

Representative Barnhart

Chair of House Revenue Committee

Sir,

I would like to have the following letter entered into the record in support of HJR 21 which is scheduled for a hearing on May 6, 2015. I will not be able to attend the hearing since I will be traveling on county business on that date. However, HJR 21 is very important to my county and to the future of the whole state.

Thank you for your assistance.

Earl Fisher

Columbia County Commissioner

As a County Commissioner for Columbia County I write to you to support HJR 21. Columbia County is and has been a county under serious financial stress. While we are not in as much distress as Curry or Josephine counties, we are very much challenged by the lack of tax revenues to provide the needed resources and services to our citizens. Since becoming a commissioner 6 years ago, and serving as President for the Association of Oregon Counties, I know the plight of our distressed counties across the State and have myself been faced each year with the need to reduce services to our citizens because of the lack of revenue to fund them. We have reduced our staff by over 25% in some departments and have only 4 road deputies for a county with over 600 miles of roads. Our Courthouse is only open to the public four days a week and we have had to place the courthouse staff on a

26 day furlough schedule for several years. We were within weeks having to close our jail which has only been able to stay open by a last minute 3 year levy the public passed after 7 failed attempts.

We are in this financial situation because, as an O&C county, we had a dependable income stream from the timber cuts on federal lands at the time permanent tax rates were set as required by Measure 50. At the rate that was set, with the then O&C dollars, we could operate at a reasonable level of service without the need for additional tax money from our citizens. However, the world changed. O&C dollars have all but gone away and any commitment from our Federal Legislators for O&C reform, they say comes with the need for the O&C Counties to increase their property tax rate burden. Our county has a higher than average unemployment rate and an above average public assistance level. Parts of our county are under compression as well and HJR 21 Amendment 1 will address this as well.

HJR 21 would allow the citizens of the State to decide if the present system and level of taxation is adequate to the needs. The rates, processes, and restrictions we imposed on ourselves 25 years ago may not (and in my opinion do not) reflect the real needs and circumstances of today. This measure would be a first step in a much needed reexamination of our tax structure. More importantly to the O&C Counties, HJR 21's passage will show the commitment by these Counties of Oregon that we are willing to meet halfway for a permanent O&C management and subsequent timber receipt solution.

Sincerely,

Earl Fisher

Columbia County Commissioner