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**Bipartisan student debt reform bill unanimously
passes Senate Education Committee**
***Millennials Relief Act called 'monumental,' 'economic-
stimulant'***

SALEM, Ore.-A bipartisan student debt reform proposed by Senate Republican Deputy Leader Sen. Chuck Thomsen, R-Hood River, passed unanimously in the Senate Education Committee.

"Other student debt reform proposals have concentrated on just one income bracket or offered minimal tax breaks on debt interest. Those ideas are all tricycles-this is a Harley Davidson," said Thomsen. "This is student debt reform on steroids."

Earlier this session, the proposal earned the support of Democratic President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, who joined the bill as a chief sponsor.

"Education that isn't affordable, isn't accessible. We should consider every option to make college more affordable for students. Our bottom line should always be the students," said Courtney upon sponsorship.

The chief sponsors of the proposal, Senate Bill 1034, say their bill will help Oregonian college graduates burdened by student debt. The "Millennials Relief Act" fixes Oregon's tax code to make student debt payments completely tax-free.

In the 2013-14 school year, 3,319 students at Oregon's public institutions of higher education received federal student loans. They received a total of over \$22.5 million. The Institute for College Access and Success reports that average student debt in Oregon increased 51 percent from 2004 to 2014. Students in Oregon are spending over \$500 a semester on books alone.

It would take an everyday Millennial in Oregon, 48 weeks of working 40 hours

a week, that's about an entire year of working day in and day out, to afford attending college.

In Oregon, 63 percent of students have student loans, and the average debt load is almost \$30,000. Food insecurity and housing insecurity are plaguing Millennials in college too, with 47 percent of college students in Oregon not regularly eating, and not by choice but due to a lack of financial stability.

"Everyone from Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton to Donald Trump, and other national figures, have expressed interest in tackling this issue but they haven't made the necessary progress," said Thomsen spokesman Jonathan Lockwood. Thomsen credits Lockwood for developing the proposal. "With this bill we don't have to wait for national politicians, Oregon will be a leader in addressing this critical issue and it will make a tremendous impact."

The bill now moves to the Senate Finance and Revenue Committee for further consideration.

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