



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

President  
University  
Senate

May 21, 2008

Representative Jeff Merkley

P.O. Box 33167

Portland, OR 97292

Dear Senator Merkley:

As presidents of our respective organizations at the University of Oregon– the University Senate and the Associated Students of the University of Oregon – we urge you to advocate on behalf of students, faculty, and the well being of all OUS institutions, and to release the entire \$125 million state salary pool during the June 25-26 meeting of the Joint Legislative Emergency Board. We have enclosed a resolution regarding this issue that was adopted without a dissenting vote by the University of Oregon Senate at its May 14th, 2008 meeting.

As you know, in 2007 the Legislature appropriated funds to the State Salary Pool to enable state agencies to cover salary increases over the 2007-09 biennium. Classified staff and graduate student teaching fellows have reached collective bargaining agreements that include salary increases for the biennium. At the UO, the administration also approved a modest increase for faculty salaries effective in January, although for many faculty this increase did not exceed the rise in the Consumer Price Index for 2007. We are hopeful that an additional increase for faculty can be accomplished next year as well. Without the salary pool, however, every increase in the salaries for our teaching faculty next year will require a dollar for dollar reduction in program costs. We applaud the legislature's effort to make post-secondary education a priority once again for Oregon. Retaining and recruiting high quality faculty for the University of Oregon is essential for maintaining a quality education that will produce a well prepared Oregon workforce.

At the special session in February the legislative leaders decided to delay releasing the salary pool until after the June 2008 revenue forecast is available. You do not need to wait until the June forecast to know how withholding these funds will reverse the work you have accomplished, especially during the last legislative session.

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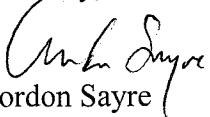
Please take the necessary steps to release the entire \$125 million package in June, regardless of the forecast. Insofar as state agencies have already committed to salary increases, the only way to meet these commitments will be to cut programs. Across OUS, withholding these funds will result in fewer classes offered, lower graduation rates, reduced enrollments, and higher costs to students who already pay 60% of the costs of their education. To renege on salary commitments to faculty and staff leaves students in an awkward situation. Students have already selected classes, made commitments, and determined their financial aid. Not releasing these funds will force universities to break agreements with students and their families.

Experience from 2002 and 2003 indicates that when the legislature forces cuts in the middle of the biennium, we are laid off, our contracts are not renewed, classes are closed, and our tuition is raised. Moreover, enrollments this fall are projected to increase. Applications from resident undergraduate students are up 15% across OUS. The University of Oregon is expecting two hundred to five hundred more freshmen to begin classes this fall. Our new Pathway Oregon program is providing opportunities for students who previously could not afford to attend college.

Withholding funds now would immediately stop the progress. Moreover, the burden will be placed, again, on the backs of students. We understand that no one wants another special legislative session devoted to cutting budgets. Releasing the salary funds in June actually gives the Legislature time to address the problem of revenue declines rationally and equitably. If the September forecast shows an increase, there may be no need for a special session. And if the forecast shows a continued decline, then a special session will be inevitable. Enacting budget reductions in a special session brings all of the players to the table, and it enables the legislature to use funds that have been set aside to address revenue shortfalls. Withholding the salary pool in June will merely focus the cuts on university students.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter, and congratulations on your victory in the primary on tuesday.

Sincerely,



Gordon Sayre  
Professor of English  
President, 2007-08 University Senate



Emily McLain  
2007-08 President  
Associated Students of the University of Oregon