

What's_Next__Podcast_Episode_Claire_McMorris.mp3

[Snippet from Podcast] Claire: The cost of higher education has gone up over the last 30 years, I mean, anyone could tell you that, right? Student loan debt has skyrocketed. We're the universities lobbyists, so our goal is to fund public higher education. So, I feel every day so proud of being a lobbyist for OSU because, you know, we're trying to do something here that's public good that serves everybody that isn't in the interests of individuals.

[Bouncy theme music plays.]

[Introduction] Welcome to the What's Next? podcast. Let me just start off by saying. Not everyone has the same background. There is no road-map for success. Life begins at the edge of your comfort zone. Leaning into your curiosities. It does suck when you grow up. We're all still figuring out who we are. You can't just sit back and be silent. Black lives matter. It is the little stuff that makes the biggest difference. Do you have another hour? [Laughs]

[Bouncy theme music fades.]

Cody: Hello, Beaver Nation, welcome back to another episode of the What's Next podcast, I'm your host, Cody Stover. 2020 was a year of politics like our state and country has never seen before, and now in 2021, I think we are all ready for a fresh start. Joining us on the show today is someone who works in this field. She's the assistant director of government relations for Oregon State University, a role in which she lobbies and advocates for the university at the state level. And of course, she's a 2017 grad from OSU with an honors degree in political science, as well as two minors in Spanish and music. And we are very excited to have her on the show. Claire McMorris, thanks for joining us on the What's Next podcast.

Claire: Thanks, Cody. I'm so excited to be here.

Cody: Yes, we're so excited to have you. And I know that you are a Corvallis native, grew up in Corvallis, were you always a Beav or were you one of those Corvallis kids who wanted to get out of town but then realized how great OSU is?

Claire: Yeah, I'm one of the coveted townies of Corvallis, and I think all of us who went to OSU knew or were one of those folks. I'm actually, I think a third or fourth generation Beaver, so my mom and my grandfather all went to OSU, which is just really special. But I actually didn't start at Oregon State when I graduated from Corvallis High School. I went off to Willamette University in Salem for just a semester and decided, you know, it wasn't for me. So, I transferred to Oregon State just to come back home, just try to figure things out, and I fell in love with a campus. I started getting involved in student government and connecting with my professors in a way that I think is just so unique and special to the OSU community. And, you know, I never, never have looked back. So, I bleed black and orange and I'm so happy that I still can through my role at government relations with the university. So, yeah, no, Beaver Nation was definitely in my future whether I saw or not from the beginning.

Cody: I'm sure growing up in Corvallis here, you have I mean, it's not that big of a town, so you probably have this like super detailed knowledge of, you know, the whole town and not too long as a kid growing up. But when you come to OSU and actually start going there as a student, do you find that you saw things with new eyes or a different light?

Claire: Oh, yeah. So, my parents weren't affiliated with the university. My mom's a teacher and my father is a scientist and chemist, formerly with C.H. to Hemphill, which was in Corvallis for a long time. So, I actually didn't have much exposure to the university through my parents at the time. Though, I mean, I think in Corvallis through high school, there a lot of collaboration with the university through, you know, whether it was the Linus Pauling Center or the university library and using the resources there. But when I came to be a student, it was like just this whole new world that seems like this sort of void in the center of Corvallis because, I mean, you can't drive through campus. We have a really unique campus in that fact that you can't just have traffic going through campus.

So being able to experience the, you know, Memorial Union and all of our beloved classroom buildings and activities as a student and sort of be able to utilize sort of like really infinite possibilities I found was super special. I like to think that, you know, when I was at a smaller university, it seemed like the floor was a little higher and the ceiling was a little lower. But at OSU, the opportunities were, you know, much more expansive, either side. So, during my time at OSU, I really took advantage of a lot of things outside

of the classroom, which I think really catapulted myself into my post-college career. But being able to go to Washington, D.C. for internships and be involved with student government and with music organizations on campus really, really solidified this sense of place and belonging at OSU that I think we all look back fondly when we think about our experience in college.

Cody: I want to hear more about the experience you had in Washington, D.C. Before we jump to that, though, fill in the blanks for us here as far as political science, were you like that third grader who was super politically active, and this has always been your path? Or is it something you found when you came to OSU? Talk to me about how political science became part of Claire McMorris' life.

Claire: Yeah. So, I think my interest in politics really grew in high school. So I had an amazing teacher at Corvallis High School, Colleen Works, shout out, I think she's still there, who taught U.S. history and government and encouraged me to participate in a summer program called Girls State. So, there's these two programs called Girls and Boys State that are nationwide, that invite high school students to participate in sort of this mock government experience between their junior and senior year of high school. And we went to Salem, I think it was actually on the Willamette campus, and we had, you know, legislators, secretary of state come in very strong, you know, women leadership in politics. And that really was where my interest in policy and politics was born, seeing these women who have just carved these paths for themselves in politics, that is nothing but admirable, and I was very drawn to that. I was very drawn to being able to speak towards issues and think through processes and understand the ways in which our society works through government. And from there, I think that in going into college, that's where it was, kind of was the solidification of, you know, I'm really interested in this topic. But for me, it always has been about how you can leverage your academic experiences to have these out of the classroom experiences.

Claire: And, you know, that's really plentiful, I think, in the in the world of political science and politics, though, I did do my fair share and still am very interested in academic research. I, through the honors college, had the opportunity once I was in college to do the thesis process and write an academic article that ultimately was published in an academic journal. And I presented at conferences and so forth, so it's really that twofold interests that I think really drew me in. And, you know, there's always there's always something happening in politics, I mean, we can all say that for good or

bad, there's something happening. And it's always fascinating to not only understand what the headlines are and how to navigate that and how it affects your life personally. But for me, really digging into like, well, what was the process? How did those things happen? How did we come to those decisions? Where are the chess pieces on this board? And that really is a sense that I have developed through my time in college and my professional experiences for sure.

Cody: Mm hmm. Talking more about those professional or at least when you were a student, the outside of the academic field experiences, I want to dig deeper now into that Washington, D.C. experience you mentioned earlier. What was that experience? And tell me why it was important for you.

Claire: Yeah, so I had a couple of different internship opportunities through college. In the spring of my junior year of college, which was 2016, I went to intern with Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici, who is representing the northwest corner of Oregon in Washington, D.C. So being a college intern in a D.C. office on Capitol Hill was something, an experience I really wanted to make happen and made it happen through support of my department, through advisers and other support mechanisms for my home university. But as an intern in D.C., it's really a culture. A lot of folks, every office almost in the Senate and House has student interns, and it is an experience that is really a gateway for a lot of folks, including myself, because you get to see what's happening on the inside action. You're answering the phones, you're helping answer the emails, going to hearings, which was one of my favorite parts, to see the deliberations, doing research on projects. And I was really fortunate in the fact that I had the internship program and Congresswoman Bonamici's office, they really had a very close connection with their interns and the staff and the congresswoman. So, there was a lot of touch points that were really valuable in my development. But, you know, coming from Oregon, going to Washington, D.C., is not an easy experience, especially like if your means are limited. And I was fortunate in that, like I was able to cobble together being able to get the plane ticket and find a place to live.

Claire: That's one of the biggest things, is finding a place to live for, like that stint of two and a half months. So, I found a great location that was sort of like the secret hidden, hidden gem, sort of dorm for women who were interning on the Hill. But it's an opportunity that I really recommend, anyone who's in political science are interested in politics while they're in college or even after you graduate, I mean, I saw a lot of folks

there who had graduated one or two years out and went to do an internship just as a foot in the door. It is really an opportunity that you need and should have if you want to go into politics or policy, even if the only outcome from it is that you decide that you do not want to work ever again in Washington, D.C. I think having that clarification is really important. I think for me, it helped me determine too, that sense of wanting to. Try my hand at state politics and go that route first. I also did some other internships, too, on various campaigns in the state and some other leadership opportunities that really - they were things that I had to go out and find for myself. But the reward was so great when you think about like sort of long-term implications.

Cody: It seems like that internship experience and actually going to D.C., seems like a pinnacle experience, at least when you're somebody who's interested in that field, because it is like our nation's capital and where a lot of that is going down at the highest level. So that's so cool that you got to do that. I also been noticing that it was 2016, so it was another, as we're coming off of an election year, 2016 was another election year. Did that change the experience at all for you or was it more hustle, bustle there because it was that year?

Claire: Yeah, I mean, four years ago was like a very different time than today, I think we can all have an appreciation of that. So, it was in the spring before the election. So, yeah, there was some hustle, bustle. But I think one of the things that I really learned while I was there, and it's sometimes I think for the person who's just experiencing politics as a citizen and tracking the news and wanting to keep informed, there's actually this pretty significant distinction between being in a policy, doing the work of being a member of Congress, and campaigning. So, there's actually a pretty strong separation between the two. So, when you're in in Washington, D.C., if you're a member of Congress doing your work, trying to write bills and pass bills and make that process happen, that's almost completely, you know, separated from the work that you do to get elected, get other people elected. And there's some pretty strong, you know, both on the state and federal level separations between the two.

So, I mean, I think it's safe to say that the air of an election, like, kind of permeates everything, right. But when you're talking to, like, the day-to-day work, like because I worked in a member's office in D.C., I didn't do any part of the campaign work, but I could have done campaign work then not done any of the part of the office work, so it's sort of an interesting distinction that that can get really messy sometimes, especially for

folks who are trying to be staffers and make the process happen. But I think that that the folks do a really good job of making sure that those buckets are really separate for each other from each other. And that's something that we are really conscious of too, when we talk about state politics as well.

Cody: That's so interesting, and it seems like something that could, as you're talking about how it sounds like folks specialize in different things and it takes all the parts to make the whole engine work, but definitely something too that I think anybody who's listening with and going into political science or not, will see that across an organization. Some people want to be managers, some people want to, you know, you know, manage a group of people who are specialists at different things, some people just want to be that specialist, and some people want to do a mix of all of them. So, as I'm hearing you say that, I'm just thinking like how applicable that is too everybody that you might have. One thing that you're an expert on doesn't necessarily mean you do all the other parts, but, you know, specialization seems to be key.

Claire: Right. And even if you're in the same role, like we talk about members who are elected representatives or senators, you know, they have different styles of working and all of those different styles, whether you're the person trying to, you know, whip the votes in your caucus or you're the person trying to exactly write the legislation or, you know, have all these different roles even within the same sort of category of jobs, so to speak. All of those are really important to keeping the process moving, and, you know, in my role I play, currently and we'll probably talk about like what I do right, currently in my job. But that is a distinct role too, as somebody who works in government relations and is representing an entity, in my case, the university. So, they're all really important sort of paths that have to fall in place for you to have success in the legislative process, no matter what that end point success is.

Cody: Yeah, we'll get to the OSU stuff you're doing currently. Before we jump to that, I heard you mentioned earlier in this intro here that you had worked on some campaigns. So, I was interested to hear a little bit more of that. What campaigns did you work on and what was that experience like being on that side of the of the coin?

Claire: Yeah, when I was a student, I was a campaign intern for both our local Corvallis representatives and senators. And that's a totally unique experience too, that I think people should have, if they're interested, even it's just a volunteer. You don't have to be

an intern per say, you could just be a community volunteer. And that's a lot of knocking on doors. So back when, you know, we could have interactions face to face, one of the primary strategies is you just you know, if Corvallis is your district, and you're running for the state legislature, you're going to knock on every single door in that Corvallis district to talk to the voters directly, introduce yourself or the candidate you're volunteering with and, you know, have a have a brochure you might hand them. And some of you might have experienced this firsthand in past campaigns when someone comes knocking on your door wanting to talk about a candidate. But it's actually such a critical part in having those connections and being able to just be in the community in such a much more direct sense because you're on this hyper local level. And so that's a lot of fun to really just get to know a community, whether it's your community or somewhere that you are working in with the member in particular.

Claire: You really learn a lot about the culture of that community, what people are thinking about, what issues folks are interested in. And I think you realize really quickly that there's lots of cultural identity and sort of issues that are occurring locally. It might be something that has to do with, you know, the parks in the region or sort of municipal governments or the university or schools in your district. And that is just so unique to whatever region you're in, whether you're on like city council level or, you know, state representative, even, you know, these members of Congress who represent a portion of the state being tuned into what actual people that they're representing or could be representing are thinking and how best to do that. So, that is something that I always look back fondly because, you know, you're always campaigning or doing these experiences over the summer. So, um, there's just a good a good sense of it being, you know, the best the most beautiful time of the year, and you just get to walk around and chat with folks.

Cody: Yeah, it sounds like something that really helps give that well-rounded experience as you combine it with the stuff you did in Washington, D.C. and as we went through your time at OSU. So, after graduating in 2017, you've been working with the Oregon State Office of Government Relations. So, let's transition over to that a little bit more now. What's the primary function of that department and what's your role look like?

Claire: So yeah, I started after I graduated. I didn't actually think that this is where I what I was going to be doing. I was one of those, having grown up in Corvallis, you can

imagine I was like, I'm getting out, I'm moving to the city, I want to do something different. So, I had planned and when I was in school, I kind of started up a side job of being an assistant substitute teacher. So, I would go into different local K-12, like when a teaching assistant, called in sick, you know, you show up, you're the sub. And so, I had my mom, having been a teacher and a substitute teacher, encouraged me to, like, try that because it is like accessible. And let me tell you, and I know you've talked to teachers on this podcast, teaching is not an easy thing, and being a sub is not an easy thing. So, there's a lot to learn there. So, my original plan was to just kind of be a substitute teacher, apply for graduate school, you know, take a little bit of a break from doing kind of a very busy life I led in an undergraduate and then I saw this job pop up for the government relations office. And I actually, when I was a sophomore at OSU, worked as a student worker in this, in the government relations office at OSU. So, I knew the folks there, I knew what they did and where about. And so, I just I couldn't pass up the opportunity to put my name in and see where it led me and I ultimately got the job.

Claire: So, to answer your first question, Cody, the government relations office at OSU, so we represent Oregon State University to state, local and federal politics. So, the university, as we all know, is a public university or a state school. So that means that we get funding from the state of Oregon to operate and, you know, keep tuition reasonable compared to private schools and produce students and especially research that is like in the public interest. And for OSU in particular, we're a land grant school. So, we have the OSU extension, which folks might be familiar with if they, you know, participate in 4H or, you know, we're OSU extensions in every single county of the state. So, I, with the government relations office, the office reports directly to the president of the university. So, we work with university leadership to help set and execute the priorities that we have in the legislature. So, one of those priorities look like? Funding for higher education, and that's pretty much like our big bucket item, so the state should be investing in higher education in order to keep it affordable for students, in order to keep the quality of programs, you know, at a level that serves the state of Oregon and the students who are here and be able to invest in research, invest in access of bringing more people to higher education that historically haven't had access to higher education and really put an emphasis on making higher education a public good.

Claire: So, that's the main area in which we seek to advocate. And when we do that, it is a pretty, I'd say there's a process that is established, but it's also just working to

educate the members, the 90 members of the legislature and the leadership in the state. Or it could be the federal government as well about, you know, what OSU is, like, who we are, what we do and make the case. So, it's really making that pitch, I mean, it kind of like in business sense, you know, you're trying to make the pitch for why taxpayer dollars should be invested in creating accessible, affordable education for Oregonians post high school. So, we spend a lot of time doing that. We spend a lot of time as well on specific items related to funding for different research projects, financial aid, which also goes in like the Oregon Opportunity Grant some folks might be familiar with. And like I mentioned, funding for OSU's special programs, which are often in like the land grant area. So, we have got OSU extension and agricultural experiment stations that serve way beyond just students at OSU. These are programs that are serving rural communities and Oregon agricultural communities and Oregon urban communities and Oregon, too, to help connect communities with resources and education, they need to be healthy and prosperous. So, on the day to day, like what types of issues we work on, that those are pretty much the big buckets.

Claire: How we do that? So, we utilize a lot of different faces in this process because different folks' perspective and roles have a different amount of influence or can mean something different. So, you know, we have us, so it's me and two other folks on the team for OSU's Government Relations Office, we're the university's lobbyists. So, I know for some people that word's like, whoa, whoa, whoa, you're a lobbyist, like, you know, that's sounds sketchy. I, you know, I like to think that, you know, we're representing a public university. We're representing OSU. Like, our goal is to fund public higher education. So, I feel every day so proud of being a lobbyist for OSU because, you know, we're trying to do something here that is, you know, a public good that serves everybody that isn't in the interest of individuals to make more money. This is in the interest of people being educated and, you know, being able to live their lives and go on to great things. So, our team of folks in government relations definitely plays a unique role in sort of piecing together the process and being able to know when and how is the right time to influence things in the process. The other, we also have lots of folks like you, Cody, or anyone listening to this podcast who are alumni, who are folks who are working for, you know, businesses in Oregon and really have experienced firsthand what it means to have a college degree.

Claire: And one of my jobs is to help enable folks who have a story about how OSU has been influential to their process, to them being successful, to the economy, to research

developing, to the healthiness of their community, enabling them to have a voice in the process as real-life people to make the case for OSU. And that's like one of my favorite parts of my job, because I get to empower individuals who think that, like, they don't have any place in politics. They don't, you know, they're just a normal person, how can they influence what happens in Salem or Washington, D.C.? But it's the case that individuals' perspectives of their real lives and how OSU, higher education, has been an important part of it and is worthwhile to fund, to be a public good. They are the most they are more powerful than my voice as an employee of the university. They're the ones who can be a third party to say validator to encourage folks that, yes, it does make a difference, it is worthwhile. You know, I'm a normal Oregonian and it's something that I want my taxpayer dollars to go to. So, through organizations like the Beaver Caucus and we also work with, you know, other colleges and programs like OSU Extension to cultivate that stakeholder advocacy and really be able to make those individuals' voices or organizations' voices as powerful as they can be in support of the shared mission that we have to support Oregon State and the future of public higher education.

Cody: Yeah, and thanks for taking us all the way through that, too, because that's super helpful in just understanding the scope and what work actually goes into this. And as you talk about these things that you kind of advocate for, for the university and for Oregonians in general, we say thank you too, because it sounds like really honorable work and really honorable things that you're advocating for and trying to make happen. I wanted to ask, too, because I think one of the things I'd love to hear a little bit more about, too, is what is it actually... Like when I hear the word lobbyist, sometimes I think of like this person who is at a fancy dinner party schmoozing with the organization and then a political candidate or something along the lines. But I know that this is kind of like not necessarily the nitty gritty of what it actually looks like. So, talk to me. How does that message actually get from OSU, from your department, to either a, you know, political person in office or their office in general?

Claire: Yeah, my life is probably a far reach from House of Cards. So, you'd probably, like, dispose of any of that.

Cody: Tell us the real deal.

Claire: Yeah. I mean, well, right now I'm just like working out of my apartment living room, just like everyone else. So, it's a lot of connecting with folks and sort of being able

to understand processes. So, I mean, the average person isn't looking on the Oregon legislative website every day to see if hearings are posted or when's the most ideal time in the calendar to have messages dispersed. So, I do a lot of sorts of I, I'd say like service level, like just like browsing both legislative websites, like local news, statewide news, trying to figure out kind of where and what the process is. A lot of email conversations, a lot of preparatory meetings. One of our biggest partners in this work is the students, are the students. And so, we meet really frequently with the two student governments that are affiliated with OSU, the ASOSU, which is on the Corvallis campus, and the ASCC, the Associated Students of Cascades Campus who are on our branch campus at OSU Cascades. And Cascades is another project that is really near and dear to my heart, as far as being able to advocate for the growth of that campus in Bend in the legislature. And I've felt very lucky to have worked on that project and with that community over the last three years, too.

Claire: So, let's just like do a hypothetical, which is very real. So, we're about to start the legislative session here in like two weeks, and it's going to be a very different legislative session from past years because we are in the remote setting. But let's just imagine that we're like in a pre- or post-covid world, whatever you want to think, and we know that there is the budget that's coming through and we're trying to organize advocacy to kind of maximize the amount of funding that can support students in the higher education budget. So primarily, like one of the first things we do is work with our other higher education institutions in Oregon. So, there are seven public universities. So you've got UO, you know, our rivals, the ducks, but in my world, they're like one of our closest allies, so it's kind of funny like that. We've got Portland State University, Western Oregon, Eastern Oregon, Southern Oregon and Oregon Institute of Technology. So, the seven of us work really closely together to coordinate a strategy around funding. So instead of just having everyone asking for different things, we work together to support these legislative priorities because, you know, you can just be one person saying something. But if you have a few more folks saying something and a few more, it's sort of the snowballing effect where you can kind of really do a full press, and that's a very wide in advocacy to support your priorities.

Claire: So, we might determine that, you know, we have our ask, we have our number, the funding amount that we want to advocate for. We have all of, you know, the talking points on why that's important, being able to prepare, you know, those who we work for and work with to speak to legislators advocating for those priorities. And if there's a let's

say there's a hearing coming up. So, in a legislative process, you know, a bill becomes a law by someone has to write the bill and then it has to go through a committee, the committee has to deliberate. And then from the committee after that, then it goes to the, let's say, Senate floor, and then they have to deliberate and vote on that, and then it does the same thing in the House. So, at a committee hearing, we might have an opportunity to provide public testimony on a bill that supports funding for higher education. So, we're going to work to think about who are going to be the best messengers to tell the story of the value of public higher education. Is that going to be the students? Probably. Is that going to be young alumni like yourself or others who might be listening that, you know, graduated in the last 5, 10 years and now they're doing something amazing, and they would have only had that opportunity because of their education? Yeah, they're excellent messengers.

Claire: They really tell a great story. Is it going to be a business, another business owner, perhaps a faculty or an administrator, perhaps someone who is working in K-12 who, you know, wants to see their students go on? So, we think through who's going to be the right person to carry and deliver whatever message that we've collectively determined to be, perhaps most strategic or effective for whatever that priority is. So, we help prepare them to do that work. All along through this process, we're also having sort of individual one-on-one meetings with legislators to kind of take them through what our ask is. So, what are we asking for? Why are we asking for it? Why is it important? Who supports it? So those meetings might include, you know, our government relations team, but we really take the back seat to help support our folks like students or alumni or other people who might be interested in supporting the process, to schedule those meetings, make sure they have everything they need to know about those meetings and help them deliver that message. And those opportunities, I think, are really rewarding for, you know, both us and the folks who participated.

Claire: And just kind of like what I said before, being able to actually sit down with your legislator and they're actually really interested in hearing from you because, you know, you may or may not have voted for them or you may or may not have a business in their district. So that process really helps solidify, you know, how we permeate that message through the legislators and get really the maximum education of that, whatever we're asking for funding, increase funding for higher education, if we were in-person in this theoretical, hopefully post-pandemic, I believe we're going to get back to it. That would mean that, like we invite you to come to Salem with us, to the state capitol. So myself,

and Katie Fast, who works on and is the executive director of government relations and works on state issues, will be in the state capital helping connect folks who might be advocating for OSU to either a hearing they're going to be testifying for or these meetings that they might have. We also will be connecting with legislators on answering technical questions that they might have, because we don't expect you as a volunteer to come in and know every single detail of, you know, the finances or something like that.

Claire: So, we're answering questions. We're working with other folks who are in the lobby, so other advocates, other lobbyists who have their own organizations they're representing to see if there are opportunities to partner with them and see if there's opportunities where, you know, there might be there might be something where we're on different sides of an issue and figuring out how to work that out. And monitoring hearings that might be happening, monitoring the floor sessions that might be happening, and, you know, this all occurs because we have a public Capitol building where anyone if you're someone who just decides to go in and watch a hearing, you could do that off the side of the street. You don't have to have any special permission to because it's, you know, your capitol. Nowadays, this looks a lot different as far as the virtual world. It looks like plugging into, you know, a Teams meeting or a video stream of the hearing helping prepare folks who might be testifying for hearings by getting them the zoom info, making sure they sign up with the online form correctly. It's still a very new system, and so, we're very interested in seeing how it works out. But on the advocacy side, so what we organize for individuals, alumni to be effective in this process, faculty, students. I've actually spent the last couple of months working with a team of folks from across the university to really develop a robust virtual advocacy strategy because it is completely changed from what we've done before.

Claire: So, virtual days of advocacy where we might have 30 meetings and 10 teams of different folks together to talk to legislators over Zoom to have the right, like instead of having a handout that's like an 8 1/2 by 11, you know, making something that's digital that you can actually see on your zoom screen or share it. So, things like that, which we're transitioning to the virtual world. But I mean, at the end of the day, like just like with a lot of things, like virtual government is very hard. You can't have a passing conversation with somebody, you can't have just that like person-to-person relationship building that we didn't, I think even realize was so important to some of our, you know, norms across all business, which is just like those conversations at the coffee pot or, you know, chatting between meetings that I think are really important to just like our

collective understanding of each other as human beings outside of like professional contexts. So, we're definitely you know, we're however, many months into this and so it's become more normalized. But it definitely still is a challenge, I think, with like with everybody's professions, to do this 100% in the virtual space.

[Bouncy theme music plays.]

Speaker3: Hey Beaver Nation. I'm Ali and I'm a 2015 OSU grad and part of OSU Next. Figuring out your journey post-college in these times can be tough and it sometimes can seem like there's a lot flying at us all at once. We started the OSU next LinkedIn group to be a place for Beavs to support Beavs. Whether you're looking for tips on negotiating your first promotion, hoping to connect with others in your area, or simply trying to stay sane while working from home, we're here for you. Join us by searching OSU next on LinkedIn. Now, back to the show.

[Bouncy theme music fades.]

Cody: Before we wrap up this episode too, I wanted to ask another question, too, just because it's something that's kind of a hot topic and something that you mentioned a little bit throughout this episode, but just the cost of higher education in Oregon and the United States of America as a whole, too. I know that your work may indirectly or directly work on some of this stuff, but I would love to hear just your general high-level opinion, too. I know that the cost of education in higher education is something that's every year when the ballots come or every four years when ballots come around, and at the state and national level, it's something that we're always talking about and also the accessibility of education, higher education, and especially for, you know, people of color, indigenous communities, people who are in that underrepresented population in the higher education field. So, I'm curious, like what should we as the citizens, you know, who don't necessarily have this insider look that you have, what should we be thinking about, most especially as Oregon kind of starts its legislative session here and we go forward in this next decade? What are the top things we should think about around higher education and the cost and its usability?

Claire: Yeah, I mean, Cody, you're so right. The cost of higher education has gone up over the last 30 years. I mean, anyone could tell you that, right? Student loan debt has skyrocketed. And that's not just by accident, that's not just because things are getting

more expensive. That's because of a systematic disinvestment by the states. It's not just Oregon, but the United States, like each state in higher education. So, when we think about how higher education in Oregon was funded in 1980 or 1990, you know, the state picked up probably 70-75% of the cost. So, the student and the family would only have to pick up 25%. Today that has almost swapped, so the student is picking up, you know, 70%-ish, maybe less or more, and the state's only picking up that 20-25%. And that is why you've seen this shift of the cost onto tuition and onto students backs and onto student loan debt, which we know is like building at this crazy rate. I think there's a lot of promise to think about what has- how the dialogue and conversation, where it seems to be going around higher education, finding ways in which we can better fund our systems of higher education from the national perspective to better incentivize those that accessibility both on a cost and from like a diversity perspective. We think a lot about how and who is at our institutions as well.

Claire: That is important, that is so important. We know that systematically higher education in the past, higher education of the past was not open to people of color, was not open to people from low-income backgrounds. That's changing a lot. I mean, in the last 10 years, we've seen that change a lot. But the work's not done, I mean, we still see that folks who come from a lower income background, you know, have them having debt, like they might be able to achieve more higher incomes over their lifetime. And higher education is a gateway to that prosperity, but it not being affordable in the first-place cuts people out. Not being able to have culturally responsive, cultural, culturally competent programs that are open and supportive of BIPOC folks who have been in the past, intentionally excluded from these spaces is not going to be the model that's going to invite them forward. So, taking a high-level perspective of like acknowledging these are things we want to change, these are things that we know we have to change. We can't do it with no additional funding, we can't make college more affordable without, you know, the state being able to pick up its share. We can't create these spaces that are going to have more support without the state and, you know, policies taking responsibility of that process. So how can folks get involved in that? I think being able to be representative of those opinions that the states should, and in general, we should invest more in public post-secondary higher education.

Claire: Folks need to hear that. I think a lot of times they just you know, things are taken for granted, that like, oh, well, someone's going to be advocating for something. No, no. You're the one that needs to be advocating for something. We want to empower you as

individuals to be able to convey those messages. And just I mean, I want to be able to give the listeners an opportunity to, like, take action on this, now. The OSU Alumni Association and OSU Foundation have an organization called the Beaver Caucus. The Beaver Caucus is a group of alumni who feel like they want to be part of this process. They want to be advocates, they want to be the ones who encourage policymakers at the state level to invest in OSU and higher education for the entire state. And this isn't just folks who've had experience before. These are just everyday people who can come in and we train you. don't worry about not knowing what you're doing, like, we will give you all the information you need to be able to be involved in this process, whether that's writing an email, whether that's attending one of our virtual lobby days, this next year, over the next six months, whether that's just being informed and bringing a group of folks together to do that.

Claire: And when I say that young alumni are like the most influential voices in this process, like, I seriously mean it. When we have folks go in who graduated a few years ago and now they're working for some company and doing some work that really is making a difference in this state. Everyone wants to hear that, they want to hear their story, and it's not about whether you've done this before, it's about who you are and how OSU, how higher education, has enabled you to do what you're doing now. And that's what I love about this podcast, because you feature these people that are like these change-makers and you can be a change-maker, too, by being involved in this process. So, if you are interested in this work, I'm happy to be a resource to you, claire.mcmorris@oregonstate.edu, reach out to me any time, I can help connect you to what you're envisioning. The Beaver Caucus has a website as well, and they have opportunities for you to sign up for a lister that will provide you information on these opportunities going forward, as well as just kind of periodic updates about the legislature and the legislative process, because it is sometimes can be confusing, especially when it might not be getting the headlines you might be tracking. So, understanding those processes and we will find a way to plug you in and you'll make a difference.

Cody: I appreciate you sharing all that Claire, and for the listeners out there, too, we'll make sure that in the show notes here, we'll post some of those links and ways that you can get involved with Beaver Caucus and also get in contact with Claire if you have more questions on that. So, we'll make sure to post that so you can find that easily. But yeah, Claire, thanks so much for taking us through that. I appreciate the kind of look under the hood that you gave us there and to all the workings of OSU's government

relations department, but also how it impacts people and what are the things we should be thinking about. So, I appreciate all of that. And I want to take a little time here at the end of this episode to do a couple of fun segments, where we get to learn a little bit more about you.

Claire: Yeah. Let's do it.

Cody: So, yeah, so we'll cap off the episode here with that and this first one is called New Year's resolution. So, as we know, 2020, a year unlike any other we've experienced, and a lot of your resolutions that you made probably at the end of 2019 looking into 2020, didn't necessarily come to fruition as you maybe thought they were. But as we look to 2021 here, what New Year's resolutions do you have?

Claire: Oh my gosh. I mean, I feel like there's a lot of just, sort of the stereotypical ones of health and exercise and all of that as we try to reverse ourselves from our home body, you know, our home-working states. But I just want to find more ways to connect to my connect to my community, here in the Corvallis community. It's been hard, virtual, I mean, you think that you could have just gone to an event at OSU or a show at Majestic Theater or, you know, Dark Side Cinema and be able to have those touch points into the community that are a little bit more difficult now. So, I think being able to find ways to connect to fellow Corvallis citizens and have some of those shared experiences that I know we all are missing, like the, you know, not having a fall festival and having that experience, which I know is just always a beloved event. So, I'd say that's one of my big resolutions for this year is just, continue to try connecting, even if it is harder than usual.

Cody: Yeah, I think we've all found ways that it works, but I know we all look forward to times when, yeah, things like the fall festival can happen again safely and those types of things. So, yeah, great resolution for 2021.

Claire: What's yours, Cody?

Cody: I actually, as you were saying that, one of mine, I went back and looked at my notebook for end of 2019 where I made my resolutions, and one was like, get more involved in community. And one of the things I wanted to do was get more involved in the OSU community, and so obviously this podcast has spawned out of that. And so

that was one that I kind of checked off from last year, but also it was in a completely different way than I thought. I thought we were going to be running more in-person events and those types of things. But it's been a beautiful pivot and it's been so much fun, as you mentioned, to kind of like have these guests on who are doing incredible things and pivoting in incredible ways. So, anyway, that was a last year one, and that's also one that I want to continue this year with this podcast and beyond. What are ways that, you know, I can use the time outside of when I log out of work to, you know, be a better member of my community. So, I'm tag teaming off of yours, but.

Claire: No, it's an important one too.

Cody: This next fun segment here is if I weren't a blank, I'd be a blank. And so, for you, I guess we could fill it in and if I weren't in government relations or politics, I'd be.. Fill in that blank.

Claire: Well, I mentioned my stint with substitute teaching, which was so fun and challenging. And it just makes me have such mad respect for all the teachers out there and excited for sort of my future and sort of this other perspective of education. But, you know, you mentioned briefly in my intro that I was a music minor, and I am an active flutist and a singer. I did Bella Voce at OSU, and then, of course, with flute, with the OSU Wind Ensemble and OSU Corvallis Symphony, which I still participate in as a member of the OSU community. So, I think like something in the music and arts. I have always been a theater, music, you know, dance kid, I grew up dancing. So, if I wasn't a government relations professional, I would love to just wholeheartedly pursue my interests in the arts.

Cody: Love it. I love that we've so many guests on here who, you know, whether they're an engineer or they're a scientist or whatever they are, a lot of them have that arts background, too. So, it's so cool to see kind of some of those come together.

Claire: Yeah, a lot of folks at OSU, you have that shared experience just because of the way that our alma mater approaches it. You know, you don't have to be in the music school to be in the top ensemble and that draws so many folks in, and the talent, it's a hidden gem.

Cody: Ok, this final fun segment, it's called Dinner for Four. So, if you could have dinner with any four people past, present, future, you can take it wherever you want it. Who would they be and why? And I always preface to say to our guests, this isn't COVID times, imagine you could actually be around the dinner table with them. So, who would those four people be?

Claire: Oh, goodness. Well, I imagine me and my partner Tas Tenell, who's also an OSU grad in computer science would be two of the folks. Oh, I just feel, you know, the Obamas. I mean, that seems like an obvious Michelle and Barack Obama, and I think anyone who can have genuine conversations about music and food and all of that. But that's one kind of stumps me, Cody, because I haven't put enough, it seems like I'd have a good answer because it's such an icebreaker.

Cody: Yeah, well, to the listeners out there, too, like, I never give any context on these to our guests when they come on here. So, I like to put them on the spot, and so that's I mean, that's, that's great, though, you and your partner and the Obamas that's 4 in my book. Yeah, it's a fun question and I love to see where folks take that, so, yeah, I appreciate you humoring us with that answer, too, as well. All right, Claire, well, we're so appreciative of your time here and for taking us through all that you're doing and all the honorable work you're doing for both students and our university as a whole, and also making those connections between state governments and back to education. So, thanks so much for the time and for taking us through that.

Claire: Thanks so much, Cody, this was really fun. And I wish you a very happy and healthy 2021, and actually, for everyone you know, I think the light's at the end of the tunnel.

[Bouncy theme music plays.]

Cody: Hey, listeners, our goal at LSU next to the alumni association is to build community, and that includes creating connections and sharing these unique stories with the rest of the nation. If you found this episode of the What's Next podcast valuable, you can help us achieve this goal by writing a quick review, leaving a rating and subscribing to the show in your preferred podcast player. We're thankful for your support.

[Bouncy theme music fades.]