

## SPEECH FOR OCTOBER 2 MERKLEY EVENT

Welcome to Senator Jeff Merkley's Fighting for College Affordability Tour. My name is Pam Miller and I am President of Portland State University's American Association of University Professors. PSU-AAUP represents over 1250 faculty and academic professionals employed on this campus. We strive to defend the rights of our bargaining unit through advocacy, collective bargaining, and grievance procedures and we are committed to protecting tenure, due process, and academic freedom.

College affordability seems to have become a topic that is now discussed in the media, on college campuses across the country, in state legislatures, and now ultimately, the family dinner table. For me, growing up on a farm in Ohio in the 60s, (I've never quite understood if farming is working class or middle class...it is lots of physical labor), the affordability of public higher education was not part of the equation when I considered going to college even though my parents did not go to college. For my parents and me, what was most important was how I would do in college and if I could do well. My high school years weren't probably a good indicator of how I might do (there were so many other cool things going on in the 60s and early 70s) yet I guess things worked out!

Now, everyone is talking about the cost of higher education and what to do about it. As many states, particularly Oregon, have divested from public support for college, students have been expected to pay more and more of their tuition and many must borrow the money to do this. Student debt is high and it seriously hurts those who don't finish college and also straps those who do. With college loan debt, it is not possible to buy a car, a house, or make other purchases and commitments that create stability and help our economy.

Even while in college, there are mounting obstacles to finishing a degree. For example, here on this campus, 4,235 students returned surveys about

food insecurity just a few weeks ago. 59% of those respondents (2,516 of students on this campus) were found to meet the USDA definition of food insecurity that means being unable to consistently access, either by purchase or charity, sufficient quantities or quality of food and not eating balanced meals. **THIS IS WRONG!** And we can see the complexities of how college life has changed from families being able to support young adults to get degrees to students missing meals and needing to get food from the Food Pantry on our PSU campus. What is wrong with this picture?

Since Oregon has decided, in my opinion, to not make higher education a priority, it appears that we need increased national attention and action. This is why I am happy to announce today that PSU-AAUP's Executive Council unanimously voted to endorse Senator Jeff Merkley for re-election to the United States Senate.

He shares our values about public education, living wages, worker's rights, and finding ways to create opportunities so that all Oregonians can have a better life. I believe that debt for education does not have a place in our society. It is not sustainable, and our generations now and to come should not be burdened with paying back banks and Wall Street.

Today, we will hear from two PSU students: one who will share her personal experience working to afford a higher degree and one who introduce the Senator. Finally, we'll hear from Senator Merkley as he tells us about his "Fighting for College Affordability Tour."

I would like to introduce Rayleen McMillan. She is a senior at PSU and an alum of PCC Sylvania. She is a political science major and a Spanish minor. She is studying to be a high school civics teacher.

Andrew Davidson will introduce the Senator. He is a freshman at PSU and an alum of Grant High School. He recently finished working as a communications intern on Senator Merkley's campaign.