

■ Guest commentary

Consolidated debt pool causes problems for University students

If only people knew that while living in our residence halls, they were helping to pay for the residence halls built at Oregon State University. Yes, this sounds strange, but wait — there is more. Most students know that the University of Oregon residence halls are a little out-of-date, but did you know that our residents pay some of the highest prices in the state? Where does this money go? Why should you care?

Well, I am a huge Duck fan, and I know that when recruits visit the University they don't just check out Autzen Stadium, they go look at the place they will be living: the residence halls. Let me tell you about something called the consolidated debt pool and a little talk I had with the governor.

In the simplest terms, the consolidated debt pool was an agreement amongst the Oregon University System schools in which every time a school built a new residence hall, all the universities would divide up the cost amongst them based on the number of students that go to that university. The consolidated debt pool system was eventually abandoned; however, the debt remains. Right before the debt pool ended,

OSU and Eastern Oregon University built new residential facilities, tacking on a considerable amount to the total debt shared by all OUS schools. The University of Oregon, being as large as it is, took on a great amount of the debt every time a new hall was built, causing University Housing to continue to raise rates to maintain the current services.

Our University has the highest priced residence halls in the OUS, yet the University has not built a new residence hall in about 50 years. This is, of course, with the exception of the new Living Learning Center, which will only add rooms for around 300 students. There will still be approximately 3,000 students who remain in the older buildings. This means University residents have been paying for other schools' residence halls, and will continue to pay for them until the debt is paid off. In the end, we are left with a higher cost and more difficulty in updating and improving our residence halls.

Earlier this week during a bill signing at the University, Gov. Ted Kulongoski spoke a lot about giving Oregonians the opportunity to go to college with the Oregon Opportunity Grant.

I thought it made sense to give

University students the equal opportunity to live in the residence halls in order to receive the complete college experience. As a representative of all University of Oregon residence hall students, I asked what the governor's plans were concerning the consolidated debt pool that has disadvantaged University students. He said he was aware of the system; however, when I asked him how he was helping out, he discussed more capital-improvement money for new buildings. I feel that allocating additional resources is only a temporary fix that would allow the University to generate more revenue in order to help deal with the debt. As for the students living in the halls now or in the near future, this form of relief may come too late. And this is why I encouraged the Governor to make relieving the debt a priority.

I encourage all of those who read this article to write to the governor, your state representatives, and your student representatives encouraging them to advocate for the relief of the debt accumulated by this consolidated debt pool.

Todd Mann is president of the University Residence Hall Association

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