

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the important issue before you.

My name is Chuck Hinman and I represent (2) Hotel properties in the Columbia Gorge, the 194 room Best Western Plus Hood River Inn and the 63 room Best Western Plus Columbia River Inn. My involvement with these properties started in 1989. As you can well imagine, the growth we've enjoyed in the Gorge since then is beyond remarkable.

In addition to my involvement at the hotels, I have served on numerous lodging, hospitality and tourism boards. I am a past President of the Oregon Lodging Association and in fact was a board member when the decision was proposed and passed to self fund through, at the time, the 1% state lodging tax, Travel Oregon. On the local level, I am a past chair of the "Hood River County Visitors Council" and a founding and past board member of "Visit Hood River". For years now, our current Regional Destination Marketing Organization, "Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge", has successfully navigated challenges like balancing seasonal tourism, promoting shoulder and off season needs while also promoting responsible tourism habits during the more than busy summer season. You need to look no further than the Smith Travel Research reports, the City of Hood River and the Hood River County room tax receipts to gauge the growth and success we've gained through the relationships made and the efforts of our current RDMO.

My understanding is that Travel Oregon's review committee for the current RFP has been unable to reach a decision between our region's current contract administrator and the "Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance" (a bi-state entity) and their recommendation for the Commission vote is that they extend the region's review and application process through the summer season with a decision in September. It is also my understanding that for years, Oregon tourism taxes have provided a stipend to CGTA, a bi-state organization which may have been used to fund bi-state promotions. Using Oregon tax dollars to fund promotions outside the state feels wrong to me and certainly is not in the spirit of what we envisioned as a board when the Oregon Lodging Association first voted to self fund state wide tourism promotion. Providing a stipend for specific bi state promotions is one thing, awarding a contract, in my mind, is another.

In my mind, there is no reason to delay the important vote before you. You have an organization, "Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge" with a proven track record versus an underfunded, unproven organization, "CGTA", the choice is clear. The last thing our region needs is uncertainty going into our busy summer season.

Through many years of successfully operating tourism related businesses, one thing that I have learned for certain is that, "if it's not broken, don't fix it"!

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment.