

Lawmakers restore funding for county fairs during special session

Funding will not be cut in half as previously discussed

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Members of the Oregon County Fair board persuaded lawmakers not to cut \$1 million in funding in hearings before both the Joint Ways and Means Committee and the General Government subcommittee.

County fairs across the state will not see the 50% cut in state funding they were expecting.

Bart Noll, chairman of the Oregon Fairs Association, said about eight to 10 people from across the state, including county commissioner, fair managers and county fair board members testified before both the committee and subcommittee.

"We had an excellent response, excellent attendance and an exceptional testimony at that subcommittee hearing," Noll said.

That, he said, played a significant role in securing the funding.

Noll said OFA made the case that fairs bring a return on the state's \$1 million in lottery funding. He said each county fair receives \$25,000 and leverages the money to generate various income streams and provide a benefit to the residents of their respective communities.

"We don't just take the \$25,000 that each fair gets and spend it," he said. "Fairs generate further business activity with that money, from the events they put on to the fairgrounds' rentals."

With the number of fairs forced to shut down this year due to COVID-19, he said he would have been questioning whether some fairs would have been able to open back up again in 2021.

State Sen. Lynn Findley,



Raney Anderson was the Grand Champion for Market Steer at the Grant County Fair in 2019. With her is buyer Russ Young for Iron Triangle.

Eagle file photo

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—Bart Noll, Oregon Fairs Association chairman

R-Vale, said he and several other lawmakers worked hard to maintain the funding.

"They are an extremely critical resource for all of Oregon," Findley said of county fairs. "There's a lot of good rural legislators, and it was pretty widespread that they do play a major role in communities."

Noll said the testimony during the special session reflected how essential fairs are to Oregon.

"So many people thought that it was important that they took time out of their day to get signed up to testify," Noll said. "They got online during the meeting. They prepared their testimony and delivered it to the subcommittee. It is a substantial investment in time and energy to do the

testimony, and there were a lot of us there so it was very encouraging."

The Legislature, after months of work, balanced the budget in a one-day special session and shored up a \$1 billion budget shortfall that erupted as result from the COVID-19 global pandemic.

On July 16 the Joint Ways and Means Committee released their budget re-balance plan, which included, among other things, the \$1 million cut in lottery revenue to the county fair's account.

Noll said the announcement took him by surprise because the OFA had been assured the funding would be in the budget proposal. Noll said each county fair receives a "modest amount."

Grant County Fairgrounds

Manager Mindy Winegar said the potential cut would have been "pretty devastating" for the county.

Winegar said she knew of three Grant County residents who wrote their elected representatives, including Donna Palmer, Mary Ellen Brooks and Courtney Montague.

"I'm from Grant County, total population of about 7,000 people, and the county fair is the one thing that brings us all together once a year," Palmer wrote. "Although we get support from the few businesses in our county, there is just not enough resources to make up the gap that would be left if you were to cut the current dollars we receive. Please help us continue to bring our county citizens together for our Grant County Fair."



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

John Day City Manager Nick Green expresses his frustration at the lack of support from the state when it comes to coronavirus relief.

City investing virus relief funding into broadband, organizations

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Frustrations of a lack of support from the state and discussions on being proactive during a pandemic dominated the conversation during a John Day City Council meeting Aug. 11.

During the meeting, John Day City Manager Nick Green talked about the state providing \$52,000 in COVID-19 relief funds to the city and how low it is in comparison to the need of relief from the pandemic.

"These amounts are ridiculously low," states the agenda for the meeting. "The State has re-directed critical funding for education and coronavirus recovery from local governments to special interest groups, while denying funding applications for basic infrastructure needed to fulfill their constantly changing guidelines on what is and is not 'allowed.'"

The lack of broadband access needed for online education and responding to 24 executive orders from March 8 to the end of June affecting policy framework were two problems Green cited in explaining why \$52,000 was little help.

"When we found out that the entirety of our relief from coronavirus in the city of John Day amounts to \$52,000, it got my ire up," Green said. "The thought that I had in my mind was what exactly do you expect us to do with \$52,000 when we don't have broadband to our elementary school or many residents, and you just turned down our application for funding to correct that."

Green submitted an application to Business Oregon for \$2 million in broadband grants, which would help finish the broadband project in John Day and at Humbolt Elementary, but the application was turned down with no explanation given.

Green said the city needs to take proactive measures, and he said Sen. Lynn Findley is in full agreement with the city's position.

Oregon received about \$1.63 billion in coronavirus relief funds. Under the federal directive, some local governments received their allocations directly with about \$247 million sent to Portland, and to Washington and Multnomah coun-

ties. Other local governments were to receive \$625 million.

However, the Legislature and Gov. Brown have controlled the process with about \$200 million put into a state-run account in which local governments could apply for allocations.

On July 14, legislative leaders allocated \$200 million of the relief money to special interest groups. On Aug. 17, legislative leaders approved a plan to use federal funds to buy \$105 million of personal protective equipment, despite objections from over half of all lawmakers.

Many lawmakers were against the plan on Aug. 17 and wanted funds to go directly to local governments to spend on their COVID-19 priorities instead of having the agenda dictated by the state.

Green said one of the reasons the state is holding onto funds is because they haven't seen John Day spend the money yet.

"I'd like to spend our money tomorrow and then send them a letter at the end of the day and say money's gone," Green said. "The other issue is that we're still in this reactionary mindset where you pay people to not work... The reality is that you need to put people to work."

He said there will always be people critical with how the city will spend their relief funds, but a solid implementation of the funds would be in small infrastructure projects.

The city council approved \$15,000 to go to Commstructures Professional Services to design the broadband extension to Humbolt Elementary, which will make this project ready for building. This project will provide Humbolt with faster internet speeds to carry out online education from the school building.

The city council approved \$2,500 to the John Day Farmer's Market after manager Stephanie LeQuieu said that the county will not be funding the market after October.

The city council then approved up to \$2,500 to support 4-H students at the fair livestock auction by adding \$20 to each animal auctioned.

Complaint against school board member unfounded

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant School District 3 school board voted that a complaint against a board member was unfounded during a school board meeting on Aug. 19.

A complaint was filed against board member Jake Taylor by Kristi Moore, the former dean of students at Grant Union High School, after noticing that Taylor shared a post via Facebook.

The post shared on Facebook was written by Shaun Robertson, a parent of a student, and the post criticized Moore for her work as the Grant Union girl's varsity basketball coach and the school's lack of response for his complaint. Taylor shared the post and then responded to a friend who commented on his share.

"I understand fully how 'things' work inside school districts and behind closed doors," Taylor said in his response on Facebook. "I simply believe that employees should not only be qualified for whatever position they are hired for, but also should do their job as required by the district."

Board Chair Chris Cronin said the ethics policy alleged to have been violated

is board member ethics code number 22.

Code number 22 states that, when using social media websites, board members will treat and refer to other board member, staff, students and the public with respect.

During the discussion, board member Tracy Wyllie asked for clarification from Taylor regarding the post for better understanding since she felt the comments from him were not kind nor with respect.

Taylor said he read through the post, and it was all about what he was involved in for the last year and a half that directly involved his daughter.

"I may or may not have agreed with everything in the post, but I shared it so other people could read it if they had any other questions directly related to that post," Taylor said. "That was not my writing. Another person wrote the post, but as I have learned, if you like anything on Facebook, you inherit everything that was within it."

He said he has liked a lot of things on Facebook that he probably would not agree with 100%.

"I was very much involved with what that post was about and I'm not

going to be a hypocritical and say I feel this way one day and feel a different way a different day," Taylor said.

He clarified that the comment he made on how things work inside school districts and behind closed doors had nothing to do with being a school board member because all their meetings are public.

"As far as the social media part ... I was completely unaware that you inherit all of the content 100%," Taylor said. "As far as a training on social, I'm 100% for that."

Cronin said one of the things she learned about social media is that when a post is shared there needs to be something saying that you do not completely endorse the post.

"One of the areas that I have learned on my time on the board is that once you become a board member you become a public official and your role becomes different than when you were a patron or parent," Cronin said. "You are a public official at all times. It's a learning experience for all of us, and it's a difficult thing."

The school board voted to find the complaint unfounded and no further action is required.

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