

**GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD**

## Oregon community colleges get a boost

Although not all of the details have been wrapped up in the Oregon Legislature (and the session itself now looks as if it could go into overtime), some budgetary details are clicking into place.

You know already about the \$2 billion tax package that's been earmarked for K-12 schools, even though it seems increasingly likely that the gross receipts tax on certain Oregon businesses will be referred to voters.

Our recent editorial talked about the extra \$100 million that legislators are sending to the state's seven public universities. The extra money, which comes courtesy of the state's unexpectedly robust tax collections, won't prevent the need for tuition increases or cost cuts on campuses, but it's better than Gov. Kate Brown's original budget, which called for no increase in funding to the universities. (And legislative leaders have made it clear that this is all the extra money universities can expect from the state this session.)

There is another part of the state's public education system, and it often gets ignored in the discussions about K-12 and university funding. Oregon's 17 community colleges typically are the last to get their share of state funding — and from their perspective, it must seem at times that they're scrambling for budgetary crumbs.

Certainly, some of that happened this session. But it looks as though the same unexpectedly brisk tax collections that gave a boost to higher education funding also have paid off for Oregon's community colleges.

The numbers tell the story: The Legislature's chief budget writers originally called for a state general fund allocation of about \$590 million to be divided among the state's community colleges. In response, community college boards around the state felt they had no option but to raise tuition and to start earmarking possible areas for cutbacks.

But the final number that seems likely to pass the Legislature is \$640.9 million, which gives community colleges a bit of breathing room.

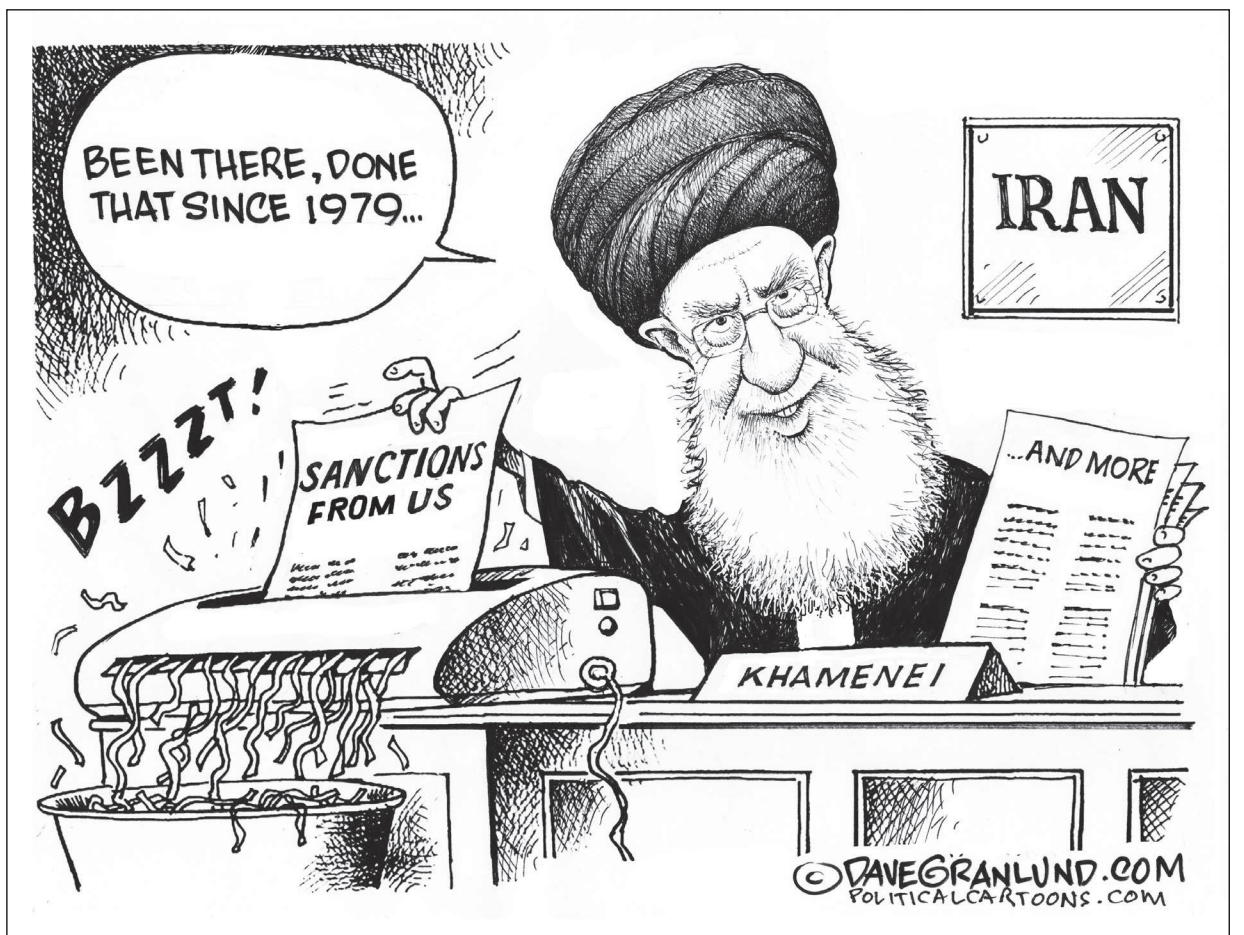
In the case of Linn-Benton Community College, the extra money likely will allow the board to roll back a planned 7% tuition increase to about 4%. LBCC's board was scheduled at last week's meeting to take action on a resolution along those lines; the resolution won't go into effect until the legislative budget was finalized, but LBCC officials were hoping that they could roll back the planned tuition increase in time for the summer session, which is right around the corner.

(One of the frustrations that faces public education budget officers every year is that they have to build their spending plans long before they have any kind of solid numbers from Salem; the Legislature, in theory, can tinker with the budget until adjournment at the end of June, but universities and school districts obviously can't wait that long to craft their budgets. This is part of the reason why the very first drafts of these budgets often are gloomy affairs; budget officers with any experience aren't predisposed to guess high.)

As for why community colleges tend to be third in the pecking order for state funding, we have a couple of theories: First, of course, community colleges, like four-year universities, collect money from tuition. But community colleges also get some support from local property taxes, and as property valuations go up, so do the tax revenues.

But as we get a greater sense of the essential role that community colleges play in training Oregon's workforce, it's vital that tuition at these schools remains affordable. And community colleges are facing the same cost drivers that afflict four-year universities with rising price tags for health care and the state's public pension system.

The governor has talked about building a seamless system of education that runs from cradle to career. It's a good goal. But that's certainly not how we budget our education dollars now.



## Your views

### Tuinstra: Workers need to be able to drive

To the Editor:  
In most communities, especially here in Eastern Oregon, driving is a big part of everyday life. Public transportation is very limited and it's not practical or safe for people to walk for miles just to get to and from work or to take care of their families. I was glad when I heard Oregon lawmakers are considering passing a law that would ensure standard licenses are available to all drivers who can meet the requirements to drive.

Agricultural communities like ours have thrived because we need migrant laborers to work at a pay level that keeps farms profitable. These workers need to be able to drive. Oregonians might disagree about how Congress should reform our complex, broken immigration system, but we can all agree that the need for driver's licenses is important no matter who you are. I urge legislators to pass the Equal Access to Roads Act (HB 2015) to

ensure standard licenses are available to all drivers.

Naomi Tuinstra  
La Grande

### Darnell: Impeachment inquiry is sane course of action

To the Editor:  
New reasons to call for an impeachment inquiry of Donald Trump include ordering former White House staff not to testify to congressional committees and routinely appointing unqualified long-term "acting" appointees to cabinet positions, bypassing congressional oversight.

Worst of all, Trump is illegally and systematically cracking down on immigrants by continuing to separate migrant children from their parents, denying them basics like soap, mattresses and toothbrushes, depriving them of sleep and failing to ensure their safety. These are torture techniques. This systematic dehumanization increasingly seems "normal" as we grow weary and

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numb to new acts of incompetence and cruelty.

Enough. Whether Republican, Democrat or Independent, please join me and ask Rep. Greg Walden (call 541-776-4626) to support an impeachment inquiry in the House so we can begin to restore our values, defend American rights, reclaim some sense of dignity and protect the weakest among us.

Carl Darnell  
Medford

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