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June 12, 2019

Neil Bryant, Chair
Higher Education Coordinating Commission
255 Capitol Street NE, Third Floor
Salem, OR 97310

Dear Neil:

On behalf of The Chamber of Medford/Jackson County's Board of Directors and, more importantly, employers in Jackson County, I want to convey how important the continued sustainability of SOU is to The Chamber and this region's overall economic health. This Chamber represents nearly 1,400 members in 57 cities, totaling over 50,000 Oregon employees for whom continuing education is paramount to their success.

As an SOU Senior, I was also a full-time intern in the 1987 Oregon Legislative Assembly. I continued on in the '89 and '91 sessions and can say that starting then and over the course of my career at The Chamber spanning some 30 plus years I have watched the legislature underfund higher education in the State of Oregon. There is long-term harm to this inaction and I believe we are on the front end of seeing the deleterious impacts of this decades old trend.

Speaking to our regional university, SOU is absolutely critical to attracting, retaining, and developing our workforce. SOU students are our interns, research assistants, employees, prospective employees, and the children, parents and partners of our employees.

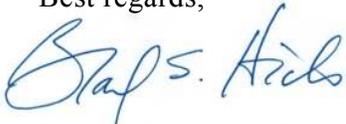
The relationship between SOU and the region jumped to a whole other level this year, as the University reached out to major employers to develop a "University Partnership" agreement to meet the continuing education needs of their workforce. *Together* the university and employers are encouraging and supporting adults in completing their college degrees or growing the skills they need to progress in the workplace. In our rural region and with record-breaking employment levels, it is critical to southern Oregon that we have a partner in SOU.

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The level at which tuition is set matters to us as well. The Chamber Board recognizes the nexus between our region's employees and the cost of post-secondary education...they are also tuition payers; and, quite simply, they don't want high tuition. Yet, at the same time the fiscal stability of the university must be ensured. The Chamber and I have long advocated, and more specifically, argued for state investment in higher education throughout this legislative session. The university's board of trustees has leaned in and established a tuition schedule that corresponds to the level of state investment; we support that. It strikes the right balance between ensuring fiscal stability, and continuing this university's lean staffing levels.

If I can only ask one thing, it would be to urge you to support the good work being done at SOU, and affirm the decision of its board.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brad S. Hicks". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Brad S. Hicks, CCE
President & CEO