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In This Issue

Whatever Happened to Personal Responsibility?

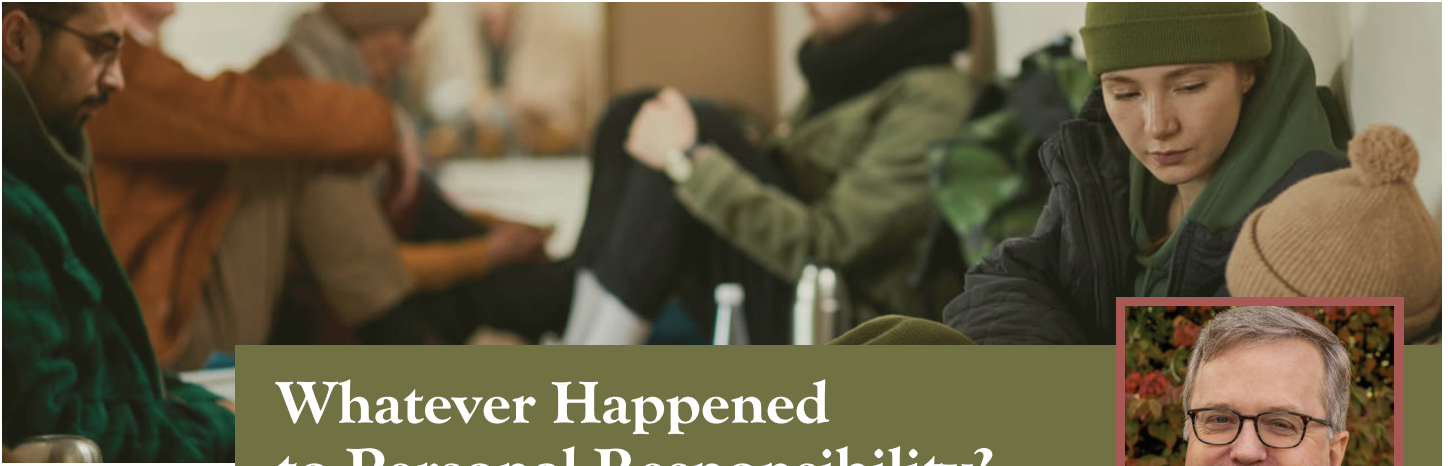
By John A. Charles, Jr.

Meet Cascade's Summer Research Associates!

By Kathryn Hickok

Oregon Legislature Passes Cascade's GED Bill.

By Eric Fruits, Ph.D.



Whatever Happened to Personal Responsibility?

By John A. Charles, Jr.



Governor Tina Kotek achieved her first big legislative win in March by persuading the Oregon State Legislature to appropriate \$200 million related to “homelessness.”

The largest portion of money, \$112 million, will expand the state’s shelter capacity by 700 beds, and help about 1,650 homeless individuals move into housing through rent subsidies.

The next largest expenditure, \$34 million, will go toward rental assistance. State officials project the financial aid will prevent more than 9,000 families from becoming homeless.

This was a big political win for the Governor, but it doesn’t solve the homelessness problem. Two years from now we’ll be having the same conversation, because nothing in the many assistance programs is designed to incentivize or force behavioral changes by the people receiving the funding. And most of the time, chronic homelessness is the result of poor choices made by individuals over a long period of time.

Oregon political leaders don’t like to admit that because they find it easier to blame all problems on various “systemic failures.” Few of these failures can be proven, but it gives politicians an excuse to raise taxes and create new programs.

Here’s one small example. Portland will be receiving funding from the Governor for a new homeless shelter that will feature 140 “sleeping pods” which are expected to be the same or similar to “tiny homes” used elsewhere. Portland was going to keep costs down by using tents on platforms, but Gov. Kotek will not allow state money to be used for tents because she considers them to be an inadequate form of shelter.

The new site will also be equipped with showers, laundry facilities, restrooms, common eating spaces, and a kitchen where **meals will be served daily**. “Peer support” workers and housing caseworkers will be on site to help people transition to more permanent housing.

But why would pod users want to make the transition? They will already be getting everything they need for free. “Transitioning” to real housing, which requires real rent payments, is for suckers.

The only thing this new project will do is attract more people to Portland looking for free stuff to enable their dysfunctional (and frequently criminal) lifestyles.

The same problem exists in the way Oregon handles drug addiction. Most of the tent dwellers we see on public sidewalks have serious drug problems. If we want to reduce homelessness, we have to address substance use disorders as well. But Oregon isn't doing that.

The Oregon political focus is on gently nudging drug addicts to someday, maybe getting around to addressing their self-destructive habits, but only if they want to. In the meantime, we'll spend billions on state services that probably won't even get used.

This was the focus of Measure 110 that was approved by voters in 2020. According to its proponents, that policy was designed to "make health assessment and recovery services for drug addiction widely available and to adopt a health approach to addiction by removing criminal penalties for low-level drug possession."

Fine, that had a nice surface appeal and obviously a lot of voters liked it, but there was never much evidence that drug users themselves **wanted the services**. That's relevant because the services are expensive. M110 diverts more than two-thirds of the money generated by the 2014 marijuana legalization law to pay for at least 16 new Addiction Recovery Centers (ARCs) across the state.

As required by the ballot measure, the new Recovery Centers must be open 24 hours per day, 365 days of the year. The Centers must assess the acute needs of persons who use drugs, provide connections to other services, and offer peer support, at no charge. All services provided at the Centers must be trauma-informed, culturally responsive, non-judgmental, and centered on principles of harm reduction. These services must be provided without employing coercion or shame or mandating abstinence.

For the 2021-23 biennium, anticipated expenditures for the ARCs were about \$278 million, a number that will grow over time as cannabis tax revenues increase.

The rollout of M110 services has been chaotic and incomplete, but I predict that by the time the ARCs are fully operational, there will be few clients. Is there really a demand for these services every hour of the day? After all, there's no leverage to get most addicts into treatment. Possession has been decriminalized, M110 prohibits using abstinence as a goal, and most addicts don't voluntarily seek treatment.

And by the way, in 2021 the legislature passed a bill changing the name of the ARCs to Behavioral Health Resource Networks (BHRNs). The original name, part of M110, sent the clear message that addiction **recovery** was an explicit policy goal, and that's what people voted for. Why would 90 state lawmakers decide a year later to replace that name with four words that don't mean anything? Because most of them want to dilute the message so it will be more difficult to hold anyone accountable for program results.

These are just two examples, but there are many others. The Governor and her legislative allies are determined to expand the culture of victimhood and diminish the concept of personal accountability wherever possible. This is wrong, and it won't work.

**John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO at Cascade Policy Institute.
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Meet Cascade’s Summer Research Associates!

By Kathryn Hickok



Every May through August, Cascade Policy Institute welcomes undergraduate students to the office for our annual internship program. “Summer research associates” spend 10-12 weeks conducting meaningful work that supports Cascade’s mission to advance individual liberty, personal responsibility, and economic opportunity in Oregon.

At a time when many universities are pushing young adults to adopt increasingly far-left views, Cascade’s internship is a breath of fresh air for many conservative and libertarian students.

At Cascade, interns learn how to inform themselves about complex issues, think critically, and reach well-reasoned conclusions. The internship helps participants **become more effective advocates for free markets and limited government** before they head back to campus or start their careers.

Cascade interns work on research projects resulting in published articles and reports, but it’s more than just research. Interns have opportunities to submit op-eds to local papers, record radio spots and podcasts, and testify in public meetings. They learn what makes a nonprofit organization work, including communications, public relations, fundraising, and donor relations. Throughout the internship, students meet with professionals with real-world experience shaping public policy.

Cascade Policy Institute receives applications from high-achieving students from across the country. In recent years, interns have come from the University of Notre Dame, Hillsdale College, Benedictine College, Grove City College, the University of Portland, Portland State University, Boise State University, and the University of Oregon. No matter where they come from, Cascade interns take pride in having made a real difference through their work.

Thanks to the generosity of Cascade supporters like you, we have hosted a structured internship program every summer since 2005. When you support Cascade Policy Institute, **you invest in future leaders like Cascade’s summer research associates**. If you, your business, or your family foundation would like to sponsor a student internship (which is a 40-hour/week summer job), **please contact me at (503) 242-0900 or kathryn@cascadepolicy.org**.



Sam Herrin

Sam Herrin is a rising senior at Georgia College & State University in Milledgeville, Georgia.

I am an upcoming senior economics major and math minor at Georgia College. After graduation, I will pursue a Ph.D. in economics. My love of economics started sophomore year in a taxation class. The professor would pick apart your brain and show you nuances you could not have dreamed of. The subtleties that economics teaches you to look out for can go a long way in public policy.

Using the skills from this internship and grad school, I eventually want a career in public policy. Although over 2,000 miles from home, Cascade Policy Institute was my preferred internship. They align with my pro-market convictions. They have a meaningful impact on public opinion/policy. And they give their interns more responsibility (like research, writing, or testifying) than other think tanks. At Cascade, I hope to promote free-market policies to help the Beaver State.



Ethan Rohrbach

Ethan Rohrbach is a junior at Hillsdale College in Michigan.

A rising junior at Hillsdale College from Maple Valley, Washington, I intend to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree in either Philosophy or Psychology. I will also minor in Music, having accompanied for departmental music programs on piano while in school.

Cascade Policy Institute first attracted my interest because it is one of a modest number of free market think tanks in the Pacific Northwest; location was a high priority. Cascade has been up to the challenge of bringing clarity to Oregon public policy issues. Its commitment to educational choice for all children particularly mattered to me, a student accustomed to various charter, co-op, and homeschool programs.

As a Summer Research Associate, I hope to expand my knowledge of education and housing policies in preparation for a career in the social sciences. I jump at the prospect of perhaps enlightening one or two minds, as I do my own, about the causes of problems that plague Oregon and potential solutions to them—all while refining my writing and speaking skills.



Micah DeSilva

Micah DeSilva is a senior at Western Washington University in Bellingham.

I am a college senior working towards my BA in Financial Economics from Western Washington University. I am interested in personal finance, philosophy, and self-improvement, but I became interested in joining Cascade out of my passion for political economy. I have always been interested in learning the details of how public policy is set, and as I see it, there is no better way to learn than by doing. Cascade's summer internship program is a perfect opportunity to learn hands-on about what a career in public policy might look like, and I am excited to see what a summer here has in store for me.

Kathryn Hickok is Executive Vice President at Cascade Policy Institute. She can be reached at kathryn@cascadepolicy.org.



Oregon Legislature Passes Cascade's GED Bill

By Eric Fruits, Ph.D.



Cascade Policy Institute's bill to ease state restrictions on taking the GED was passed by both Houses of the Oregon Legislature during the 2023 Oregon Legislative Session. HB 3068 unanimously passed both the House and the Senate. On June 23, the House repassed the Senate version of the bill. At press time, HB 3068 awaits the Governor's signature.

General Educational Development tests are a group of standardized exams on four subjects that measure proficiency in science, mathematics, social studies, and language arts. When passed, the GED provides certification that the test-taker meets high school graduate-level academic skills. Higher scores demonstrate college readiness, and even higher scores can qualify students for college credit.

Under current regulations, Oregon requires that a person be 18 years or older to take the GED tests. The state permits people as young as 16 to sit for the GED only in very limited circumstances, such as if they already dropped out of high school, are married or emancipated minors, or are in juvenile detention.

HB 3068 removes these restrictions. Cascade's bill allows 11th and 12th graders to graduate early and receive a diploma by passing the GED. Importantly, students won't have to drop out of high school to take the GED exams.



Oregon's four-year high school graduation rate has historically ranked in the bottom five in the nation. Oregon has the 15th highest dropout rate (6.1%), according to the most recent state-by-state comparison published by the U.S. Department of Education. Disadvantaged students leave school at significantly higher rates. This bill removes barriers for students ready to move to the next step in their lives. Earning a GED while still enrolled in school provides students with a low-risk option to receive a diploma, graduate early, and move on to higher education or employment. Because HB 3068 allows students who pass the GED to graduate early, the bill can reduce the state's dropout rate.

For years, Cascade has been promoting school choice policies, such as education savings accounts, increased charter school access, and inter-district student transfers. For years, the majority party in the legislature has shown little interest—if not outright hostility—toward these ideas.

However, our GED bill generated bipartisan sponsorship and support. That's because there is growing recognition that the public school system isn't working for many students. It's also because our bill was crafted to have no fiscal impact and to impose no obligations on school districts.

It's often said that politics is the art of the possible. Cascade's GED bill won't shake up the public school system, but it will make a meaningful difference to many students who are looking for a way to move forward more quickly toward college or a career.

Eric Fruits, Ph.D. is an adjunct scholar at Cascade Policy Institute. He can be reached at eric@cascadepolicy.org.

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that foster individual liberty, personal
responsibility, and economic opportunity.*