

May 1, 2015. Bill Hunker. *How Should You Vote On Measure 17-66? No on Levy: Too Many Questions Linger about Made-up Crisis, Proposal* (Guest Opinion)

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Lack of trust in our elected officials is the greatest single factor affecting Josephine County. Trust is built on truth-telling, transparency and accountability. When these three elements of leadership are lacking, it generates gridlock between the citizens and their representatives. Since this is the 10th levy attempt for Public Safety in Josephine County, I think one can argue gridlock. In 2008 property tax levy proposals started at \$2.49, then dropped to \$1.99, then \$1.48, then \$1.19 and now, inexplicably, \$1.40 is being proffered. Ten levies, 15 years and still a one-trick pony; one might ponder Einstein's quote regarding insanity.

Perception versus facts. A popular pro-levy argument is that people "feel" unsafe. If they are repeatedly told/sold that they are unsafe, in time they will believe they are, even when the facts say otherwise. Are we "being sold?" On May 30, 2012, two weeks after the levy failed, the "crime crisis" campaign began. The sheriff instigated a propaganda campaign that culminated in the infamous picture of freed inmates skipping down the sidewalk in front of the jail. Later, on Aug. 18, 2012, the famous 911 call was made. But, not until the day after the failed levy attempt of May 21, 2013, was that call released to the media — eight months after the call happened. Picked up by the national press, that audio release put Josephine County on the national map as lawless. Do you think that was a coincidence?

The sheriff has stated that it is a "myth" that the city of Grants Pass generates more crime than the county. The sheriff's statement is blatantly false. Please research the Oregon Uniform Crime Reports for yourself. The county pays 58 percent of the taxes and accounts for 20 percent of the crime. Grants Pass pays 41 percent of the taxes and accounts for 80 percent of the crime.

City residents note: This levy does not fund any city police services except to add jail beds and Juvenile Justice detention facilities. You are far better off paying the sewer tax of \$3.55 each month for 30 jail beds than \$1.40 per \$1,000 of assessed value on your house. In fact, even if you doubled the sewer tax to \$7.10 per month, then also fund Juvenile Justice, every resident in Grants Pass with a home worth more than \$70,000 will save significant money. And your house will not be put at risk. Transparency. Ideally, people make decisions based on facts. Facts to support Measure 17-66 are in short supply. Examples:

- 16 deputies: If six deputies currently cover 10 hours a day, 7 days a week, why does it take 22 deputies to cover 20 hours a day 7 days a week? How long do they train before they can patrol? Will new hires have contracts that pay back the county for the training dollars invested in them? Why no detectives?

- Patrol cars: New or used? How many? Over what period of time? What do they cost? What is their projected life.
- Four 911 Dispatchers: The sheriff says he is exploring contracting out the 911 services or combining services with the city. Is that for cost savings?
- Jail Capacity: 160 beds? What is the justification for needing more beds per capita than other cash-strapped counties?
- Reopen the Juvenile Justice Center: It's not closed. Why not accurately state that the Detention Center and Shelter are closed? And how much is Juvenile Justice getting?
- Citizen Oversight Committee: The committee has been chosen. Who are they? Who selected them? Were all the rural communities represented? Have the sheriff or the county commissioners agreed to their "authority" in writing? The oversight committee is a "feel good" and has no actual teeth.
- Economic Development: The argument is that we cannot attract new industry to our area until we first create a "safe" county. The opposite is true: Economic Development is the driving force that will reduce crime in this county. Currently, 30 percent are on food stamps, 35 percent on Medicaid, 7.4 percent unemployment plus those in poverty and on welfare. High school graduation rates are 64 percent. Hands down we are the most impoverished county in Oregon.
- Budget Process. The 10 percent skim. If we are truly on the cliff's edge, if the crime crisis is actually real, why wouldn't we allocate every single penny of the \$900,000 to alleviate this "terrible, howling, crisis of crime?" Because it is not a real crisis.

What happens to the 31 cents out of the 58 cents that has traditionally gone to the Sheriff each year? What happens to the \$4.6 million in Rural School funds? What happens to the timber receipts of 2.1 million? Lots of questions, no answers. Summary. I am not against taxes or a levy, but 17-66 is not that levy. \$1.40 is too much. Our current economy cannot afford it. When the commissioners, the sheriff and citizens all come to the table ready to each contribute something to ensure public safety in our county, that levy will pass. That has not yet happened.

Bill Hunker is a member of Josephine County Alert, which has organized to oppose Measure 17-66.