

# Proposed room tax met with mixed feelings

## Hotel, motel owners weigh the pros and cons of tax increase

By Scott McFetridge  
Of the Emerald

Eugene Mayor Brian Obie's proposed 50-percent increase on the room tax paid by Eugene motel and hotel owners met with a mixed reaction from local managers on Tuesday.

Obie proposed the citywide tax, which would be used to provide nearly one-third of the funds for the proposed \$17.1 million expansion of Mahlon Sweet Airport, during his annual state-of-the-city address Monday. The tax increase would raise the 6-percent room tax now paid by all motels and hotel owners in Lane County to 9 percent for those located in Eugene.

Agnes Huang, manager of the Continental Motel, 390 E. Broadway, said it is unfair to tax only hotels, since many businesses would benefit from an expanded airport.

"It will especially hurt small motels like us," Huang said. "If we raise the room rate, nobody will stop at all. In a small town, people expect lower rent."

Because few people arriving in the area by plane stay in Eugene's small motels, it is unfair for the room tax to provide such a large portion of the airport expansion, Huang said. And if

hotels and motels must charge a higher tax, restaurants also should pay a tax to be used for the expansion of the airport, she said.

Dean Bliss, general manager of the Eugene Hilton, 66 E. Sixth Ave., said he doesn't oppose the increased room tax, but believes a smaller increase might be more appropriate, such as a 1 or 1.5 percent increase. Although the higher room tax might hurt smaller motels, the Eugene Hilton competes for conventions with other metropolitan areas that already have higher room taxes, he said.

Because the Eugene Hilton never has used its lower room tax as a selling tool, a 3-percent increase would make little difference, Bliss said.

"We are already a bargain at our basic rate," Bliss said.

But Bliss believes the increased tax could be used as a marketing ploy by Springfield motel owners, which now pay only the 6-percent room tax.

Gene Cheeder, manager of the Shilo Inn, 3350 Gateway in Springfield, said a higher Eugene tax could aid Springfield motel owners in the long run, but he believes there would be few short-term effects from the tax. If a similar tax were proposed in Springfield, Cheeder said he



The Hilton Hotel, located downtown, is just one of the many hotels and motels that would have to charge customers a 9-percent room tax if Brian Obie's proposal is enacted.

would oppose it.

"I personally think there are more equitable ways to raise revenues," Cheeder said.

Barb Bellamy, city of Eugene public information director, said Obie has

recommended that Lane County and the city of Springfield consider a similar tax increase to fund airport expansion. The council probably will deal with the tax issue within the next month, and it may be up to six months before it takes any action on the matter, she said.

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