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## Horse-Center Bill Passes Committee

OF COURSE, OF COURSE:  Majority Leader Sees Potential for Economic Development

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OLYMPIA - A bill to create a public-facilities district in support of a proposed equestrian center in Lewis County passed the House Community, Economic Development and Trade Committee 9-0 Monday afternoon.

The next step for the bill, which is sponsored by Rep. Gary Alexander, R-Olympia, is the House rules and finance committees, where all legislation involving the sales tax must go before appearing on the House floor.

The bill would allow Lewis County to accept a tax credit from the state on the sales tax to help with the cost of construction of the Southwest Regional Equestrian (REQ) Center, which is expected to be built along Interstate 5 outside Winlock.

"I'm really pleased with this situation. From all the things I've seen so far, I think this really has a good chance of getting support from the Legislature and the private investors," Alexander said.

The bill would not mean a tax increase for Lewis County residents, Alexander said, and the county would have access to \$300,000 a year for the next 25 years for a total of \$7.5 million for the stadium.

The county could choose to pitch in with more sales-tax revenue, which would bring the total to about \$10 million, Alexander said.

Private investors are required to foot at least two-thirds of the total, which has ranged from \$55 million to \$80 million.

House Majority Leader Lynn Kessler, D-Hoquiam, who is a co-sponsor of the legislation, said not all of her Democratic colleagues know of the bill, so she can't accurately gauge how many votes it will receive.

She said she's a supporter because of the potential economic development the equestrian center could bring Lewis County in the wake of the closure of the TransAlta coal mine.

"Many of us are just trying to help that community recover from that loss," she said.

The only potential downfall for the bill, Kessler said, is that some lawmakers may lump the proposal in with other stadium requests, such as the \$300 million price the National Basketball Association's Seattle SuperSonics have put on a new arena, or a new NASCAR track in Kitsap County.

"It's a much different reason they're asking for than the Sonics or NASCAR," Kessler said.

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