

Guest Opinions “Related” To Primary PSS Tax Measures

May 10, 2013. Connie Roach. *Assessor Office is fiscally responsible* (Guest Opinion)

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CONNIE ROACH

An argument has been made in the Voters' Pamphlet that taxpayers should vote no on any ballot measure to increase property taxes for the funding of our criminal justice system based on the fact the county purchased a replacement assessment and tax software package for \$600,000. The implication is this is an irresponsible expenditure of taxpayer dollars when the criminal justice system is so drastically underfunded. I would like to respond to this error in critical thinking.

The Josephine County Assessor's Office has drastically reduced staff over the past 15 years, from 25 full-time equivalencies in 1997 to 14.85 FTE in 2012.

We have been very responsible in budgeting and sticking to that budget so as much of our public safety system can be retained as possible, while meeting the statutory mandates required by the state of Oregon.

Often government is criticized for not acting like a business, and quite often, this has been proven to be true. But we don't think that is the case in this instance.

The software currently used for assessment and taxation was installed in 1997. Although it has served us well, it is built on soon-to-be-obsolete technology. This is a problem every business that relies on databases comes up against. Knowing that one day the company that supplied the software would stop supporting this product, the Assessor's Office began saving for the day when we would need to replace it.

We received a grant from the state Department of Revenue, and each year set aside money for the project. The county received 25 percent of the eventual cost from the state grant. This money cannot be used to support the hiring of deputies.

Currently, there are seven counties on the software we use. Three of the largest are Multnomah, Marion and Washington counties.

Multnomah had already contracted for new software from a different company. Marion and Washington counties were both in the process of seeking bids for new software.

As the large counties stop using our current software system, it is anticipated that the annual costs to the remaining counties will increase and eventually (in three to four years), the company will cease to support our current software system.

When Marion County put out its request for proposal (RFP), we were able through an intergovernmental agreement to save the cost of having to do our own RFP.

Through that process, Marion, Josephine and Yamhill counties all selected the same software. We have made an additional intergovernmental agreement with Marion to share much of the preliminary work they are doing, once again saving expenses for Josephine County.

Marion and Jackson counties have signed contracts for new software at approximately \$1.8 million each. Klamath County signed a contract for \$2.3 million. Our cost is significantly less, because we are doing as much of the conversion work as possible ourselves, are accepting a system that another county will configure and had good business timing. If we had waited until our software was no longer functional, we would have paid significantly more.

In our planning for the future, we leveraged otherwise unavailable state funding, partnered with other counties for buying power, compromised on configuration and were as fiscally responsible as possible.

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Connie Roach has been Josephine County assessor since 2009.