

## Guest Opinions “Related” To Primary PSS Tax Measures

### October 16, 2013. Jim Boston. *Back GP’s top-notch police, firemen* (Guest Opinion)

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#### JIM BOSTON

Once again we are asked to renew funding for police and fire services in the city of Grants Pass. Although I very much want to see the public safety issues of the county addressed, they are not the subject of this levy. Rather, the citizens of Grants Pass are being asked to do what we have done for almost 30 years: provide the funds needed to maintain quality police and fire services to the citizens of Grants Pass, not to mention to those who work and shop with us.

What difference does it mean to have a good fire and police departments? Lots. When you call 911, help will be on the way in seconds and arrive in minutes. You will not be told, sorry, no police officers are available. You will not be told that although a fire crew will come, you may get a heavy bill if you neglected to pay in advance with a commercial firefighting company.

When help arrives in Grants Pass, you will know that it comes from agencies dedicated to the highest standards, agencies that have submitted themselves to rigorous self-evaluation and review by others, departments that meet and exceed professional standards.

Our police division has had national accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies since 1993. Only two other Oregon police agencies have it. They are the Corvallis Police Department and the Washington County Sheriff’s Office. Thirty-one other Oregon police departments are accredited by a state group started in 2001. The only local ones in that group are the Medford and Ashland police departments. Looking at both their websites, the CALEA program looks more challenging, although the state organization is tough enough that most police departments in Oregon are still not accredited.

Our fire department has an excellent Insurance Services Office rating of 3. Doing a little research, I found that the 3 is the third-highest level on a 10-point scale. A 1 is very rare, and only 3.6 percent of fire departments even attain the 3 rating. I discovered that fire departments serving outside the city of Grants Pass have ratings of 5, 6 and 10.

I understood having a well-rated fire department lowers my home insurance bill. But how much? I did some more research through my own insurance company. We could not compare rates with much of the county, because my company does not insure homes with wildfire hazards. But we could get a comparison with Cave Junction. Their fire department has an ISO of 6. My homeowner’s insurance for an identical house in Cave Junction would cost \$860 per year. In Grants Pass, it costs \$713 per year. That means that my savings cover half of my police/fire levy bill. Not bad. Not bad at all.

Are you afraid that all governments cost taxpayers more and more? Not true, at least not in the city of Grants Pass. The proposed periodic levy is exactly the same as the one it will replace. No more, no less. How can they do it with rising costs? I am not sure. But I like it. Maybe it's good management?

Of course, it is good management, from the City Council on down. I got to see the quality of our leadership firsthand during my short time as a city councilor. They are not perfect, and they benefit from having accountability to a vigilant and thrifty City Council, but they are top-notch professionals. They are rightly proud of the work they do, and they deserve thanks from all of us in the city.

I have personally experienced the professionalism of the men and women of our fire and police department. The fire department saved the house next door to mine, and most of the fence in between. The police reminded me, at moderate cost and with real courtesy, to drive more slowly. I just heard of a life saved last month when the fire department reached a man suffering a heart attack in a minute after 911 had been called. I could go on.

To sum up, we in the city of Grants Pass have a good thing. Let's keep it. Vote "yes" to renew our city's levy police and fire services for four more years.

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The Rev. Jim Boston was rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church for 22 years before retiring and a member of a temporary City Council that served for six months in late 2009 and early 2010 following the recall of several councilors. A four-year Public Safety levy of \$1.79 per \$1,000 of assessed property value is on the Nov. 5 ballot, which is due to be mailed out Friday.