

March 25, 2021

Re: Support for HB 3376

To: House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity

From: Lee Mercer

Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs Cate and Kropf and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of HB 3376 to help the movie theaters of Oregon which are suffering, almost more than any other category of businesses, from the impact of Covid 19 restrictions.

I owned and operated art film movie theaters like the Salem Cinema, for over 20 years, in California and Nevada, before retiring in Silverton, OR. More than just an employer and an economic engine, a movie theater provides magical venues for communities to gather and share the experience of big screen cinema.

Unlike the large theater chains, the small town and art cinemas, especially, struggle, in the best of times, to keep the doors open. While I operated the Keystone Cinema, in Reno, NV, for 8 years, it was extremely difficult to pay the bills in an inefficient 500 seat auditorium, as opposed to a multiplex. Having become a real cultural center in Reno, the Keystone eventually was on the edge of folding in a recession, and patrons donated over \$10,000 to keep the doors open.

Similarly, Loretta Miles, the visionary theater owner who has managed the Salem Cinema for years, has really struggled through the year of the pandemic. On her website she has made some income providing access to great international, independent U.S. and documentary films. She has also done great fundraisers to keep the cinema alive. But she, and Oregon's other movie owners, need help!

Or, they, like the Silverton Cinema, our small-town movie house, will close. If not revived, we will lose the places, like in the classic film, Cinema Paradiso, where families from babes in arms to grand-parents gather to share an evening of Hollywood magic.

So, as we move out of the pandemic, let's make sure not only the chain multiplexes, but all the art and small, town theaters survive, and thrive, so we don't lose this important part of our lives.

Please pass HB 3376.

For your entertainment and edification I have included, below, a poem I wrote in 1981 about a venue I operated, The Empress Theater, a 20's era Fox Coast West cinema palace, complete with a gold leaf ceiling and a pipe organ to play with silent movie classics, in Vallejo, CA.

Thanks for your time and consideration in this matter.

Lee Mercer  
Silverton, OR

### **THE EMPRESS**

Hall of a thousand dreams  
the gold ceilings glow in  
perpetual beauty and  
the celluloid tapestry plays on.  
The collective visions  
of generations of filmmakers  
pour through aperture plates  
and onto the silver screen.

The Oz machine creates  
godlike creatures  
bigger than life  
to teach us our destiny.  
For art reflects man  
and man reflects art.  
Back again, and back again  
ad infinitum.  
And in this hall of mirrors  
the reflections must be clear  
so that we can see,  
and act,  
in the light of reality.  
So fight on Bruce Lee,  
in the ghost world of High Noon,  
while the lovers and talkers  
and the dancers and the walkers  
parade across the screen.  
And the mandalas of Busby Berkeley  
and riots in Berkeley  
and wars and crises of  
every description act out  
our turmoil so we may go in peace.  
And Thomas Edison chuckles  
as he looks down on his creation,  
in a thousand movie halls  
across the land,  
and the last vestiges  
of the church  
of the celluloid reality  
hold sacraments nightly.  
While back at the ranch,  
the blue glow of  
a million vidicon tubes  
heralds the new church of  
the electronic messiah,  
spreading throughout the land.

1981