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On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Interim Committee On Transportation
Funding
Measure, Appointment or LC 2
Topic:

Testimony on Oregon's special session on Transportation

We live in a time of upheaval, our common beliefs ruptured, our systems changing, our future more obscured than at any time in history.

In Oregon we are faced with a loss of ability to provide well-maintained, safe roads for our citizens. As is too often the case, the root of the problem is money.

These circumstances require us to take a long view, both backward and forward. What past actions have led to this? What future actions can restore the necessary balance?

As in any organization, Oregon's Transportation Department (ODOT) must balance income and spending. In short, where does the money come from and where does it go.

The largest source of income to ODOT is the gas tax. Increasing the gas tax is proposed in the Governor's agenda. That may or not be necessary when we look at where that money goes.

Administrative costs are always on the chopping block and regular audits are in the Governor's proposal. Those audits will help inform the spending side of ODOT in the future.

We are, however, in an urgent situation. We have to find sufficient balance between income and expenditures as quickly as possible.

There is one item on the spending side that benefits only a small interest group. The money disbursed goes to the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department and amounts to a few million. It is distributed by the OSPR through an ATV Fund that is inequitable and corrupted.

No other recreational pursuit in Oregon gets such largesse. Making it worse is that the amount of money in the fund is determined by the recipients of the fund. Any person having an off-road vehicle permit can tell the State how much gasoline they used in off-road activities and that determines how much is in the fund. Basically, the fox is asked how many eggs he wants from the henhouse.

The parks department distributes those funds in the form of grants that can be used by off-road organizations to build trails, acquire easements and buy land. Those organizations are a small representation of a small minority having undue influence in the Oregon legislature. Peter Buckley introduced a simple bill to require visible license plates on off-road vehicles and reported to me, "Jack, you wouldn't believe the push back."

Even BLM, in their 2017 RMP, found that passive recreation on public lands returned ten times the economic input to communities than machine recreation.

While a minority of the public benefits inequitably from State money, it upsets the balance necessary to keeping Oregon's roads and highways in good maintenance. It's time to eliminate the ATV Fund and use that money for the good of all citizens.