

June 1, 2019

COCC Board

RE: North Lake County Tax Issue

Dear Board members,

This is the letter I am sending to the HECC Board. It outlines our frustration with lack of service from COCC and our plea to be removed from the COCC taxing district.

In the 1960's, it made more sense to be a part of a Bend area education system. Our high school students at that time attended Bend Senior High School. The Fort Rock School District paid their tuition as well as room and board. That system was in place until 1964 when students were then bussed to Paisley High School. Then, in the mid 1980's, our high school students were given a choice to be bussed to Paisley or La Pine High School. In the late 1980's, the Bend-La Pine School Superintendent informed the North Lake School District that they would no longer accept North Lake students in La Pine. With that ultimatum, we were spurred to build our own high school. We did. It opened in the fall of 1991.

However, it is documented that the original intent of joining the COCC district was for community education. There is no community education provided by COCC.

We acknowledge that COCC provides in-district tuition to North Lake students and also provides some testing opportunities and a campus visit. KCC also provides a campus visit and competitive tuition rates, as well as programs more suitable to our rural area. And the in-district tuition argument is not entirely sound. Only Fort Rock and Christmas Valley residents live in-district. Silver Lake students do not.

If you find that releasing our area from your taxing district is uncomfortable and has long reaching implications to other community college districts, perhaps a compromise can be made that would be beneficial to our tax payers and students. As we have just passed a bond for improvements to North Lake School District, please consider supporting this endeavor by contributing 80% of our tax payment back to the North Lake School Endowment Fund to be used for capital projects.

June 1, 2019

HECC Board

RE: North Lake County Tax Issue

Dear Board members,

This problem has been on and off of your agenda far too long to deal with a fairly simple issue. A year and a half ago, I started the formal process to remove the northern part of Lake County from the COCC district territory. HECC staff spent a lot of time developing the procedure to deal with this request. They lined up the hoops and we jumped through them.

We gathered the required number of signatures. HECC scheduled a hearing at North Lake School on August 27, 2018. Two HECC staff and two Board members conducted this meeting to hear reasons why North Lake citizens wanted out of the district and to hear COCC explain why status-quo was the best choice. When the hearing adjourned, it was obvious that releasing North Lake from COCC's district was the right choice.

COCC's only strong point was that if we were released from the district, then other areas might want to do that also.

I feel that if the full board had been at the hearing, our position would have been approved. Since then I have had numerous conversations with Patrick Crane and have provided more supporting material, thinking that it would be shared with you Board members. I don't believe that has happened, mainly because staff believes they should not release or reduce any tax income to community colleges, regardless of the circumstances.

Again, I want to share some history and my reasoning for removing North Lake county from the COCC taxing district.

Since 1962 Fort Rock and Christmas Valley communities (precincts 13 and 14) have been part of the COCC taxing district. Silver Lake was a separate school district until 1980 and they chose not to join when the college district was formed. I gave Patrick Crane copies of a 1961 news article reporting Don Pence (COCC's 1st president) talking to the Fort Rock Grange about the courses that would be offered to our area if we were included in the district. I also gave him a copy of a letter thanking my parents for helping to get the district formed.

The primary benefit of being in the district was community education. A welding class was the original class proposed and anticipated. In reality, a location was not available to hold such a class and thus began the failure of the community education component.

North Lake High School opened in 1991 in our new K-12 building. An office with a separate entrance was included for a COCC representative to organize community education. COCC hired Patty Effingham to coordinate these programs. Patty worked hard at finding classes that would attract enough students at the same time that a qualified instructor was available. She and a couple others were rarely successful at getting classes to happen. The biggest reason for this failure is our small population. North Lake's part of the COCC district covers 2,160 square miles with less than 2,500 residents. It didn't work 57 years ago, and still is a problem today. Commuting 100 miles from Christmas Valley to the Bend campus also doesn't work. This unique area is sparsely populated and far from a campus. After 57 years of poor service, it makes no sense to stay in the district.

Since 1991, North Lake High School has had a variety of interactions with a number of colleges, including COCC, for distance learning and other services. None have come near to the support currently provided by Klamath Community College. They not only provide support to the high school, they also provide excellent training for our EMS volunteers through the video-conferencing equipment that they

installed at the high school. And, importantly, perhaps North Lake should be paying KCC for a service contract. We receive services from KCC that we should be receiving from COCC.

At your December meeting you directed COCC to review their relationship with North Lake and report what they intend to do when you meet in June. North Lake superintendent Dave Kerr reported no contact until late April. Matt McCoy, VP of Administration, has made two trips to North Lake in the past 30 days. One visit was to see Mr. Kerr and one to visit with me. They also hired a consultant in Prineville to do some telephone interviews.

I attended the COCC board meeting in May and heard Mr. McCoy's report. At this point, they don't seem to have any plans to improve their service.

There are good reasons that this is not the top of COCC's list of things to deal with:

- Selecting a new president for the organization

- Declining enrollment

- Solving campus security problems

- Debugging tech issues with interactive classes at the branch campuses

- Deciding on a branch campus in La Pine

- And..... Finalizing a long term lease to put 16 houses and 122 senior living apartments on campus property. This one doesn't make sense to me.

Mr. McCoy tells me that since the year 2000, we have sent 38 students directly from high school to COCC and 34 North Lake graduates have enrolled there sometime after graduation. Of those 72 students, 17 have earned a degree. These students all benefitted from in district tuition. COCC has no information regarding whether these students actually resided in Precincts 13 and 14. It's possible that nearly half of the enrolled students and graduates resided outside of the taxing district.

Our concern in North Lake County is our tax dollars and service. Or rather, lack of service. And North Lake's tax contribution of \$117,005, plus the \$21,145 bond payment is pretty insignificant compared to COCC's total tax base or total budget. Using country math, our present tax payment multiplied by the past 18 years equals nearly \$2.5 million.

Please understand paying taxes is NOT the issue. Paying for something and not getting it is disturbing. We are not opposed to taxes. Since our unfortunate entry into the college district, we have approved a number of taxes to improve our community.

- In the mid 1980's we passed tax bases for OSU Extension and the County Library

- In the late 1980's we approved a bond measure to build a new K-12 school

- In 1999 we established the North Lake Health District with its own tax base

- And this month, our community handily passed a \$4.0 million school bond to improve our North Lake School District campus!

We have proven we are willing to pay for improvements to our community and our lifestyle.

What started as a housekeeping issue to eliminate a tax situation that has never worked, now begs the bigger question:

If a community approves a tax that proves unsuccessful.... can it ever be eliminated?

I have traveled all over Oregon to speak to your board and I'm writing this because I would like you to understand our history and our frustration. Your agenda is always full and a three-minute public comment period is not adequate for me to address all of our concerns and arguments.

Thank You,

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