

Community_ **EWEB** approves water rate hike

By Stephanie Mencimer Emerald Reporter

Eugene Water and Electric Board customers will see their bills go up by almost 10 percent beginning April 3, a decision made in the midst of continued controversy over the firing of EWEB general manager Jean Reeder.

The EWEB board voted 5-0 in favor of raising water, steam and electric rates at a public hearing Monday. The utility raised electric rates one year ago by 7 percent, but the 5 percent water rate increase is the first in eight years.

The rate increase is needed primarily to pay for electricity from the new Smith Creek hydroelectric plant in Idaho, according to a written statement by Tom Santee, EWEB public information officer.

The 9.4 percent rate increase is about 2 percent higher than

originally proposed earlier this year, due to a shortage of cash reserves that EWEB commissioners cited as one reason for firing Reeder in late February.

Several members of the community have filed to run in the May primary against two of the EWEB commissioners who were responsible for firing Reeder.

Jack Craig, former EWEB commissioner. and Susie Smith. a land-use planner from Springfield, have filed to run against incumbent Randy Thwing in the at-large seat. Jack Delay, former Eugene city councilman, has applied to run against Dennis Solin, the incumbent in Wards four and five.

On Tuesday, representatives from Citizens for a Responsible EWEBoard political action committee delivered petitions with nearly 10,000 signatures to city election workers to recall Solin and Thwing for violating the spirit of the Oregon public meetings law when they decided to fire Reeder.

Christina Davis, a recall organizer, said the coalition is close to having enough signatures to also recall commissioner Rob Willis.

The elections workers have 10 full days to count and verify the signatures, said Kathy Fieland, Deputy City Recorder.

Davis said volunteers collected the required number of signatures in only 24 days, even though organizers had 90 days to accomplish their goal.

'It was an incredible volunteer effort." Davis said. "The response from the public was wonderful. People from out of the area came to us asking if they could sign petitions and we had to turn them away.

Davis said the main opposition to the recall has been mainly from retired EWEB employees who think Reeder cut their retirement benefits. However, she said the purpose for the recall is not to bring back Reeder, but to demand responsibility from public officials.

However, even if it qualifies. the recall may not be on the May ballot because of the number of issues and candidates facing voters this year.

Dave Spriggs, Lane County Elections Supervisor said. This is probably the most complicated election in my 13 years with the county.

If the recall is not on the May 15 ballot, it may be placed on a special paper ballot on May 15 or in a special election after the May primary.



