

from the editor...

First of all, a Happy New Year to everyone!

This month, we start publishing *Vernonia's Voice* twice a month, and we're pretty excited about it! You can look for the second issue this month on January 26th-- after that, we should be out and around on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. We have split some of our regular contributors, so you will find some of their columns in the first issue each month and some in the second. We will continue to bring you Vernonia city news and area news, as well community events and happenings in each issue. We hope you continue to enjoy reading about Vernonia and our surrounding area in each edition.

This month, we are adding a couple of new features. Randy Sanders, a friend of the *Voice* since just about the very beginning, and

an occasional contributor, has agreed to write a somewhat regular column we are calling "Between the Lines." Randy is particularly interested in Columbia County politics and social issues and likes to speak up for the little guy. Randy is a long-time resident of Columbia County and a critic of... well, just about anything he thinks is wrong. Watch for his ongoing commentary on life in our region as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Also, this month we wave goodbye to P.J. O'Leary's "Voices In My Head" column, at least temporarily, and say hello to "Voices From the Crowd," a new column. P.J. seems to believe that he has misplaced his sense of humor, and is taking some time to see if he can relocate it. In the meantime, we hope to fill that space with thoughts, ramblings and musings from other

locals-- folks who have something on their mind-- or on their chest-- and feel the need to be heard. If you are one of those people-- someone who has a criticism, an observation, a revelation, or a funny story-- please send them our way and you might find yourself as one of our "Voices From the Crowd." Your thoughts don't necessarily have to be humorous (it's hard enough to write something for publication, without the added pressure of having to be funny as well-- just ask P.J.), just have something that pertains to life in Northwest Oregon, that you think others might find interesting. Oh yes-- and try to keep it to around 800 words.

Here's hoping the New Year finds you happy, healthy, and humorous-- and not necessarily in that order.

Scott Laird
Editor and Publisher

An Opinion: Lets Look at Measures 66 and 67 Honestly

By Scott Laird

I just received my Voters' Pamphlet for the upcoming special election in Oregon on Measures 66 and 67. I also recently I received an email concerning that upcoming special election. In case you've been living in a cave (or in Vernonia), were wrapped up in the holidays, or haven't opened the voters' pamphlet yet, Measures 66 and 67 would veto tax increases signed into law by Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski. Here's how part of that email I received read:

"Measures 66 & 67 ask very rich people and large corporations to pay a little more in taxes so that schools can stay open, poor kids can be on the Oregon Health Plan, and the old and 'disabled' get adequate care. What an outrage! We feel that the burden of running society should be squarely on the backs of its middle and lower classes. The rich and corporate business community have long been exempt from paying a fair share of taxes, and we want to ask you now: why change a good thing?"

"The rich and powerful corporate interests have recognized the need to protect ourselves; we've already put nearly two million dollars into funding the anti-tax efforts, now we need your help!"

"Legislators say it's only a tax on the rich. They're right! It's not that we won't be able to still afford our country club memberships, gas for our Hummers and other "needs," like cooking classes in Italy... it's just that we don't want to pay more!"

Now this was obviously written tongue-in-cheek with just a hint of sarcasm, and it comes from people obviously trying to make a point. But it certainly got my attention.

At a recent Town Hall meeting in Vernonia, State Senator Betsy Johnson informed the audience that they could expect a maelstrom (my word, not hers--pun intended) of political information in our mailboxes in January concerning this special election. What I didn't realize--since I live in cave-- was that this special election takes place on January 26th, now just a few weeks away.

Measure 66 raises taxes on adjusted gross incomes above \$250,000 for households, \$125,000 for individual filers. It eliminates income taxes on the first \$2,400 of unemployment benefits received in 2009. It raises an estimated \$472 million to provide funds currently budgeted for education, health care, public safety, and other services.

Measure 67 raises the current \$10 corporate minimum tax, (that's right, many corporations that do business in Oregon only pay \$10 in taxes each year) establishing a \$150 minimum tax for most businesses or a minimum tax of approximately 1% of total Oregon revenues for corporations with over \$500,000 in Oregon

revenues. And it raises an estimated \$255 million to provide funds currently budgeted for education, health care, public safety and other services.

You will notice I underlined currently budgeted. That means if Measures 66 and 67 fail, cuts will have to be made in the current state budget, which, from my understanding, is already pretty tight.

What else about these measures is significant? Did you know Oregon hasn't raised or updated its minimum corporate tax since 1931?

97.5% of taxpayers will NOT see their taxes increased if 66 and 67 are passed.

Partnerships, LLCs, LLPs and S corporations will pay a flat \$150 corporate minimum.

Sole proprietorships will continue to pay \$0 in corporate taxes.

In other words, most of the people you and I know will not be directly affected by these increases.

Paging through the voters pamphlet it is obvious there are strong and organized campaigns on both sides of the issue, and there is strong opposition to these tax hikes, which is not surprising. But the campaign against tax increases is focused on claiming these are job-killing taxes that target small and family run businesses and the middle class.

To me, raising the minimum corporate tax from \$10 to \$150 only seems fair and would not be a huge burden on businesses. The increase in revenue taxes only applies to businesses with Oregon revenues over \$500,000--at a rate of 1%. Which, in my mind, is not your regular family business.

Another point--the income tax increase is only on filers with over \$125,000 of adjusted gross income. Again, according to the voters' pamphlet, less than 3% of personal income tax filers will see a tax increase if these measures pass. And they are not huge increases--a filer who earns between \$250,000 and \$499,000 would see an average change of \$3,000.

Reading through the voters' guide, it seems to me that the businesses and others who oppose these tax increases are just regurgitating information that has been fed to them. They keep talking about companies having to pay up to \$100,000 in taxes and 70,000 jobs lost. You read it over and over in many of the arguments against these measures. According to my calculations, at a rate of 1% for a business to have to pay \$100,000 in taxes they would have to have sales of \$10 million dollars. Again, not your regular family business.

No one likes to see taxes increase, especially corporations who might see it affect the salaries of their executives and their bonuses. Yes, eventually tax increases get passed down the line to consumers. Yes, some businesses will have to pay more in taxes and fees. But really, what this tax increase does is take the



reflecting the spirit of our community

Publisher and Managing Editor
Scott Laird
503-367-0098
scott@vernoniasvoice.com

News Editor Scott Laird	Contributors April Bamburg Shawn Boutwell Nancy Burch Kim Camarda Dawn Carr Jill Hult Pauline King DeAnna Pearl Randy Sanders Burt Tschache
Copy Editor Dennis Nicks	
Photography Scott Laird Sandy Welch Nicole Whiteman	

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PO Box 55
Vernonia, OR 97064
503-367-0098

www.VernoniasVoice.com

burden of state services off the backs of small business and lower-to-middle income families, and puts it where it belongs--on large corporations, big businesses, and high-income earners.

From what I can see the immediate impact of rejecting these increases could be more profound--direct cuts to jobs and service levels in education, public safety, and health care. Which I think more directly impacts our communities and our friends and neighbors.

One argument against these increases is that state government needs to control spending and not increase it. But in bad economic times, citizens become more dependent on state services. More people rely on assistance to get through tough times so state spending increases. And so does the need for revenue.

I believe it's time corporations who do business in this state pay their share and support the services that benefit us all. I encourage you to take some time to read the voters' pamphlet and educate yourself, not just accept the political propaganda on TV or that arrives through the mail.

I think some very deep pockets are trying to influence the outcome of this election by not talking honestly about how these taxes affect Oregonians.

This one is important--make sure you know what you are voting for.

VERNONIA'S VOICE
IS NOW PUBLISHED
TWICE EACH
MONTH! LOOK FOR
OUR NEXT ISSUE
JANUARY 26TH.