



Oregon

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Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Bonham and members of the committee,

For the record, I am Lisa Sumption the director of Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. I am honored to be here today to testify on Senate Concurrent Resolution 10 honoring Peter Courtney.

You all know me as the state park director, but today I would like to share part of my journey with you, to highlight the mentor, friend and leader that Senator Courtney was. As we have celebrated his legacy over the last year, I have been comforted by the stories of so many other leaders that were influenced and inspired by Peter's investment in each of us.

As with everything with Peter, it did not come in the traditional way mentoring happens, in fact it was very untraditional, and my guess is many passed it up because it could be uncomfortable until you recognized it as the beautiful gift it was.

My story with Peter began when I was the deputy director at OPRD and was assigned the task of making the Oregon State Fair profitable, which it had not been over its 140-plus years of existence. I knew nothing about politics, or legislative process, but I said things like, "close it, move it, sell it" publicly and landed myself in Peter's office.

I was so excited to gain the attention of the Senate President and was naively hopeful he was going to help us solve this financial crisis we were in. To my surprise, it was not a pleasant visit, in fact, it might still be the most unpleasant visit I have ever had in the capitol. You see, I did not know the state fair was Peter's baby. He was furious we were debating its existence publicly and had no idea who we even were. So, in Peter's way he pushed to learn more about us. With questions like, "why do you dress like you are from Portland?," "Do you even care about Salem and the state fair?" and then moved into "you think I am old and can't hear and don't understand these issues," which I took as an invitation to sit in the chair right next to him at that incredible large table in his office. Wow, what a mistake! Phil Bentley and Sarah Lockner sat on the front row watching as if it was a cliff hanger. I kept looking at the two of them for advice, guidance, anything to get through this uncomfortable meeting.

Despite my ability to remember my name, let alone the other questions Peter was asking of me, I realized midway through the conversation that he cared so much about the Fair and he was testing my grit and drive to see if I shared his passion. From that moment on, we became close allies on seeking a solution to solve a problem we both cared so deeply about. Within weeks, we worked together to create Senate Bill 7 to move the state fair to a public corporation where it thrives still today.

Our journey did not stop with the fair. We stayed good friends, which involved him showing up at my office before eight o'clock to see if I was working. He loved getting to connect with my teammates that were in the office to learn about their favorite football teams, coaches and players and ask if I was a good boss. These visits grew to be something we looked forward to as Peter always brought so much life, laughter and fun to the room. I would also get the random texts when his world was challenging and asking me why I don't care about whatever the issue was or why I had not visited him in the hospital, or if I was bringing him his favorite fudge at Christmas. It did not matter that I did not know he was in the hospital, it was his way of letting me know he was struggling and that I was someone that he knew cared about him and his wellbeing. An honor I did not take lightly. Peter's trust was a gift.

When former director Wood retired, Peter called me into his office and interrogated me on why I was not putting my name in to be the next director. I explained that I did not have the political chops to be a director, and I would be a great support to the new director as their deputy. In his Peter way, he pushed and prodded me to challenge my thinking and at least pursue the opportunity. It was an intense recruitment process, but as I progressed through it, I could see that I had everything the agency needed in a passionate leader and that I could make a tremendous contribution as a director.

I share all of this, only to say, that Peter had this innate way to see something in others when they could not see it themselves. And he had an uncanny way to mentor, challenge, grow and inspire you in ways that no other person ever could. He was a once in a lifetime leader, and I am honored I got the gift of his mentorship and friendship. I would not be who I am, or where I am today without his contribution in me. Thank you for allowing me to testify and honor my dear friend that I miss terribly.