

May 3, 2013. Jim Rafferty. *County Must Learn To Live Within Means* (Guest Opinion)

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Once again, a property tax measure will be testing the endurance of Josephine County voters. This is the sixth time in 10 years that this issue has been presented to us. We voted "no" on it every time in the past and will have to vote "no" once again.

A simple majority will determine the fate of this measure, so please do not get discouraged or apathetic. Our "no" vote is vital to defeating this measure.

We believe there are numerous reasons to vote "no" on Measure 17.49. They include:

- The ballot summary says funding for services may include the listed services, but it may not. The commissioners have said they won't promise to spend a single penny on any of the listed services.
- The chief financial officer stated in February that in the next budget, law enforcement will receive about \$347,000 more than what it started this year with. And with no levy, we'll maintain about the same status as we have right now.
- The internal services fund will siphon off 10 percent of this levy money to benefit other departments. For example, it will help pay the \$75,391 salaries of the commissioners plus over 30 percent more in benefits.
- The Josephine County commissioners have a credibility problem. They have not made every effort to provide funds to the sheriff and the justice system to fulfill their number one priority of keeping the county safe. Instead, \$600,000, the bulk of which could have gone for public safety, was diverted to purchase a single piece of software for the Assessor's Office, and it costs \$60,000 per year to keep it working. Also, the local district attorney is paid by the state of Oregon, but Josephine County gives him an additional \$1,763 each month.
- The long-term obligations of the county include \$12.9 million for the Public Employees Retirement System and \$2.9 million for compensated absences. Rather than address this huge fiscal problem, the county kicked it down the road by refinancing.
- The commissioners unanimously voted to spend up to \$6,000 of general fund dollars on their mail-out regarding this criminal justice levy.

There are also plenty of questions.

- Why haven't the commissioners cut their own salaries, which is close to three times more than our Home Rule Charter allows?

- Why do they pay the chief financial officer \$99,618 in salary and benefits each year? If the commissioners did the job themselves, the money could pay for a deputy.
- Money from timber sales on Josephine County's property could be going to the sheriff and the justice system, but will it?
- Why is it so difficult for the citizens to obtain financial accountability from the county? A transparent, line-item accounting system showing what funds came in and how they were spent would prove to citizens that our tax money was spent wisely.

With the economic crisis, high unemployment numbers, an aging population and struggling businesses, it's unwise to impose additional tax burdens on the citizenry of Josephine County.

Our properties are already excessively regulated and taxed to the point that one could rightly ask the question, who really owns the property? Adding another financial burden on property owners is not the answer to the county's chronic overspending.

The commissioners need to remember that there is no free lunch. They will have to make do with the local taxes we give them. It is not the fault of property owners that the federal government is renegeing on its obligation to us. The commissioners need to stand up for the citizenry and demand the feds pay what is due to us or let us back into the forests. Rough and Ready should not have closed among such incredible timber resources in Josephine County.

We urge you to cast your ballot on May 21 and to vote "no" on all tax measures.

"To change the crippling influence of runaway bureaucracy is our foremost problem; and upon its solution depends the survival of the American way of life. The sheer bulk and range of government today, top-heavy, loose-jointed and running amuck with arbitrary powers, has become a suffocating restraint upon our whole economy." — From Lawrence Sullivan's book "The Dead Hand of Bureaucracy."

We're for A Constitutional Government, known as W4ACG, was founded by Jim Rafferty, 471-4941; Bill Hill 761-3954; and Kurt Ramme 474-2906. We can be reached through our email or the website. Part of our mission statement states, "We will only support those measures that do not deprive us of our basic inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

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