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Land use fight is more complex than it looks

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The lawsuit between Robert Klein (and others) against the Seven Hills vineyard group is much more complex than simply wheat versus vineyards. Klein and members of the non-profit land use group Friends of Umatilla County are not against vineyards. In fact, some of our group's members and financial supporters are in the wine business.

The fight is about what happens when big, out-of-state money comes to town and selfishly pushes its weight around for financial gain. Taking a 1,647-acre dry land wheat farm, in an area zoned EFU 160, and using all of its might to divide that land into small lots, is part of the reason for the fight. Their acquisition of at least seven well permits which will allow them to pump millions of gallons of water a day from a declining aquifer is another insult. The list goes on and on as to why so many are opposed to this project.

But at the center of the dispute is the advocacy of, and help from, so many local, county and state government agencies that made this possible. Despite the objections of so many Oregonians, the way was paved for this land and water grab as soon as it was proposed.

From the Governor's office, state and local economic development agencies, water resources departments, local city councils and above all, the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners, not one raised any objections or worse, listened at all to the voices of the citizens who opposed this project for very sound reasons.

Umatilla County was apparently for sale and the highest bidder came along.

The Friends of Umatilla County is a very diverse group, not just wheat farmers. But we all have one thing in common.

We know when things are wrong with our government and when the voice of the citizen is no longer heard. We hope the Oregon Court of Appeals will finally show us that there is some justice in America.

Scott Hendricks , Milton Freewater, Ore.