

**GUEST OPINIONS: 2012 -2015**  
**On Josephine County's Justice System & Public Safety Services Problem/Issue**  
**Published In *The Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Grants Pass, Oregon**

**HARD COPY ARCHIVES OF HUGO JS&PSS EXPLORATORY COMMITTEE**  
**Justice System & Public Safety Services (JS&PSS)**  
**Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society**

**Compiled by Mike Walker & Jon Whalen**

**November 21, 2015**

**Guest Opinions**

- 2015 Guest Opinions On Grants Pass, Oregon City Sales Tax (Measure 17-67)
- 2015 Guest Opinions On Josephine County, Oregon Levy (Measure 17-66)
- 2014 Guest Opinions On Josephine County, Oregon Levy (Measure 17-59)
- 2013 Guest Opinions On Josephine County, Oregon Levy (Measure 17-49)
- 2012 Guest Opinions On Josephine County, Oregon Levy (Measure 17-43)

2015 & 2013. These two years of guest opinions, by year, are paired in a pro and con citizens' views per levy and/or sales tax proposal. The paired guest opinions, con and pro, are on the same guest opinion page for the years 2015 & 2013.

2014 & 2012. These two years of pro and con guest opinions, by year, were published a few days apart.

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**2015**                                 **Guest Opinions On Grants Pass, Oregon City Sales Tax**

- Sept. 13, 2015             Dan DeYoung. *Should Grants Pass Implement A Sales Tax: Low Rate Would Fund Public Safety* (Guest Opinion)
- Sept. 13, 2015.             Dave Thomason. *Should Grants Pass Implement A Sales Tax: Tax Would Burden Businesses* (Guest Opinion)
- Nov. 3, 2015                 Grants Pass City-wide Special Election Measure 17-67 2 Percent Sales Tax for City Public Safety and Criminal Justice Services

**2015**                                 **Guest Opinions On Josephine County, Oregon Levy**

- 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)
- May 1, 2015.                 Scott Draper. *Yes on Levy: Citizen-driven Levy Creates Safety Funding with Oversight* (Guest Opinion)
- May 19, 2015                 JO CO-wide Special Election Measure 17-66, For Patrol, Jail, Shelter of Abused Youth; Five Year Levy (i.e., \$1.40 per \$1,000 of assessed value)

**2014**                                 **Guest Opinions On Josephine County, Oregon Levy**

- April 26, 2014.             Jim Rafferty. *CON: Proposal Would Cost More But Doesn't Add Patrols, Reduce Crime* (Guest Opinion)
- April 28, 2014.             Jay Meredith. *Pro: Citizen-Driven Tax Initiative Would Restore Safety During Funding Crunch* (Guest Opinion)
- May 20, 2014                 JO CO-wide Primary Election Measure 17-59, Criminal Justice and Public Safety Three Year Local Option Tax (i.e., \$1.19 per \$1,000 of assessed value)

**2013**                                 **Guest Opinions On Josephine County, Oregon Levy**

- May 3, 2013                 Jim Rafferty. *County Must Learn To Live Within Means* (Guest Opinion)
- May 3, 2013                 Pat Fahey. *Let's Control Our Destiny And Vote Yes* (Guest Opinion)
- May 21, 2013                 JO CO-wide Special Election Measure 17-49, Criminal Justice and Public Safety Three Year Local Option Tax (i.e., \$1.48 per \$1,000 of assessed value)

**2012**                                 **Guest Opinions On Josephine County, Oregon Levy**

- April 27, 2012.             Josephine County commissioners Simon Hare, Don Reedy and Harold Haugen. *Passage of levy crucial for county*
- April 28, 2012             Patricia Sitze. *No justification for property tax levy*
- May 15, 2012                 JO CO-wide Primary Election Measure 17-43, Criminal Justice System Operations Four Year Local Option Tax (i.e., \$1.99 per \$1,000 of assessed value)

## 2015 Guest Opinions On Grants Pass, Oregon City Sales Tax

- Sept. 13, 2015      Dan DeYoung. *Should Grants Pass Implement A Sales Tax: Low Rate Would Fund Public Safety* (Guest Opinion)
- Sept. 13, 2015.      Dave Thomason. *Should Grants Pass Implement A Sales Tax: Tax Would Burden Businesses* (Guest Opinion)
- Nov. 3, 2015      Grants Pass City-wide Special Election Measure 17-67 2 Percent Sales Tax for City Public Safety and Criminal Justice Services

### **September 13, 2015. Dan DeYoung. *Should Grants Pass Implement A Sales Tax: Low Rate Would Fund Public Safety*** (Guest Opinion)

The City of Grants Pass Department of Public Safety relies partly on Josephine County's Criminal Justice System. As our public safety chief says, we can have a cop on every corner but it won't do any good unless the rest of the system is available — the adult jail, juvenile justice, and prosecution services.

The Criminal Justice Sales Tax on the ballot for Grants Pass voters this November would restore funding to the justice services the city relies on, retain our current level of services in city police and city fire services, while lowering property taxes and fees for Grants Pass residents and businesses.

Sound too good to be true? It's not. Rather than tie all fees for public safety to property taxes and utility fees, the very low 2 percent sales tax spreads the tax burden among everyone that uses the system rather than just those who happen to live or own property within the city limits of Grants Pass.

While the rate is a low 2 percent, this will provide enough revenue to eliminate the city's \$1.79 per \$1,000 of assessed value Public Safety Property Tax Levy and still maintain city police and fire services. It will also provide sufficient revenue to eliminate the city's jail services utility fee. A home with an assessed value of \$155,000 will save about \$311 per year from this tax and fee reduction. If your assessed value is \$250,000, your household would see a tax and fee reduction of about \$482 per year. Do the math on how many taxable items you would have to purchase to even come close to these amounts and you'll find this is a big tax-and-fee reduction for Grants Pass residents and businesses.

We all agree we can't go much longer with a crippled criminal justice system and the Grants Pass City Council decided to give Grants Pass voters an option to restore these justice services while lowering property taxes and fees. A sales tax is the only equitable way we can, at the City level, share the burden with all users of the system. If approved, this measure would result in a significant tax and utility fee reduction for all property owners in Grants Pass, both businesses and residents, because it shares the burden for services we all share.

Perhaps even better, this measure has unique provisions you don't normally see in a sales tax program. These unique provisions help make this local sales tax program more accountable and fair to both businesses and consumers:

- The 2 percent rate cannot be raised without another vote of the people.
- There is no tax on many items like unprepared food, prescription medicine, fuel, and many others.
- The 2 percent tax is capped at the first \$1,000 of sale amount in each sale. Therefore, even if you buy a new car, the most the sales tax can ever be is \$20 per sale.
- There is a tax rebate to help businesses cover the cost of reporting. Smaller businesses will earn a higher percentage rebate on their tax collections from sales.

The rate is low enough to reduce the negative affect on local businesses — that's the last thing anyone wants. It's common in cities and counties across the country to have variable rates that differ by at least 2 to 3 percent in the sales tax rates of neighboring cities and counties. And in our case the tax per sale is capped so that it would never pay to go to Medford rather than shop locally. Think about the various times you planned a vacation or recreational trip — was a sales tax rate for the place you were going to visit part of your decision making process? Nope, this won't affect our thriving tourism industry either.

For those retail and food services businesses that do have to collect the low 2 percent tax, this won't affect sales and the property tax reduction, utility fee reduction, and sales tax rebate will more than cover the cost of collecting the tax from customers. Service businesses do not have to collect the tax and most businesses will find that this increases their profitability as opposed to collecting taxes for safety services by property taxes and utility fees. Many local businesses will save thousands of dollars per year as a result.

The measure will keep city police and fire services, boost funding for adult jail services, it would reopen the Juvenile Justice shelter-and-detention building (closed since 2012), and would boost funding for criminal prosecution services. All while reducing property taxes and fees for city residents and businesses. Vote with your conscience, vote with your wallet, and vote yes for the criminal justice sales tax. It's the right thing to do to restore justice services and reduce taxes and fees for Grants Pass residents and businesses.

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Dan DeYoung is the president of the Grants Pass City Council.

**September 13, 2015. Dave Thomason. *Should Grants Pass Implement A Sales Tax: Tax Would Burden Businesses* (Guest Opinion)**

The proposed Grants Pass sales tax measure being put before city voters on the upcoming November ballot would cause more problems than it would solve for our community. I will start by saying that I am most certainly aware of the issues surrounding public safety that we face in our city and county. I have supported the failed levies that have been attempted the last four times.

I do not, however, support any kind of sales tax being implemented in the city of Grants Pass as an answer to solve our funding problems. While I do not purport to speak on behalf of all members of our local hospitality industry, I can with great confidence tell you that my feelings are mirrored by the vast majority of Grants Pass operators.

We have been absolutely battered and bruised by state and federal laws that have made it extremely difficult to continue operating in Oregon with any level of success. The restaurant industry already has a failure rate of approximately 80 percent within the first two years of operation. Already thin margins are being wiped out with the addition of legislation such as Obamacare, an upcoming Mandatory Sick Leave law and a major increase in the minimum wage that will come via either legislation during the next session or by a vote of the citizens which will result in either a \$13 or \$15 wage. Since we are a very labor intensive business we will no doubt feel the brunt of these changes. Also since approximately 70 percent of our guests choose to pay with a credit card we will also be responsible to pay the additional sales tax that includes our 3 percent processing fees to the credit card companies.

The implementation of a sales tax will only add to the burden of trying to operate profitably. I can assure you that when the playing field becomes unbalanced via a sales tax in the city there will be those who will make their decisions to spend their money elsewhere. There will be those who will choose to spend their money in the county and others who, while traveling up and down the freeway, will simply bypass Grants Pass. I have no doubt that knowledge of the fact that Grants Pass has a sales tax will spread throughout the state and another 30 miles up the road to Medford will be an easy choice to make. It will also be on the minds of people in the Medford area, where we have had significant success in becoming a destination location for many of them at our Taprock Northwest Grill restaurant. There are just too many other choices for us to be handicapped in such a way. It will also come in to play at our Event Center when major groups are trying to decide where they should schedule their next event.

I completely disagree with those who say that our locals will continue their normal spending habits since the amount of the tax is so minimal. I believe that you underestimate the amount of people in Oregon who, no matter what the tax is, are philosophically opposed to paying a sales tax. I personally know many people who have refused to dine in Ashland ever since they enacted their meals tax there several years ago. We also know that once a tax is enacted, it will never go away and will only go up.

A combination of a significant increase in the cost of doing business coupled with any downturn in revenue will spell disaster for our industry and other small businesses in Grants Pass. At a time when the local economy is still fragile, imposing a tax that would discourage consumer spending in Grants Pass is sending the wrong message. The public safety needs of the city can be met with economic growth, not with a tax that inhibits business and encourages our neighbors and visitors to go elsewhere to spend their hard-earned dollars.

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Dave Thomason is the owner of Southern Oregon Elmer's, LLC; Taprock Franchise Systems, LLC; and Thomason Bean Co. (Human Bean). He is a past president of the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association and the Grants Pass & Josephine County Chamber of Commerce board of directors.

## 2015 Guest Opinions On Josephine County Levy

- 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)
- May 1, 2015. Scott Draper. *Yes on Levy: Citizen-driven Levy Creates Safety Funding with Oversight* (Guest Opinion)
- May 19, 2015 JO CO-wide Special Election Measure 17-66, For Patrol, Jail, Shelter of Abused Youth; Five Year Levy (i.e., \$1.40 per \$1,000 of assessed value)

### **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)

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.

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



**May 1, 2015. Scott Draper. *Yes on Levy: Citizen-driven Levy Creates Safety Funding with Oversight*** (Guest Opinion)

Measure 17-66 is a grassroots effort, a measure placed on the ballot of the people, for the people, and by the people of Josephine County. Measure 17-66 offers a rare opportunity for the right combination of ingredients to come together at exactly the right time.

Measure 17-66 is clear, concise and complete, reflecting the strong values of our community. It is written to ensure, along with state law, that funds are spent efficiently and effectively on critically needed public safety services only. It includes a bridge to building trust between our community and our Sheriff's Office. Just as importantly, our new sheriff is the right leader at the right time — experienced, capable and deeply dedicated to Josephine County and the safety of its people. Perhaps most importantly, our community is uniting, fed up with being fed up, and we see that together we can create the community that we envision. Measure 17-66 is a powerful opportunity for each of us to make a simple yet meaningful stand for our own safety as well as the safety and security of our families, our neighbors and our community. Your "yes" vote restores our community.

Public Safety Measure 17-66 is smart, complete and is aligned with our values. The measure has been carefully and transparently created, aligning with the distinct values of our community, to ensure a complete, workable, and game-changing solution to our public safety crisis.

Measure 17-66 restores sheriff's patrols and emergency response, so that when you call 911 in an emergency, a deputy sheriff will respond. It also provides a presence of law enforcement across the county through patrols and resident deputies and other programs, creating a proactive approach to crime before it happens. Measure 17-66 increases jail capacity to 160 beds, taking advantage of facilities we have already paid for that now sit vacant, and providing real consequences for those who would commit crime. Abused and troubled children in our community presently have nowhere to go to escape dangerous living conditions. Measure 17-66 will re-open the Juvenile Justice Center to shelter and counsel youth who are in crisis. Sadly, this state-of-the-art community asset currently sits vacant.

Measure 17-66 provides for a Citizens' Oversight Committee comprised of local citizens from different geographic areas of the county and different perspectives, ensuring that our tax dollars are spent for cost-effective public safety only. Measure 17-66 places resources effectively and efficiently in the capable hands of a sheriff who will get the job done.

Public Safety Measure 17-66 saves money, property and lives. Our current lack of public safety is expensive. We pay individually through theft; rising insurance premiums; insurance deductibles; hiring of private security firms that can provide only a fraction of the services provided by a solid public safety program; substantial downward pressure on property values; lost individual, business and social opportunities; and in many other ways. In 2012, 80-year-old Josephine County resident June Rice was found dead next to her motorized wheelchair. She had wandered from an adult care facility in Murphy and, due to budget cuts, no one was available from the Sheriff's Office to search. We are better than this.

Over the past year, working alongside many dedicated local citizens and speaking with literally thousands of local residents, a very clear picture is emerging. We are a community that is uniting. People from all walks of life, newcomers as well as natives, folks from all sides of the political spectrum, people of all ages are coming together to support the advantages of Measure 17-66. Many who have, for various reasons, voted against previous safety levies, are also coming together in support of Measure 17-66.

Sentiments such as these are being shared: "Finally, a public safety levy that provides all the pieces we need." "The Citizen's Oversight Committee is a great idea to ensure that the monies are spent wisely and for exactly what we need." "Sheriff Dave Daniel is already bringing the community together and his dedication and solid plan for our future needs and deserve our support." "We need to deal with the federal government, timber and other critical funding issues. A yes vote for Measure 17-66 allows us to do this from a position of strength."

Measure 17-66 is a grassroots effort, a measure placed on the ballot of the people, for the people, and by the people of Josephine County. A vote for Measure 17-66 allows us to live safely, securely and peacefully in one of the most beautiful areas in the country, all while enjoying a tax commitment well below the average county in Oregon. Your yes vote is smart, saves money, saves property and saves lives. Let your voice be heard. Vote yes on Measure 17-66.

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Scott Draper is the general manager of Club Northwest and a founding member of Community United For Safety, which gathered the signatures to place Measure 17-66 on the ballot and is campaigning for the measure's passage.

## 2014 Guest Opinions On Josephine County Levy

- April 26, 2014. Jim Rafferty. *CON: Proposal Would Cost More But Doesn't Add Patrols, Reduce Crime* (Guest Opinion)
- April 28, 2014. Jay Meredith. *Pro: Citizen-Driven Tax Initiative Would Restore Safety During Funding Crunch* (Guest Opinion)
- May 20, 2014 JO CO-wide Primary Election Measure 17-59, Criminal Justice and Public Safety Three Year Local Option Tax (i.e., \$1.19 per \$1,000 of assessed value)

### **April 26, 2014. Jim Rafferty. *CON: Proposal Would Cost More But Doesn't Add Patrols, Reduce Crime*** (Guest Opinion)

The proposed May 2014 jail and Juvenile Justice Center (JJC) five-year tax levy, sponsored by the PAC Citizens for Securing our Safety (CSOS), adds \$1.19 per \$1,000 of assessed value to property owners' current taxes (a 205 percent tax increase). Estimates are \$7.5 million, \$8.1 million, \$8.3 million, \$8.6 million and \$8.8 million in new taxes over the five-year levy, or \$41.3 million total.

If your property is assessed at \$200,000, you would pay an additional \$238 annually, plus the 3 percent yearly amount allowed for increases in assessed values, about \$6 with the proposed levy, for a total of about \$1,220 through 2019. Then add the current tax rate of 58 cents per \$1,000 assessed value (\$116) plus the 3 percent annual increase (about \$3 per year) during the same five year period (about \$580), for a grand total of more than \$1,830.

Commissioner Simon Hare said recently, and Commissioners Walker and Heck agree, that \$2 million in general fund money would be available from "unallocated carryover," if the jail levy passes in May, for road patrols and the District Attorney's Office. He also said, "Our projected carryover for 2014-15 is nothing." But, no mention is made of a guarantee for subsequent general fund monies for years 2015-19. If this carryover funding is not available, will the road patrol manpower revert to the 2013-14 level of one or two patrol deputies?

If the proposed five-year levy passes, who benefits the most? The city of Grants Pass, since they have patrol manpower to fill the jail and JJC. If the jail remains fully occupied by city inmates, where would county inmates be housed? Would the increased court, parole and staff be limited by the same levy funding levels, clogging up the justice system? If the current justice system is strained now, what will it be like in five years?

One wonders why the levy was not initiated by the commissioners, the people's representatives, as taxing is a government function. But private citizens under the cloak of CSOS propose to establish a quasi-taxing authority without express approval or permission of elected representatives. The power to tax, if not satisfied, has the potential consequence of property confiscation, a real economic loss of property owners' worth and rights, all for the incarceration process only. Collateral damage from property confiscation results in loss of tax base and

increased county liabilities which degrade over time, resulting in increased taxes on the remaining property owners.

Yet, no part of the proposed levy provides for the enforcement process known as sheriff's road patrols. How is it that lawbreakers are to be discovered, let alone detained or transported to jail, if there is no stated levy funding for additional deputies? Without express budget funding defined in the levy, are taxpayers to rely on our commissioner's promises to "fix" the lack of funds by diverting suddenly-found "unallocated carryover" or other "funds" after it passes?

Josephine County commissioners must take responsibility for this debacle since they decided to bank past O&C/federal school funds instead of funding 10 patrol deputies. Their only funding solution was easy pickin's property tax instead of other alternatives, such as an in-county-only lottery, where 10 winners of \$10,000 could be awarded to stimulate lottery sales, reaping net proceeds of several million dollars dedicated only to sheriff's patrols, instead of state coffers.

Another alternate road patrol funding option in the place of the proposed 17-59 Measure might be the following: Assuming 10,000 voters want to pass the proposed levy. And, in lieu of the levy, they would voluntarily pay an additional yearly tax to cover the average \$8,312,344 yearly tax levy, each would share the proportional cost of \$831.23. If that is the case, the current proposed levy would be paid for by the 10,000 volunteer tax donators, and the \$2 million would then be available for sheriff's road patrols.

JJC and jail funding is covered by those who want it, 24/7 road patrols would be funded and no new property taxes would be needed for five years or more. Fifteen deputies for road patrol could then be provided 24/7. At a cost of about \$100,000 per deputy per year, this would amount to \$1,500,000 of the \$2 million, leaving a difference of \$500,000 for the District Attorney and other needs, each year for 5 years.

The proposed levy has serious flaws: No dedicated, sustained funding for road patrols. No road patrols, no crime reduction. No crime reduction, no need for county taxpayers to pass the levy! Don't be surprised if a new levy for sheriff's patrol funding is next if the jail and JJC levy passes.

Vote NO on Measure 17-59. Don't vote for no rural road patrols and higher taxes.

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Jim Rafferty is a member of the citizens group We're for a Constitutional Government, which is campaigning against the public safety levy on the May 20 ballot. Its website address is [www.w4acg.com](http://www.w4acg.com)

**April 28, 2014. Jay Meredith. *Pro: Citizen-Driven Tax Initiative Would Restore Safety During Funding Crunch*** (Guest Opinion)

Securing Our Safety was formed during 2012's budget challenges (federal timber dollars going away) that shut down much of our county's criminal justice system. SOS, comprised of business owners, community leaders, parents, retirees and other residents, set out to explore ideas to address long-term county needs and the means to fund them.

The public safety situation facing the county is the most imminent public threat facing every resident. Even if you think you can protect yourself, your family and property 24/7/365, the fallout of our situation is affecting the safety of our roads, insurance rates, home values, quality of life, job market and more. As the situation worsens, we cannot afford to put our heads in the sand and wait for a magical solution.

SOS has learned, through exhaustive research and public input, that there is no single solution, and simply cutting expenses, as some suggest, is not a solution at all. Over the last 10 years, extreme cuts to county services and workforce have gutted the public safety system and threatened other services (such as the library) as funds are diverted from those services in an attempt to shore up public safety.

Our "citizen-voiced plan" started nearly two years ago with the input from citizens — collecting surveys and listening to input from Josephine County residents. Not only have we found out what you want out of our local public safety systems but we found out what funding solutions you desire. It was clear we all want to restore our criminal justice services to not only where they were a few years ago but better. A statistical survey amounts to about 400 to 500 people, but we collected close to 1,200 surveys of Josephine County residents quickly after our organization came together.

It has also become clear that an increase in local taxes, smaller than proposed in the past, must be part of a multi-pronged effort that will also include possible longer-term revenues generated by a lottery initiative, environmentally responsible mining and mineral development efforts, and timber harvesting on county-owned land. And we need to keep fighting on the timber equation on federal land as well. We are also working on drug and crime prevention programs that will make our county safer and the criminal justice system a more effective and efficient system.

At a simple level, we have a hole in our county's criminal justice system of at least \$12 million per year due to dwindling "federal payments." We have a revenue problem, plain and simple. SOS is very proud of what the draft of the citizen voiced plan looks like today after much work and research. However, some of the solutions in the works will take time to implement (years in some cases). The citizen-voiced plan is an intentional mix of tax and non-tax solutions that will restore health to our county and our county's public safety system and based on all the solutions favored by your input.

The five-year levy we'll vote on next month is citizen driven, not a county government initiative, and at a cost of \$1.19 per \$1,000 assessed value, is more affordable than past proposals. It will

provide about \$7.6 million in annual funding and is restricted for use in the county's criminal justice system — the system that serves the entire county whether you live in Grants Pass, Cave Junction, or in the unincorporated parts of Josephine County. Federal payments may or may not continue, but even if they do, the current level is only about \$4 million per year, and many think that won't continue. The levy will restore critical pieces of the public safety system — jail operations and re-opening of the Juvenile Justice Center. Funds currently used for limited jail services will be re-directed to increase sheriff's patrols.

Passage of the Jail/Juvenile Justice Center levy will provide a bridge to restoring our county's safety as we work to generate additional, sustainable revenues through those additional efforts outlined above. If the levy fails, even more devastating cuts are on the horizon.

We urge you to vote YES on the Jail/Juvenile Justice Center levy, Measure 17-59. If you are not yet registered to vote, you have until April 29 to register for the May 20 election. We also invite you to join our meetings and/or email list as we work together as a community to solve the challenges ahead and make Josephine County an even greater place to live. Please visit us at [www.SecuringOurSafety.org](http://www.SecuringOurSafety.org).

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Jay Meredith is president and board chairman for the nonprofit citizens group Securing Our Safety, which has been pursuing various options for public safety funding in Josephine County.

## 2013 Guest Opinions On Josephine County Levy

May 3, 2013	Jim Rafferty. <i>County Must Learn To Live Within Means</i> (Guest Opinion)
May 3, 2013	Pat Fahey. <i>Let's Control Our Destiny And Vote Yes</i> (Guest Opinion)
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### **May 3, 2013. Jim Rafferty. *County Must Learn To Live Within Means* (Guest Opinion)**

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 reneging 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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Jim Rafferty is a Grants Pass businessman.



**May 3, 2013. Pat Fahey. *Let's Control Our Destiny And Vote Yes* (Guest Opinion)**

If you are a registered voter in Josephine County, you will soon receive your ballot for the upcoming May 21 election. Depending on where you live, you may have several different issues on your ballot, but what I wish to discuss today is 17-49, the Josephine County criminal justice and public safety levy. The levy is a three-year, \$1.48 per \$1,000 additional tax on the assessed valuation of property located in Josephine County. The proceeds of this levy are to be used only for criminal justice issues.

I often get asked, "What does that mean?" A quick look at the ballot summary shows:

- Increase inmate capacity at adult jail
- Increase in number of criminal cases prosecuted by district attorney
- Provide school security program and resources
- Provide support for Animal Protection field services
- Provide Juvenile Justice services and detention
- Increase sheriff's deputies' response and patrol
- Provide support for Sheriff's Office civil services ( investigations, evidence, records and court security)

One might ask, "Why do we need this levy now, what has changed?" This question requires a little history lesson. In 1937, the federal government set aside 2.4 million acres of federal forest land for the economic benefit of 18 western Oregon counties, of which Josephine is one. For decades, the receipt of timber sales on these properties was the primary source of revenue for Josephine County. Often the sales were so good that Josephine County didn't collect its local property tax at all. That is one of the reasons that the Josephine County permanent tax rate is only 58 cents per \$1,000, the lowest rate for Oregon counties.

Since the 1980s, there has been increased pressure by the environmental community to restrict the harvest of timber, frequently using the Endangered Species Act as the basis for legal challenges. The pressure was so great and the resulting timber receipts dropped so low that the federal government stepped in with a series of safety net measures, providing declining funding for counties impacted by the loss of this revenue. In 2012, Josephine County received what appears to be the last of these payments.

So here we are in 2013 with no federal aid available to fund county government. This is a loss of \$12 million a year from what the county once received. This means the county must live with what it generates in taxes and fees. Since the criminal justice sector (district attorney, sheriff, jail) is by far the largest budget area, it must bear the largest burden of the cuts.

The cuts to criminal justice so far have been draconian. The Juvenile Justice center has closed. We have reduced the District Attorney's Office by three assistant district attorneys. The Sheriff's Office answers calls only from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. There used to be almost 200 jail beds available. Now, there are only 99, of which 30 are federally contracted, and most of

the remainder are occupied by prisoners serving mandatory terms under Measure 11, the mandatory sentencing law.

The best indicator of how far the system has fallen was highlighted last week in two separate instances. One was the daylight mugging of an elderly lady in the Applebee's parking lot, and the other was how the system dealt with the armed criminal lurking near Redwood Elementary School. He was ticketed and released.

I have often heard comments such as "I have a gun and I can protect myself." That is good. Public safety begins at home. But we should remember that there are those who cannot protect themselves: children, the elderly and the infirm. And how do we protect our belongings when we are not at home? A gun is a useful tool for self-defense, but we also need a healthy criminal justice community to investigate crimes, prosecute those accused of crimes and incarcerate those found guilty.

The levy will economically affect all. It will cost money. To see the impact of the levy, a property owner may browse to <http://www.co.josephine.or.us/> and find out the additional tax for a specific piece of property.

The cost of the levy has led many in our community to voice their opposition. They have a valid point, and I appreciate their avoiding personal attacks that so often happen during the political process. I offer them my thanks.

This is truly a values decision. Is the cost of the levy worth the level of public safety it would provide, and if we don't pass the levy, will the governor step in and impose what he considers the minimal acceptable level of services and bill us later (House Bill 3453)?

Josephine County has come to a fork in the road. Business as usual is no longer possible. We choose to control our own destiny and pay our own way by voting yes. By voting no, we let the county limp toward the abyss and see what the governor will do.

I know what my course of action will be, and I urge my fellow citizens to join me in voting yes on 17-49.

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Pat Fahey is a Grants Pass businessman who has been a spokesman for Securing Our Safety, a local citizens group trying to find ways to improve Josephine County's criminal justice system.

## 2012 Guest Opinions On Josephine County Levy

- April 27, 2012. Josephine County commissioners Simon Hare, Don Reedy and Harold Haugen. *Passage of levy crucial for county*
- April 28, 2012 Patricia Sitze. *No justification for property tax levy*
- May 15, 2012 JO CO-wide Primary Election Measure 17-43, Criminal Justice System Operations Four Year Local Option Tax (i.e., \$1.99 per \$1,000 of assessed value)

### **April 27, 2012. Josephine County commissioners Simon Hare, Don Reedy and Harold Haugen. *Passage of levy crucial for county* (Guest Opinion)**

By now you have probably heard about the criminal justice levy. The Josephine County Board of Commissioners is committed to this effort and feels it is important voters understand the facts.

The situation is serious. This is not a scare tactic.

On May 15, voters will have the opportunity — and the responsibility — to decide the future of our community. The question is simple: What level of crime are we willing to tolerate? The answer to this question is not in the hands of the district attorney, the sheriff or the county commissioners. Both the choice and the consequences are entirely up to the voters.

In putting the levy before the voters, the commissioners have sought nothing more than the minimum level of funding necessary to keep basic criminal justice functions operating. Funds from the levy will not be used for any purpose other than to fund the criminal justice system.

Why is the county asking property owners to pay more taxes in these tough times? The frank answer is that there is no other practical alternative. Congress has failed to live up to its obligation to timber counties like ours. According to the 1937 O&C Act, O&C timberlands are to be managed for "permanent forest production with timber to be sold, cut and removed for the purpose of providing a permanent source of timber supply ... and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries."

Despite this stipulation, timber production on federal lands has fallen off by more than 90 percent since the 1980s.

For years, federal funding, so-called "county payments," has paid for essential public safety services in O&C counties. That funding has declined dramatically and is unlikely to be renewed for the 2012-2013 budget year. The expected shortfall this budget year is roughly \$12 million, or a reduction of two-thirds. This is the budgetary crisis we face.

Without an immediate change in federal timber policy or reprieve from lawsuits on timber harvests, the only remaining option is to turn to our local community for the funds necessary to sustain essential criminal justice operations. This is not a long-term solution.

The board has prepared a budget with the assumption that there will not be federal funds or any additional property tax revenue for fiscal year 2012-2013. State law requires that the county adopt a balanced budget no later than June 30.

If the criminal justice levy fails, the county will see a 70 percent reduction in the public safety system.

- Jail capacity will be reduced from 150 to 30 beds for only the most violent inmates. All others — including sexual predators, those charged with breaking and entering, auto theft, assault and domestic violence — will be charged and released.
- The juvenile detention and shelter facility will be closed. Juvenile suspects will be charged and released, and the shelter for abused children will be closed.
- Deputy district attorneys will be reduced from 9 to 5. Only the most serious cases will be prosecuted. Others, including property crimes and many sexual assault and domestic violence cases, will not be prosecuted.
- No patrols in the county. Sheriff Gil Gilbertson will respond to all calls personally and only in the case of life-threatening emergencies.
- Three contract deputies will be available for backup, reduced from 21.
- The Sheriff's Office will be cut from 98 employees to 28.

In the near future, continued cuts are inevitable because this year's \$2.3 million in carryover funds will be depleted.

County and city voters must understand that we are all in this together. We all rely on the jail to house criminals and keep them off the streets. We all rely on the District Attorney's Office to prosecute cases. We all rely on the Juvenile Justice Center to care for challenged and abused youth.

We understand no one wants to pay more taxes. Government spending sometimes seems unrealistic and out of control. The commissioners began preparing for this massive revenue loss some time ago by reorganizing the workforce, consolidating departments and reducing the number of county employees from nearly 600 a few years ago to some 390 today. These changes have saved millions of dollars.

If voters turn down the levy, all city and county residents will feel the result, and the effect will last for years. Consider how increased crime affects quality of life to lower property values and impacts recruitment of new businesses and home buyers to the area. Don't be fooled, there will be a price to pay either way you vote — nothing is free.

If you vote yes, you will be voting to contain this budgetary crisis and continue funding for essential services long enough for your elected leaders to develop a long-term, sustainable fiscal plan for the county.

The decision is yours, and now is the time to act. This board will not put this issue before the voters again. You must decide, will there be meaningful law enforcement and criminal prosecution in Josephine County — or not? Vote with sober reflection on what sort of future you want for our community. Vote wisely. But above all, make sure you vote.

To learn more, please visit [www.youdecidejoco.com](http://www.youdecidejoco.com).

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Josephine County Commissioner Simon Hare was elected and took office in January 2011. Commissioner Don Reedy was appointed in August to replace retiring Commissioner Dwight Ellis, while Commissioner Harold Haugen was appointed in January to replace former Commissioner Sandi Cassanelli, who was recalled.

Editor's note: A "no" on the levy Guest Opinion will be published Saturday.

**April 28, 2012. Patricia Sitze. *No justification for property tax levy* (Guest Opinion)**

Let me introduce myself. I am an average Josephine County homeowner. I am not against property taxes, but I am against how this levy has been presented. Too often, the discussions have been negative projections of what will happen to our citizens if it is not passed. The commissioners, our sheriff and those who want this levy to pass are already laying the blame on our doorsteps if we don't agree with them.

A lot of us on fixed incomes are trying to find ways to obtain a good, healthy and fun lifestyle, within a very limited budget. Things are tight for us, and it's unfair to place additional burdens on only the property owners of Josephine County. One commissioner has even said, "The seniors will just have to suck it up."

Are you satisfied with the job the commissioners are doing or with the promises given by those running for those seats? If not, now is the time to say so.

Let's look at some of the issues:

Even if we pass the additional \$1.99 per \$1,000 of assessed property value levy, it will not prevent layoffs and keep the county at its current level of operation.

They say if we don't give them what they want, the county will fall apart. That's not the truth. They are working on a budget for fiscal year 2012-13 if the levy doesn't pass. The county will continue to function after June 30.

The commissioners and the candidates have said repeatedly that the citizens run Josephine County and that by our votes, we speak. So why didn't they listen to us in the past, and why aren't they listening now? The public has been involved by giving input, offering solutions and proposing new avenues, but the commissioners have not considered what the public has expressed.

We need to break the same old cycle of the commissioners coming back again and again asking us to raise our property taxes, so they can continue to spend. Until the commissioners do something different, we need to speak clearly with a "no" vote.

The Board of Commissioners approves the budget and makes the decisions of how, where and when to spend property tax money that we give them. They are responsible for the decisions they make. But too often, they complain that they don't have enough of our money. Wouldn't we all love to have more money in our budgets?

Just as we all are doing at home, now is the time to tell them to tighten the belt and trim the fat.

Secondly, businesses will suffer if this levy passes. They will have to raise prices, which will affect our ability to purchase goods and services in Josephine County. Some businesses may even fail. Look around and see the empty buildings with no prospects of filling them. This additional levy will not help our overall economic situation.

In the midst of all of this, the commissioners bought new chairs, funded several trips out of the county and are considering raising salaries. Why didn't they put all they could into the sheriff's budget, postponing some of these items?

They could also negotiate and renegotiate with the unions to cut salaries and benefits, reduce work hours, merge departments and use more volunteers.

Also, the sheriff has said he would use, to the best of his ability, the money given to him, and he would seek other sources of funding. Instead, he chose to accelerate his spending, starting in 2009.

I don't have all the answers, but the commissioners and the sheriff don't have the answers either. All they have proposed is to give them more of our money by paying higher property taxes for four years, and they will run Josephine County as it has been.

We can do much better. Stand with me and vote "no" on this levy.

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Editor's note: A "yes" on the levy Guest Opinion by the Josephine County commissioners was published Friday.