

**Comments before the Senate Committee on Rural Communities and Economic  
Development**

**Senate Bill 7-2 – Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center  
Kris Jones, President  
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**April 2, 2013**

Committee Chair Roblan and members of the Committee, I am Kris Jones and I am here to represent not only Oregon Purebred Sheep Breeders Association, but also the Oregon State Fair Open Class Livestock Exhibitors as the contracted Oregon State Fair Open Class Livestock Coordinator. I am pleased to offer support for Senate Bill 7-2.

***Finding the Solution...***

I have worn a lot of hats in my use of the Oregon State Fair over the last four and a half decades. From third generation race tracker to 4-H member, FFA member, FFA Advisor, sheep exhibitor, sheep superintendent to my current roles as the contracted Open Class Livestock Coordinator and mother of two.

**I would like to strongly encourage you to vote in favor of SB 7-2.** I believe it is a good bill born from the collaborative efforts of many of the stakeholders of the Oregon State Fair and Exposition to find a solution to put this storied venue back on a path to success.

In short the bill is the answer to the three primary concerns set forth by stakeholders during meetings conducted in the fall of 2012 to garner input regarding the future of the facilities. The following three points were heard loud and clear during these meetings.

- First and Foremost, we need to keep this historic century and a half year-old venue alive and functioning!
- We need to create a strategic, stable, and profitable operational business plan model to sustain the fair grounds and exposition center year round.
- We need to move the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center from under the jurisdiction of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.

Throughout this year, Oregon Parks and Recreation staff members have worked tirelessly with the many stake holders to create a collaborate effort which has resulted into Senate Bill 7-2 that you see before you. Quite honestly, it truly is a work born of a democratic process of many minds that deserves to be heard on the Oregon State Senate Floor and moved through the process to the Governor's desk for a signature.

For these political reasons alone I support Senate Bill 7-2, however when talking about the Oregon State Fair I would be amiss to not include my story, because as you see when talking about the Oregon State Fair it isn't truly deep down about the business of politics, it is about the stories. It is about the stories one creates, it is about the stories one passes on and it is about the stories our future generations can tell. In retrospect it is about the voices we hear and mine is about finding my finding my voice.

## ***Finding My Voice...***

As I sit down to write my testimony in support of Senate Bill 7-2 and the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center it is in great personal debate. As a professional writer do I get to the point and highlight the arguments many others may present outlining the benefits of this great venue or do I get to the truth of the matter and invite you into my own personal and passionate journey that is coming full circle with the hearing of this tremendous collaborative effort by many to save our one and only Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center.

Quite frankly knowing that most of you have spent your day championing many a cause my practical side points to the first option, but knowing how important and close to my heart this topic is I think it is important that you know and understand the story behind a third generation fair exhibitor fighting passionately to make sure this fair is around for the fourth generation to enjoy.

If you would have asked me years ago if I would be sitting in front of members from the state Senate Committee on Rural Communities and Economic Development to testify in favor of a bill regarding the Oregon State Fair, I would have chuckled and pointed out this endeavor was better left to those that lived closer to Salem and our appointed and elected officials chosen to steward our policy process. In my mind, I was just a little sheep producer and sheep exhibitor from Central Oregon. In my mind, the question remained, "What could I bring to the table that many of the more prominent exhibitors and public officials could not? Who was I to be changing the direction of our fair? I would soon call on unfound will and courage to find the answer to this question.

In February of 2011 after a great deal of personal soul searching I finally decided to throw my hat into the arena for the position of Open Class Sheep Superintendent. Why, one might ask? I didn't need a job as I was a busy full-time Mom, feature story writer for both local and national industry publications, and to top it off I lived in Central Oregon three hours away. As my passion to create a solution mounted, the questions holding me back piled high on the other side of the scale.

I finally found my voice when I realized if no one else in our sector was going to stand up with a solution based approach to solving our problems in the Livestock area. At that time most of the exhibitors were extremely unhappy and morale was at an all time low as our department budgets had been slashed, services cut, and customer service had become a thing of the past. To top it all off our entry fees were raised and communication with the masses in the barn was down to almost nothing. Basically as some of the elite and most revered stockmen in the nation we were being asked to pay for the privilege of providing fair patrons with a dog and pony show and being treated as second class citizens to do it.

Unfortunately this management system in place was driving a deep wedge between both parties. Those exhibitors that hadn't already moved on to greener pastures were threatening to if a solution wasn't found.

Interestingly enough what I later found working closely with the staff at the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center was that they were a deeply passionate group of folks that really wanted to create a positive environment for the livestock folks, the only problem is they felt extremely

tied down and solution limited by the extensive amount of bureaucratic rules and regulations spawned on them from being under Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. Basically the business model they were operating under did not fit the governmental system at hand.

Through a miracle I would survive my first state fair and was even able to bring up morale throughout the sheep barn through little incentives I was able to dig up and find. By move-out day the sheep folks had found their voice and their passion and were again focusing on the future of our grand venue that is until late in the fall of 2011 when I received notice that the employee serving as our open class livestock superintendent was put on seasonal leave. What would this mean? It would mean that basically the livestock community, which at the time rarely communicated between themselves would have no representation in the decision making process or communication framework throughout the winter. To many this sounded like a small issue, but when you consider many of the organizational duties that go into serving one of the largest square footage exhibits on the fairgrounds this was a huge setback.

A short time later I found myself on the phone with Lisa Van Laanen, the Deputy Director of Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. To say the least, my initial demeanor was one of skepticism, accusation and anger. Within a short time it became one of common ground. In a short conversation a bond was made over common ground. We both wanted the same outcome. We both wanted a successful Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center.

As she listened to my issues and I listened to hers we realized it wasn't the people holding us back it was the system. It had been broken, brutalized and quite honestly there was only one direction and that was up. If we focused on the facts rather than faces we could come to a solution!

In the end, there were only three facts.

- A. There was limited funding.
- B. There were a plethora of rules and regulations that did not match the event planning and programming that went along with making the venue pay for itself.
- C. There were a astounding number of alienated and irritated prominent stakeholders that had long past given up on finding a solution.

As two busy ladies with plates overflowing we would leave that heartfelt discussion with thoughts of meeting back up in January. Unfortunately things became a bit more complicated after receiving notice from the Oregon State Fair's newly hired manager that as a temporary employee I could no longer plan for our event outside of contracted time periods. If you have ever been in agriculture, you will realize all of us folks don't work on a time clock. To say the least I was again taken back, but after a nice conversation initiated by myself with the new manager she assured me that something should be in play by March when a majority of the pre-fair decisions should be made. When this did not happen, I was once again inspired to call not only the fair manager, but Lisa Vanlaanen again. At this point in time to Lisa's dismay, "I quit" as sheep superintendent, because to me this wasn't a job, this was now a mission to save "Our Oregon State Fair" and if I couldn't do it through the system, I certainly could have a voice through my legislators who both had a stake in providing funding to Parks for the Oregon State Fair through the joint Ways and Means Committee.

We would speak again, but it was at this time Ms. Van Laanen offered up a solution. Since we both seemed to have a common goal and understand the process and problems could she contract my

personal services to help put the livestock department back on a path to success? After a bit of deep personal thought and soul searching I once again weighed my options. The biggest thought being that there had to be someone else out there that lived closer with a greater passion, a greater skill set or even more contacts that could do this job. I had a family to raise and I lived three hours away. After a great deal of consideration, I once again found myself diving deeper into this whirlwind that was bound to sweep me off my feet at any moment and leave me falling to the ground with a giant thud. In reality this could still happen at the loss of Senate Bill 7-2, however my faith has since been strengthened by the numbers who have surrounded me in like minded thought over the past year.

One of the first tasks was to set out to find other like minded livestock souls that had not totally given up on the system. As I searched for leaders across the species it was a bit like finding refugees poking out from hiding holes after a war. Wary of the weather with some cajoling they came out from hiding to form an enthusiastic and committed group of volunteers forming the Oregon State Fair Livestock Advisory Committee.

The committee members would meet with the Parks Department Management and Oregon State Fair staff to form a common goal and develop a plan to recreate a functioning system in the Livestock area. Together we would manage to bridge over severed relationships, create an operating framework and bottom-line reduce expenditures while increasing services to our exhibitors. In the end we were able to put together an entire state fair in less than five months and give the livestock industry back the voice they so desired to have in this storied tradition.

In the end everyone learned and gained something from this process. When the dust settled, we realized that by working together we could accomplish anything we set our minds to and do it better than if we tried to accomplish it alone. We learned a collaborative effort by all of us brought back an ownership to this historic event. We learned there was no "I" in the word "Team"!

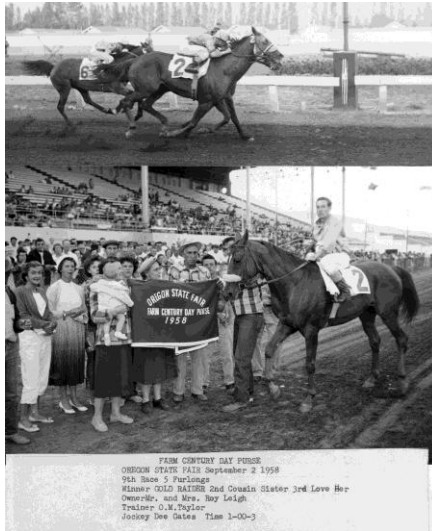
In Reflection...

As I look back on this passionate journey that has taken me down a path of enlightenment I am much more aware of my surroundings, I am much more aware that I am not alone in this journey to save this historic site, and I am much more aware of the voices around me as I walk through the hallowed halls of this venue.

They come in the quiet moments of reflection as I stand atop the bleachers before the animals move in, they come as I walk through the barns in the early morning hours taking in the peaceful moments, they come with each late night trip as I drive home over Santiam Pass in the dark after a day in Salem and they come after I hear the stories of families who have attended the Oregon State Fair for generations to see the animals and get a taste of what life on a farm was like. At first the voices are a whisper, then, they are a sense that leaves chills down your spine and then like in Kevin Costner's movie "Field of Dreams", the voices turn into faces as I walk past the myriad of old pictures and memorabilia lining the walls of the Oregon State Fair Office.

But unlike Kevin Costner's "Field of Dreams" where the whispers come from the faces of baseball players he has never met, many of mine hit much closer to home as I take down the notebooks full of old horse

racing win pictures and listen to my Dad's stories of running horses with my Grandfather, when I pull out scrapbooks from my time in 4-H and FFA and reminisce with old friends over the phone, or when I run into my former FFA members that tell me about the life changing moments they had while staying at the Oregon State Fair for a week.



*"Most people don't experience the life of their dreams simply because they quit way too easily!"*

For those of us in the livestock community multigenerational stories such as mine are common place with one exception. I know what it is like to lose something dear to my heart at this fair and not be able to get it back—horse racing. With that experience I learned a valuable lesson, if you aren't willing to stand up for something you believe in then you can't complain if it disappears.

For me as I hear these voices and feel the chill up my back in the early morning hours or late night drives, I realize the many miles I have logged and time away from family are worth it to keep this dream alive. It is a dream that has been kept alive by our forefathers through many a down turn, it is a dream that needs to be kept alive for our future!

But I would be wrong to say that by passing Senate Bill 7-2 is the answer to all of our problems, I just believe it is the beginning to our future. Like all good farmers and stewards of the land, farming isn't just about the science it is truly about the art and the passion! It is about the resources and love we put into our science. It is about the time we spend tending and cultivating our crops and it is about looking toward the horizon during the down turns to find promise in the future. Just like farming Senate Bill 7-2 is our horizon and promise for the future and for that reason, I truly urge you to vote in favor of Senate Bill 7-2!

### ***Finding Your Voice...***

"Are you a bystander that is willing to let this "Field of Dreams" slip away or are you truly a steward of this land that is willing to look toward the horizon to ensure the future of this storied event?"