



DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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There have been a few erroneous news articles published in a Portland newspaper that depict our commissioners and Douglas County in an unfair light. We would like to address several false statements and set the record straight.

First, when asked, we have gladly answered media inquiries openly and honestly. Those answers have not been accurately reflected in their reporting (to read our unpublished responses to the media inquiries please go to the Douglas County webpage at the link listed here: http://www.co.douglas.or.us/commissioner/pdf/Unpublished_Responses_to_the_Oregonian.pdf).

Many of the questions presented to us from the Portland newspaper were of a personal nature with blatantly malicious accusations, speculation and assumptions that simply are not true. Their pre-determined opinion is obvious and they have been unwilling to report in an unbiased, factual manner. For example, the receipts provided clearly show that the hotel “pet free” was paid for personally by Commissioner Freeman directly to the hotel and not charged to the county credit card.

The recent articles fail to explain the Title III fund spending guidelines. Title III dollars are restricted funds instituted and approved by the United States Congress. They can only be used for a very narrow scope of approved projects under strict usage guidelines. Educational travel is one of only three approved and allowable uses for these particular funds. The other two allowable uses are grants for Communities for Healthy Forests and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services. As much as Douglas County and the other 700 counties that received these funds would like, we are not able to use them for libraries, public safety, law enforcement or “basic services” as portrayed in the news articles. It is simply; not legal.

Every year our travel expenditures are included in our annual audit performed by an independent external auditor. The auditors thoroughly review all Title III expenditures. We have strictly followed the current law and guidelines, while documenting every dime spent. Further, in 2012 the United States Forest Service issued a report, and then in 2016 performed an audit review on multiple counties Title III expenditures. Both the report and the audit concluded that Douglas County was in compliance with the federal guidelines for the use and spending of Title III dollars. Further, Douglas County Management and Finance Department has received the prestigious Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), every year for the last 31 years. According to GFOA, “The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management.”

These dollars were never and will never be used for personal travel. Reports to the contrary are false. We provided receipts and reports documenting every item listed for Title III travel expenditures showing that this travel was specifically for government business. We did not select the location or the venue for any of the conferences or seminars. All of the locations, days and times listed were locations for local, regional and national conferences, forest land related meetings and industry related educational seminars. We were joined by representatives from the Department of the Interior, US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management at the same conferences along with dozens and sometimes thousands of other county commissioners from all over the United States. These conventions focus on pressing issues facing counties and their residents. There is nothing more important than forest management for Douglas County citizens as it provides for all other services.

Time spent with the Association of O&C Counties, the National Association of Counties, the Western Interstate Region, the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) and the American Forest Resource Council is valuable education work, as well as an investment in the future of Douglas County. Douglas County has a long history of leadership roles in these organizations, including having a Douglas County Commissioner selected as President of the O&C for decades. We are not alone in the battle to fight for reasonable and responsible management of federal forests. For over a decade, counties that receive Title III dollars have used them for travel to attend conferences, forest land related meetings; industry seminars and responsible forest management education. These are all educational and qualified expenditures. In fact, the AOC lists the conferences under the heading Education on it's website.

Because of the checker board nature of State, Federal, Tribal and private forest lands, everyone plays a role in their management. What one entity does on the lands they manage affects the Federal O&C Forest Lands, and vice versa. Plus, as you may have heard, this work and education has resulted in lawsuit victories in Oregon Circuit and Federal District Courts with the recent judgements in favor of the counties.

Lastly, counties all over Oregon and the United States must do the difficult work of communicating with their state and federal elected officials. This work is crucial to their existence. It is also imperative that commissioners meet with the management agencies like the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, who oversee the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, to let them know that their forest management practices affect our lives. We will continue to fight for our citizens to provide a stabilized revenue stream and responsible forest management while providing necessary services. Without the success of our communications and direct face-to-face visits with Federal officials and the management agencies, Douglas County would be long since insolvent. If we don't fight for our county and our citizens, nobody will!

Sincerely,

Douglas County Board of Commissioners