

'No' on tax levies might stop sheriff

By Michele Matassa
Of the Emerald

Lane County taxpayers must decide today how much their pocketbooks will affect their votes as they respond to a request for \$2.9 million in property taxes for county law enforcement purposes.

If voters hold their wallets too tightly, they may jeopardize their own safety, according to county officials.

The sheriff's office will have to cut police patrol and criminal investigations if the \$2.9 million "A" ballot fails today, says Bob McManus, a lieutenant with the sheriff's office.

That means if the office gets a call from someone in county jurisdiction — areas not covered by Eugene or Springfield police departments — "then we can't send anybody," McManus says.

Those calls would have to be switched to the state police, he says.

Included in the area patrolled by the sheriff's office are Marcola, River Road and the Hayden Bridge area.

Also on the ballot are separate levies for sheriff's office prisoner transport (\$842,697), district attorney's office (\$386,517), juvenile department (\$151,686), assessment and taxation (\$505,618), rat and mosquito control (\$168,538).

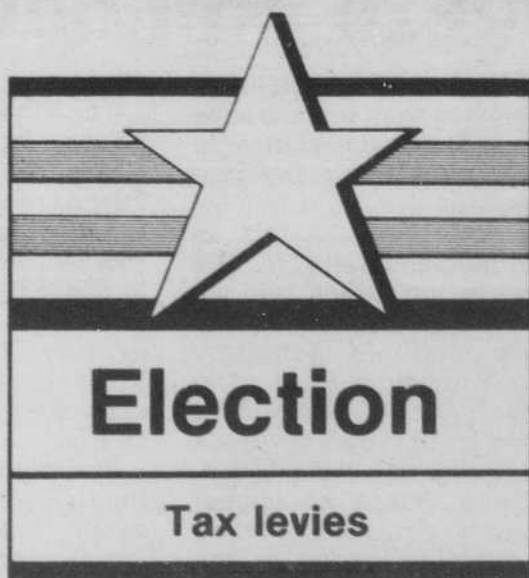
These measures, on the "B" and "C" ballots, cannot pass if the "A" ballot fails. This provision results from state legislation enacted about four years ago, McManus says.

"If the ('A') levy does not pass we will be doing the best job we can," he says. But citizens will not be as safe "because there will not be enough police officers on the street."

"What are criminals going to do? Go out into the country — into the easy-pickin' area — and commit crimes," McManus says.

"There are people out there who are certainly subject to criminal activity such as burglary," he says.

If measure two fails, only six people will be available to extradite prisoners and to



transport them to court, the state penitentiary, and mental institutions, McManus says.

"They will not be able to effectively handle that. And then there would be no one to augment that section because there will be no patrol section," he says.

The sheriff's office alone will have to lay off 50 to 60 employees if the levies fail, he says.

The jail is already 20 people understaffed so failure of the measures would extend this shortfall, McManus says.

And if the levy is a success, the sheriff's office would "by no means" be brought up to standard.

The office would simply "operate at maintenance levels," he says.

If all the measures do pass, county property tax would increase by \$21.60 for taxpayers owning \$60,000 homes. The increase equals about 36 cents per \$1,000 in property value, McManus says.

Citizens for Effective Law Enforcement and Advocates for Lane County have endorsed the law enforcement levy, McManus says.

When asked to predict the success or failure of today's levy, McManus says he can't objectively forecast the outcome of the election because he is "so hopeful" it will pass.

"How do you ask (that of) someone whose career decides on whether the 'A' ballot passes?"

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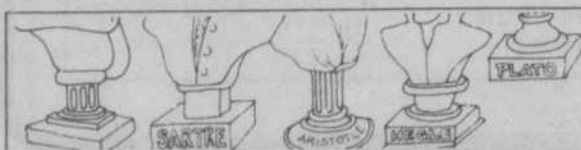
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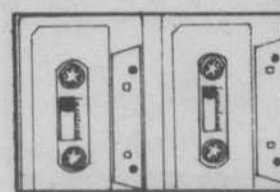
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