

Testimony to Joint Ways & Means Committee April 22, 2021 RE: House Bill 3173

Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

Note – my internet connection worsens in the late afternoons and evenings as people get home and get on-line. My cell coverage is sporadic at best. These are continuous problems shared by many in the rural areas around Grants Pass. My apologies for missing my testimony last night.

My name is Mark Koberstein and I live in Wilderville, Oregon west of Grants Pass. I am a member of the Josephine County Fair Board, serving as Chair. I am on my second term as a Board Member. I have also served on the Clackamas County Fair Board and moved to Southern Oregon 6 years ago.

The Fairgrounds in Oregon's counties have been facing severe financial issues for many years. In Josephine County, the Fair & Event Center is somewhat unique. Since 2007 the Josephine County Fair & Event Center has not been supported by tax dollars, with the exception of a County match to the funds from the Oregon Lottery. The Fair Staff and Fair Board must raise the funds for personnel salaries and benefits, building maintenance, emergency repairs, the Annual Fair, paying Grants Pass City taxes and basically all the costs involved with operating the facilities.

The Josephine County Fair & Event Center has over 1900 events a year, of various sizes, and nearly 200,000 visitors a year. Not bad for a county of 86,000! The Fair & Event Center has been used as a community center and emergency evacuation site for fires the last few years. Additionally, the pandemic has brought several COVID vaccination clinics to our grounds.

We need funds to make repairs to buildings that have suffered from deferred maintenance for at least two decades. Grants, donations and sponsors help, but we need a steady, reliable source of funds to get the job done.

I am a native Oregonian and was a voter back when the Oregon Lottery was started, when scratch-its were all that was offered. A lot of discussion went into the uses for the funds generated and the amount of revenue that would be raised. Many “caps” were put in place to ensure that things didn’t get out of hand and impact other programs. Most of those caps have been raised. Revenues from Oregon Lottery have far exceeded what was originally envisioned. Eliminating the cap on funds for Fairgrounds for Oregon’s 36 counties would fit well into the original concept for the Oregon Lottery revenues – simply put, it would distribute the money in a way that would benefit the counties and those citizens that depend on the Fairgrounds. Fairgrounds are community centers, educational facilities, emergency preparedness and evacuation sites, senior centers, and a huge draw of tourism to events throughout the year. Please support HB 3173. The additional money received by removing the cap on the Lottery funds will provide a dependable and defensible source of dollars now and into the future.

Thank you.