



**REPRESENTATIVE GENE WHISNANT
OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE DISTRICT 53**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, April 8, 2015

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Rep. Gene Whisnant's "Affordable Baccalaureate Degree Act" Passes House
Bill Would Make College More Affordable and Accessible For Oregonians

Salem, OR – Representative Gene Whisnant's (R-Sunriver) bill to make college more affordable and accessible for Oregonians passed the House of Representatives today on a unanimous vote. By requiring collaboration between public universities and community colleges to make fixed-cost baccalaureate degrees a reality in Oregon, HB 2973-A seeks to keep Oregon's best and brightest students in state as they look to further their education and work towards college and a career.

"Creating more affordable higher education opportunities for Oregonians has been one of my legislative goals since I was elected to the House," said Rep. Whisnant. "College costs and student debt are at an all-time high due to increasing costs for tuition, housing and textbooks. This bipartisan bill is a step in the right direction to make college more affordable for students from all backgrounds and will encourage talented students to stay in Oregon as they prepare for college."

As part of his work on HB 2973-A, Rep. Whisnant studied the states of Texas, Florida and Wisconsin and their progress in creating fixed \$10,000 four-year degrees covering tuition and fees. Rep. Whisnant collaborated with Rep. Mark Johnson (R-Hood River) and Dana Richardson from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to seek input from Oregon's public universities, who indicated a willingness to work on creating affordable degrees or pathways to affordable degrees for Oregonians.

The bill tasks HECC with asking Oregon's public universities to identify bachelor's degrees or pathways to bachelor's degrees that are affordable and offered at a fixed cost that is significantly less than the cost of a traditional 4 year bachelor's degree. It also requires community colleges to develop streamlined transfer and dual enrollment programs. Lastly, the bill requires the HECC to submit a report on their progress to the legislative committees on higher education during the 2016 regular session of the Legislative Assembly.

"My hope is that our state's university presidents will present some affordable four-year degrees or pathways that could be offered to students beginning in the fall of 2017," said Rep. Whisnant.

In addition to Rep. Whisnant, the chief sponsors of HB 2973-A include Rep. Mark Johnson and Democrats Rep. Jennifer Williamson and Rep. Jeff Reardon. Additional sponsors include Republicans Rep. Cedric Hayden and Rep. Mike Nearman. The bill now goes to the Senate for consideration.

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