

I am writing today in support of our county fairs through HB3173.

The Jackson County fairground is the mass gathering location for major events throughout the entire year. They host social, cultural, recreational, agricultural, commercial, and educational events annually that serve over 300,000 people. That said, fairgrounds are enterprise business units and are expected to be self-sustaining.

This year has been historic for all of us. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused event facilities to close for a year so far. The closures created lost revenue of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Being a government owned operation, the fairground has not been eligible to apply for the various assistance programs that other private & non-profit businesses have been able to attain.

Fortunately, during this year of closure we have had the ability to call on our fairgrounds to assist Southern Oregon in several emergency situations. When the pandemic started in March of 2020 our fairground opened almost instantly to accept PPE that community members were willing to donate for first responders to use. Following this PPE drive they set up a PPE depot and have been operating in support of our county EOC to keep PPE available for Southern Oregonians in need.

In May 2020, our public health authorities recognized the potential of large outbreaks with the influx of seasonal workforces coming to work in the region. Jackson County Fairgrounds was asked to assemble an entire building that would be used as emergency housing if the need arose.

That very building stood to serve on September 8th when the Alameda/Obenchain fires broke out in the county. Within hours, the entire fairground was being utilized for the emergency fire response. Every building, every barn and every piece of space outdoors had people being served through the various community response groups. Ultimately the fairgrounds housed people and animals for nearly 20 days, and has continued to be a hub for many services related to fire survivors, OEM, and FEMA.

Finally, in early 2021, Jackson County had the opportunity to host a major vaccination clinic. Thousands of people would be able to receive their shots through this 3-day clinic. The Fairgrounds was the number one place to be able to host the magnitude of staff, volunteers, and vaccine clients safely. Over 6200 people were able to get both of their shots through this drive through clinic that was hosted at the Jackson County Fairgrounds.

The lottery funds that have been extended to our county fairgrounds help tremendously annually. Our facilities are substantial, and they need quite a bit of upkeep and maintenance annually. Passing HB 3173 would increase funds to our fairgrounds annually and would greatly help with future maintenance and infrastructure needs. It is imperative that we keep these facilities at their best. They have proven their importance and value, and I believe we need to give them this bit of assistance to help them.

I urge you to support HB 3173 only with UNRESTRICTED use of these funds to our fairgrounds: no strings attached, and also leaving full control of our fairgrounds to local government.

Thank you,  
Colleen Roberts