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Local Medical Care an Economic Plus, But Recruiting is Ever Difficult

David Farris, MD, Board Chair

The proposed continuation of the five-year levy supporting the Deschutes Rim Health Clinic will be on the ballot again this November. As I am in the process of becoming the newest member of the clinic's Board of Directors and believe passage of the levy is vital to continuation of the clinic's services, I hope to begin a dialogue in advance of several community meetings scheduled in the coming weeks to talk about health care.

Voters might consider the potential economic gain to the community as justifying the investment it will take to "re-optimize" the clinic.

Local health care brings economic benefits to the community in various ways and creates living-wage jobs. I recently met with a vice-president of the Oregon Medical Association. She led me to the American Medical Association's Economic Impact Study that showed Oregon physicians support 12.8 other jobs and generate \$2.1M in economic activity and \$1.2M in wages and benefits through the creation of jobs that support health care services and delivery. Those numbers can't be expected to show up here, but local health care providers do generate tax revenue and drive the purchase of local goods and services—especially non-seasonal business—bumping up the local economy without "Bending" it or making it weird. Plus, local health care has been shown to be the best kind of health care for a community.

The clinic has been criticized for failing to recruit and retain providers. Past difficulties in their attempts to do so aside, the current situation is no joke. I recently asked the Chief Medical Officer of one of the major healthcare systems in the state about the difficulties in recruiting another doctor, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner. She wrote, "We have had multiple [primary care providers—PCPs] leave in the last 2 years and right now have 20K patients without PCPs. Even trying to recruit into Portland is difficult... Because of the workload of primary care, people aren't going into it... We have paid an external recruiter to help but it's still difficult."

That said, I believe South County has plenty to make it an attractive place to live and work, given a competitive salary, but such a competitive salary and associated benefits are not possible without the 5-year tax levy providing the necessary funding. One of my hopes is to be able to help recruit a full-time provider for this community.

Deschutes Rim Health Clinic has the potential to bring economic benefit to this community and provide the best of local health care. While our goal is for the clinic to be self-supporting, bridging to a "re-energized" level will require the reinvestment of the 5-year levy.

See you at one of the meetings.

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