



ASSOCIATION OF OREGON FACULTIES

April 17, 2017

To: Ways and Means Joint Subcommittee on Education
Re: SB 5524 – Support: Public University Budget

Co-Chair Monroe, Co-Chair Smith Warner, and members of the committee,

The Association of Oregon Faculties (AOF) is an independent, non-union organization, representing faculty from Oregon's seven public universities. AOF seeks to protect and improve the working environment and fair compensation for Oregon university faculty and to help ensure that the Oregon University System gets adequate funding in the state appropriations process.

Anyone who says history doesn't repeat itself hasn't been involved in Oregon politics longer than a couple of minutes. Three steps forward, two steps back, two steps forward, three steps back. That's been the pattern for the thirty plus years I've been watching the state try to grapple with creating and supporting a quality system of higher education. We took a step forward in each of the last two biennia. This body finally prioritized higher education, and we made some real, honest progress. We kept tuition increases very low, we built some programs, we breathed some life into Oregon's public universities. We helped Oregon's students, and in the process, we strengthened our economy, because a state's economy is **always** linked to the extent it supports its system of public higher education. ALWAYS. But that was then, this is now. Now we face one of those tough three steps back years, when much of the progress we all sweated blood to make is threatened—and by we I mean you as well as those of us actually working to educate students in the state's public universities, because we are all in this together! This is one of those years when the choices are hard. It's easy to invest in higher education when the money's there, harder when we face one of Oregon's numerous, numerous, NUMEROUS budget crisis years.

But this is when it really matters. I know the choices are hard, and we are not asking this year to take a step forward. All we are asking is not to take a step backward. The headwinds are strong. We know that. But are we really going to do this again? Are we going to wipe out so much of the progress we've made? Are we going to saddle students with higher tuition and therefore with greater debt, especially when there is every sign that the new federal administration has no intention whatsoever of making that debt load lighter or more fair? Are we going to see some of those programs we worked so hard to start, wither on a vine starved for nourishment? In order to stand strong against those headwinds, the state's universities need another \$100 million. That's not chicken feed. But it will let us weather this difficult year and hang in there until a better one comes along. And that's what we are asking you to help us do. Not necessarily to move forward. Just not to move backward.

We need engineers, we need teachers, we need chemists and biologists. We need nurses and physicians. We need business managers and marketers. We need ranchers and farmers and forest

managers, sophisticated and learned in the scientific nature of agriculture. And yes, we need writers and historians, actors and musicians, and even a poet or two. Because all these professionals not only make our state what it is. They make it what it will become. In the end, **that's what higher education is really about. It's about building our future, it's about making a place that will be a better place than the one we all inhabit today.**

So, let's not make this one of those three steps back years that we've seen so often before in our beautiful state. Let's meet that headwind straight on. Give us the resources you so badly want to give us, and let us give you Oregon's future.

We encourage you to support Oregon's future by increasing the chronically underfunded higher education system, please increase the PUSF by a minimum of \$100 million.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Greg Monahan, Vice-President,
On behalf of the Board,
Association of Oregon Faculties

Association of Oregon Faculties, 740 Oakway Circle, Ashland, OR 97520

<http://oregonfaculties.org>