

Submitter: Rob Kugler

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Special Session Committee On Transportation
Funding

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3991

I write as a citizen and taxpayer.

I urge support for HB3991. But I also ask the supporters in the legislature to use this as an opportunity to take a stand against the decades' long anti-tax crusade that has persuaded too many people that we can get public services for less than they cost.

The goal of that crusade has always been to so starve government of the resources necessary to provide services that the public has to turn to profit-seeking private enterprise to ensure good roads, public safety, energy production and regulation, and more—and abandons any attempts to provide services to the most needy in society.

Evidence that the crusade is working is today's narrative that ODOT's poor stewardship is the major reason we don't have enough money to meet transportation needs. Another win for the crusade. To be sure, there have been administrative failures, but a thoughtful analysis of reality shows that failures in that regard are a small part of the story. The bigger part is the simple truth: roads, bridges, safety features, and all the rest cost real money and the gradual erosion in public willingness to pay taxes stemming from the success of the lie-filled anti-tax narrative ensures that we're not collecting enough from the public to pay for those.

The public believes the lies, and why not? Leaders—elected officials—have grown too fearful of being targeted by the crusade to speak up. It's when elected officials who know better join the chorus, though, and parrot the notion that we are overburdened tax payers that I find myself writing testimony like this.

Let me offer just two facts that challenge the "we're too burdened" narrative in Oregon, one in general and one with respect to transportation costs. We have a kicker in Oregon that absurdly returns taxes paid in good times to taxpayers. And because of our many waterways, we have bridge repair needs in Oregon that outstrip those of other western states, yet we pay taxes for transportation at rates that place us in the middle of the pack at best.

You get my point. Please, elected officials, resist giving aid to the anti-tax crusade and be honest with constituents as a body regarding the need to pay for what we need from the state. And if you all want to be part of an effort to restore balance and fairness to Oregon's tax structure and reverse the longstanding gains of the anti-tax, privatization crusade, call for a wealth tax and a high-end corporate earnings tax to

ensure that those who really are unable to pay more—poor and lower-income Oregonians—don't get hit with the entirety of the new fees.