

LINN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



JOHN K. LINDSEY
Commissioner

WILL TUCKER
Commissioner

ROGER NYQUIST
Commissioner

*Linn County Courthouse
P.O. Box 100, Albany, Oregon 97321
(541) 967-3825 FAX: (541) 926-8228*

RALPH E. WYATT
Administrative Officer

**Senate Committee on Rural Communities and Economic Development
Senate Bill 7 – Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center
Will Tucker
Linn County Commissioner
April 2, 2013**

Thank you Chair Roblan, and members of the committee for the opportunity to appear before you again. I am Will Tucker, Linn County Commissioner and as a board we support Senate Bill 7.

I am not an expert on the State Fair, nor am I an expert on operating an Exposition Center, but we have good sized County Fair and a significant Expo Center in Linn County. I believe that moving the State Fair reporting structure and the management to a public corporation is the best move to keep the State Fair solvent and to turning the Expo Center into a bigger and better revenue generator for Salem, Marion County and the state.

As the first step, moving to a public corporation and creating a State Fair Council with the charge to make a profit, unfettered by state bureaucracy. The decision making body needs to think and act like a for profit corporation with its customers being the fair goers, the youth of the state and the tax payer. It needs to understand the market and the competition, of which I am one. They need to make a strong business case for both event coordinators and the public on why people should come to Expo events based on value, just like they make when they decide to come to Albany.

The facility and the community need a governance body who –

- is engaged with the public during the fair,
- visits the facilities as other events occur,
- drives staff to think of the facility as an asset to be fully used,
- holds it accountable to be maintained and enhanced,

with the goal to support the State Fair and the use of the facilities as an Expo Center. The facility cannot survive without a body with a profit motive to reorganize, reenergize, and support the staff to make the change from a State body to a public Corporation.

I have served on the Linn County Fair Board, I am the liaison to the Expo Advisory Board and I am the Board of Commissioners liaison to Fair and Exposition operations. Both the Fair Board and the Expo Advisory Board are established with community leaders, but more importantly, proven business leaders. They are charged with making the County Fair break even and to maximize the use of the facilities as an Expo Center the rest of the year. Without the involvement of business leaders from the community and the tools to operate as a profit making business, the Linn County Fair and Expo Center languish.

Yes the facility is, and would be, in competition with Linn County, but the physical assets we are talking about here, the significant buildings and parking lots, coupled with the State Fair's impact on families and youth attending and preparing for the Fair, add to that the huge potential for positive economic impact and this is a state asset too valuable to waste. Just for your frame of reference, in Linn County, the Expo Center, and its events accounts for 1/3 of all hotel nights

As I read the bill, as written, I am disappointed in not seeing goals for breaking even and for impact on tourism. The State Fair Council needs to be held accountable to you and your constituents and some metrics up front would help.

I hope that in the selection of membership to, and the charge given to the State Fair Council be much stronger than what is written in the bill. The council needs business leaders with a track record of leading businesses to profit, who are willing to get involved with; and support the State Fair and the important programs like FFA and 4-H. It needs leaders willing to learn about the past and willing to make hard changes to process, people and past practices for the better of the State Fair and Expo Center.

Thank you, please SUPPORT SB 7.