

# Lobby Day: students rally for tuition freeze

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Many students were quick to agree they too would have trouble raising the extra money.

"I represent the average student; I will be graduating with \$20,000 in [school loan] debt," said St. John, who came back to school 23 years after dropping out as a high school student.

"I don't want to flip burgers the rest of my life. I think people need to have this opportunity. At Portland State, we have one-third of the student population who are over the age of 35. We need the retraining and the education, not only for industry, but I personally need it for my self-esteem," said St. John.

St. John touched briefly on the issue surrounding child care for student parents before introducing Senator Eugene Kim (need his official stats).

"We hear everyday from people who want money, but I think we realize, as leaders of the Oregon Legislature the importance of higher education," said Kim. "I have been in hundreds of conversations with leadership where we have said that we will freeze college tuition."

Despite the fact that many students were missing classes to attend Student Lobby Day, they received a warm welcome from Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber.

"I'm glad to see so many people here at the Capitol fighting for what they believe in. You have an opportunity today to talk to your senator or representative on a number of issues and really make a difference," said Kitzhaber.

The governor said the lawmakers recognized students have much to gain and much to

lose by the decisions to be made during the next few weeks.

"I support your efforts and I will do all that I can," said Kitzhaber, pausing to let the enthusiastic crowd acclamation die down.

"In order to do that, there are a couple of things that have to happen. First, we must make sure that a college education is affordable in the first place. That's why I've proposed and included in my budget, a tuition freeze. In the last few years, tuition has gone up 80-percent and that is not acceptable," Kitzhaber said.

"The second thing we must do is to make sure that those students who are at least able to afford it don't face challenges in their personal lives that prevent them from succeeding," said Kitzhaber about his proposal to include expansion of the Oregon Health Plan to include students.

"The Oregon Health Plan expansion is under attack. The tuition freeze is under attack. Both are potential victims. Both could be sacrificed to finance a tax refund at a time when we should be investing in Oregon's future," said the governor.

He left students with a powerful message: "If you believe in formal education, if you believe in retaining the special quality of place that makes Oregon the way it is today, then tell that to your representative. Tell that to your senator."

Kitzhaber pulled out his own marker and walked over to sign the freezer.

Three main issues - the Oregon Need Grant, child care for student parents, and the Oregon Health Plan - were on the minds of seven students from Clackamas as they

descended upon lawmakers.

Student representatives included Chantal Angot, Jacob Boenisch, Josh Bruegman, Mike Caudle, Jay Clark, Justin Anderson and Laney Fouse. Nancy Caudle joined the group to provide support from a taxpayer's perspective.

Since their next appointment was not until 1:15 p.m., the group from Clackamas attended the Senate's regular session. On tap for the sixty-ninth legislative assembly was a measure to designate milk as Oregon's state beverage.

When the vote came down, only one senator opposed the measure with a resounding "no." It so happened, the first stop for the afternoon was the office of Randy Miller, a Republican from District 13. Miller's assistant pulled him from a Senate hearing to hear the group's message.

Prior to getting down to the issues of higher education, the students wanted to know why Miller voted "no".

"I voted 'no' during that great moment in time when we created the official state nut," said Miller. "At that point, I was at a deadline and I had so many friends in contention that weren't listed on the bill... I just could not possibly choose among them."

That legislative session adopted the filbert as the official state nut.

"More importantly, the reason I voted 'no' then and voted 'no' today was that every time [someone] introduces an idea into this process... it costs the taxpayer money. I calculated that it costs the taxpayers somewhere between \$24,000 and \$30,000 for every day we are here," said



Photo by Laney Fouse

Governor John Kitzhaber addresses an enthusiastic crowd last Thursday during Student Lobby Day.

Miller.

He figures, of the average six hours a day the senators spend in hearings, the costs associated amount to about \$3,000 per hour.

Miller figured the process was about \$8000 to \$10,000. Under the current distribution formula of a little over \$4000 per student, he asked himself, "Was this activity worth two students? I said 'no' and that's what this is all about."

The senator spent several minutes discussing how the issues with the Clackamas students. Perhaps the most important message he impressed upon them was the need to free up money for educational spending. He challenged them to find the savings in other current programs and transfer it into what students believe are better priorities.

"There are real examples, like the proposal to do away with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission. It is suggested that it would save us a \$100 million per biennium and \$60 million every biennium thereafter," Miller said.

He also pointed out the savings involved in letting Oregonians pump their own gasoline, building less prisons, and privatizing the Department of Motor Vehicles.

"Our budget here is exactly like your budget at home - there is only so much money coming in," said Miller.

The round of visits continued well into the afternoon to include Representatives Roger Beyer, Ron

Adams, Jane Lokan and Larry Sowa's Chief of Staff Trish Conrad.

At Adams' office, students received word from the Chair of the Subcommittee on Education that they had provided some of the backfill left by Measure 47. Although there were details still to be worked out, this was good news for community college students.

"What they have given us is fair and reasonable based on what's happening in the state. That \$9.8 million probably translates into about \$300,000 for Clackamas," said College President John Keyser. "We are in a tight budget time and we know we're going to have to slowly make adjustments in our budget. We're trying to do it in such a way that it doesn't disrupt what students need and what people expect of the college."

Keyser was concerned students may be confused about the political backdrop of what they heard in Salem. The tuition freeze covers the state system of colleges and universities.

"When the governor and others talk about freezing tuition, a lot of people will sweep the community colleges into that. So I am sure students will have questions about it if we [Clackamas] raise tuition," Keyser said.

The kicker revenue, if not refunded, will be used to freeze tuition for resident undergraduates.

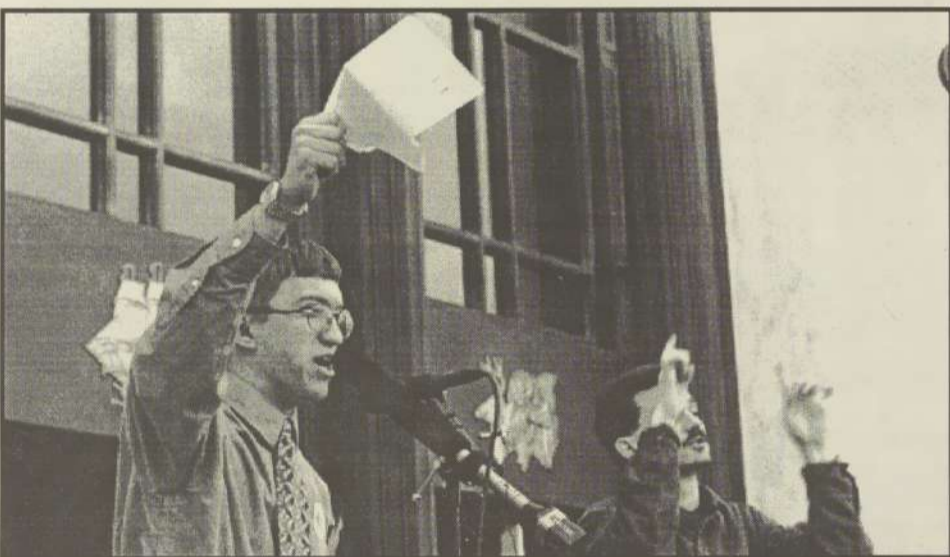


Photo by Laney Fouse

Associate Student Government President Mike Caudle started the chant, "Education is important!" Caudle's speech focused on need grants, child care and funding the Oregon Health Plan for students.

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