

As long as I can remember, I have been going to fairs. Growing up in northern California, EVERY year, the Sutter County Fair became my birthday party. EVERY year, my parents took me to the fair to celebrate, to enjoy all that the fair represents. So much culture, so much variety! Live music, crafts and all the exhibits, livestock, the rodeo, the FOOD! Every memory is sweet! I even remember the year I was tall enough to ride the big-kid rides. 😊

My mom made sure I joined FFA. I chose to raise rabbits, so I showed rabbits at the fair. My doe won the blue ribbon every year I showed her. I cannot begin to explain how that developed in me a desire to succeed; I wasn't a great student, so grades were never important to me, but those blue ribbons told me I could be successful at something else, something that mattered in the real world. I also participated in the cake decorating category—red ribbons were my best effort. That also taught me cake decorating wasn't in my future, though I sure loved that frosting! So many times I have thanked my parents for getting me into FFA and participating in fair events. That shaped who I am today. Now as an adult, my band has played the Marion County Fair for years. What an experience!

My point is, the fairs, the fairgrounds, and people have so much to offer! The fairgrounds don't just host the fair! There are so many different community events, fund raisers, expositions, trade shows, just to name a few that call the fairgrounds their home. Neighboring hotels, restaurants, gas stations, you name it benefit from these events. Volunteers and employees of the fairs and so many of these events find meaning and purpose in participation, much like I did in FFA and still do in performing, but this past year has been exceptionally difficult. Without all of these events in 2020 and with 2021 still in question, the fairs, fairgrounds, those employed by the events hosted there and all of the neighboring businesses have suffered great financial and sometimes personal distress.

Even though these events were cancelled, the fairgrounds and people came to life in many different ways that served our communities well! Living in Silverton, I know a lot of residents fled to the fairgrounds for safety during the fires—it was a place for people and their animals to have a safe haven until they could return home—this saved the lives of people and their livestock. I know a lot of residents have made their way to the fairgrounds to get tested for Covid-19, and now to get their Covid-19 vaccines! Our fairgrounds once again became an integral part of our community.

HB 3173 would greatly benefit every county and would provide much needed funds to sustain our fairgrounds and provide a capital infrastructure study to ensure our fairgrounds are able to continue to support our communities, to ensure the grounds are safe and ready to host upcoming events. Not to sound like a negative-Nelly, but in my experience, the global pandemic, past fires, and the fires of 2020 won't be our last emergency or disaster. The study will ensure our fairgrounds are prepared for that and ready to support our communities once again.