

Comments before the Senate Committee on Rural Communities and Economic Development
Senate Bill 7-2 – Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center
Betsy Hartley
State Fair supporter, FFA supporter and volunteer
April 2, 2013

Chair Roblan and members of the Committee, I am Betsy Hartley, I am here today as a friend and supporter of Oregon FFA. I am pleased to offer support for Senate Bill 7 with the -2 amendments.

When it comes to our Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center – I wear many hats. Every single one of those hats wants the Fair and Exposition Center to be financially healthy and growing.

- As a vendor exhibiting during the fair.
- For the hard-working FFA and 4-H kids showing off their talents and skills.
- As a sponsor supporting various events during the fair.
- As an event-goer and exhibitor during events held on the exposition grounds throughout the year.

The fair is important for a variety of reasons – but the one clear reason in my mind is **food**. And I'm not talking about deep-fried Twinkies, a milk shake from the red barn or a foot long corn dog. I am talking about fruits and vegetables and gardening and animals and agriculture. This is the ONE spot that folks come to see animals, check out the agricultural displays and see hatching and baby chicks. The fair-going public comes to check out canning and baking and vegetable collections. People are further and further away from their food and the people who are responsible for growing their food and natural resources. The State Fair has always been that one reliable spot where we can reconnect those two distant sides for at least a brief moment in time. FFA and 4-H have been and remain key partners in the State Fair.

FFA members across the state look to their state fair experience as the capstone to their hard work and effort. It's the culmination of a reward for their year-long work and their effort at their own county fair. Those blue and gold jackets are trademark in the barns and across the fairgrounds. They work hard, play hard, provide customer service support, put a face on modern agriculture and provide a significant value to the fair. They are dedicated volunteers, run their own shows and solve many of their own problems and issues – increasingly without any help or support from the state fair staff. They are NOT giving up and would very much like for the state fair to be around for generations to come. Those blue and gold FFA jackets and the members who wear them are a vested stakeholder in what happens with the fair. They are part of the tightly woven and successful fabric of the past and they intend to be a part of the future of the fair.

I would be remiss in not thanking Lisa Vanlaanen for her exceptional care and transparency during the past few years as she managed the complex and not-always-fun State Fair situation. She has done a tremendous amount of work in caretaking this difficult situation and the diverse array of stakeholders involved. The one thing that has become increasingly clear is that having to follow the administrative rules that she and the Parks Department are bound by is NOT conducive to a healthy and well-run, slightly-chaotic, messy-but-fun enterprise like a state fair. Waiting 30 days for bid processes, limited work hours for staff, following cumbersome procedures/processes is not easy for an enterprise like a State or even a County Fair. Fairs require an intense amount of work and dedication in a very short period of time. And often the best deals, most exciting opportunities come disguised in packages that don't follow all the rules the state would like or require of one of their state agencies.

While I am not entirely sure SB 7 with the -2 amendments is the exact right or complete answer – it is an answer that comes from extensive conversation from concerned citizens and friends of the state fair, who come from a stunningly diverse array of backgrounds. Diverse enough that ALL any of us could actually

agree on was that we want the fair to live and thrive and be a part of the future of Oregon's history. None of us wants the fair to die. This bill serves as a way to shake the fair free from being choked by administrative rules. And takes the burden of forcing the State Fair to behave like a state agency OFF of the backs of State Parks.

SB 7 with the -2 amendments sets us off in the direction of sustainability. Pushing the fair to be a free enterprise that can compete with other event venues throughout the year and truly be the gathering point for our state at the once-yearly State Fair. Can you imagine...

- the State Fair being a truly state-wide, publicly embraced event where we have to close the gates early because we are at capacity?
- Showcasing the technology of the future?
- FULL livestock barns?
- National events and shows vying for space during our fair?
- Showing off the best that Oregon has to offer in people, food, animals, arts, entertainment...?

That's the future I envision for the state fair. I know from stories told by native Oregonians that that is just the type of event our State Fair USED to be. And it can be again. I urge your support of SB 7 with the -2 amendments.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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