

Dear Editor,

In the mist of the heated debate and discussion involving the changes at Southern Oregon University, it is important for us all to understand that disinvestment in state institutions of higher education is a problem for all of Oregon. At the same time that having an educated citizenry is more important than ever to the economic and cultural future of our state, Oregon received an "F" in affordability in the recently released *Measuring Up* report, which also found us to have one of the steepest declines in the nation for chance of attending college by age 19.

It's a sad truth, but all of Oregon's college and university students are paying more and getting less for their buck with students in record levels of debt. As with Southern Oregon University, students across Oregon are finding themselves at institutions facing a funding crisis and are already starting to experience the affects of these shortfalls on campus; in our case this shortfall manifests itself in the reduction of valued support staff and programs being cut. It is vital that Oregonians reinvest in public universities by properly funding the Oregon University System (OUS) because in 3 years 87% of new jobs in Oregon will require a college degree, college graduates contribute more in taxes, use less in state programs, and are overall contributing, voting citizens.

Thus said, it was truly exciting to see that Governor Kulongoski has recommended investment in two innovative programs, the Shared Responsibility Model, a new model for need-based aid, and A.S.P.I.R.E., a volunteer mentor program that provides high school students with the tools to access postsecondary education. The investment in these programs is the first step in providing access to a college education for all Oregonians.

In order to get our voices heard, students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members will be rallying at the state capital February 22nd from noon to 1:00pm. We can make Oregon stronger by reinvesting in postsecondary education to provide access to an affordable, quality college degree. Students are asking the legislature to fund the OUS at the level allocated in the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) and, in addition, to allow students to retain the interest on their own tuition dollars by directing this money back to OUS. Students are asking for \$46 million above the GRB for community colleges, which provide access for many students often shut out of postsecondary education and develop Oregon's workforce.

Brook Colley

SOU Student