribute meaningfully to their communities, and ensure that our state can thrive economically.

However, achieving these outcomes depends on a strong and stable investment from the State of Oregon. Oregon's public universities are among the lowest-funded in the nation on a per-student basis, with average tuition the highest in the West. We simply can't afford to fall behind any further. I've been in Oregon just short of three years, and from what I've seen so far, this is not the Oregon way. Oregon is a strong, resilient, innovative, and focused state. There is no reason that we shouldn't have the strongest public universities in the nation. But to truly achieve the promise of higher education, we need the resources that help us best serve students.

Funding the Public University Support Fund (PUSF) at the requested \$1.275 billion will strengthen essential student services, relieve some of the financial burden on students and families, and help stabilize our universities while making Oregon's workforce and economy more competitive.



During this uncertain political climate, and as universities are increasingly under direct attack, there is no better time to invest in Oregon's public universities.

Put simply, investing in higher education is an investment in Oregon's future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you tonight.

Jesse Peters
President