

# An Opinion: A Tale of Two Counties

By Randy Sanders

*"It's very difficult economic times, and people are very hesitant to have any tax. But they recognize that they've got to have this, and they recognize that there's no alternative."*

Those are the words of Lane County Sheriff, Tom Turner after his county finally passed their jail levy after nine failures (since 1998). In 2013 citizens had witnessed the crime situation deteriorate long enough. Taxpayers watched in horror each time the local news showed deputies opening jail doors allowing a parade of gleeful sex offenders, assault perpetrators, wife beaters and drug dealers scurry out into the sunlight, high-fiving each other with freshly lit cigarettes clenched between their smiling lips.

One Lane county single mom remarked, "How do I respond to my 8-year-old when he asks me, 'Mom, how come those bad guys get to be released from jail?'"

But the more difficult question actually came from her 13-year-old girl who noticed that one of the released men had been arrested for sexual assault, "Why are they letting those gross men back out? Aren't they still dangerous?" The only answer she gave her young daughter was the truth. "I told her that yes, they are still dangerous and that the voting-age adults just don't want to pay their taxes to support a jail."

Stories like these are met with suspicion along with sweeping accusations of being "scare tactics." But the truth is, they are factual stories that are scary. Without the threat of jail time, what motivation does a criminal have to show up for court dates?

Consider this: deputies arrive at a domestic dispute to find a man who has assaulted his wife. Without a county jail, they can't incarcerate him. In certain instances, keeping a man who has physically assaulted his wife behind bars for even just one night can be all that comes between a woman's life and death, or being severely beaten. It's usually enough time for her and her terrified children to grab a few things and take refuge somewhere safe before he returns. But without a jail, he'll be given a ticket and the deputies drive away. In some very severe situations like rape or murder, deputies and judges will have to decide -- even by phone in the middle of the night -- which of the current inmates occupying those ten rental beds in another county get to go free in order to make room for the new one.

But remember, with two of those beds being occupied by accused murderers -- one being the man who killed Rainier Police Chief Ralph Painter -- that leaves only eight remaining. It's also important to note that all of those inmates being released are already inmates who have committed very serious crimes.

Times are difficult in Oregon, but Lane County stepped up and did the right thing for themselves. Josephine County however did not. In the year since they have rejected levy 1749, the situation has deteriorated even worse than in Lane County. Slightly larger than Columbia County, Josephine has already seen three murders, one being a horrific stabbing. It's now common place to see vehicles barreling through town at speeds of over 85-miles per hour. Heroin and methamphetamine deals are done in broad daylight, just

outside the cafe. Fights have become so common in local watering holes, that their business has plummeted.

Oddly enough, some of the worst of Josephine County's problems now falls in the laps of the rest of us Oregonians. I testified in favor of making more funds available for OSP patrols just a few years ago in front of a legislative sub-committee down in Salem. OSP had lost so many troopers that 24-hour coverage no longer existed in many areas. Oregonians were so steaming mad, that ten new troopers were finally added to the roll last year. Oregonians now have a new reason to be mad, this time not at the legislature. You see, once voters in Josephine County voted down the levy -- essentially failing to pay their public safety taxes -- the environment became far too dangerous for many families. Once ten state troopers were added, five of them were immediately sent down to manage Josephine County's public safety problem, thus mooching off the rest of the state who were waiting patiently for those troopers earmarked for the rest of us who pay our public safety taxes, at least for now. I'm looking at you Columbia County. They also tied up our state detectives. In the past year alone, OSP investigations in Josephine County climbed from five, to an unheard of 85 per month!

In May, Columbia County will have a choice as well: vote "Yes," enabling us to keep our jail open and our community safe like Lane County did; or vote "No" and turn into the latest crime free-for-all like our neighbors, Josephine County.

It's your choice.

VERNONIA'S  
*voice*  
reflecting the spirit of our community

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# Oregon Humanities Discussion About Food and Citizenship

By Jennifer Moloney

Oregon is famous for its food – for its long traditions in agriculture and fisheries, and also for its role in the movement to promote whole food in communities, schools, and home kitchens. In addition to the daily practice of cooking and eating, many Oregonians also think, talk, and write about food. Might our relationship to food production, preparation, and consumption create deeper connections to our place and our neighbors and a pathway to increased self-sufficiency?

This is the focus of "We Are What We Eat: Connecting Food and

Citizenship," a free conversation with Wendy Willis on Saturday, April 26, 2014 at 4:00 p.m. at the Vernonia Public Library. This program is hosted by Friends of the Vernonia Library and the Vernonia Library Board and sponsored by Oregon Humanities.

Willis is a poet, essayist, and national leader in civic engagement and collaborative governance. She serves as executive director of the Policy Consensus Initiative, a national nonprofit organization housed at Portland State University devoted to improving democratic governance. Her first book of poems, Blood Sisters of the Republic, was released in 2012.

Through the Conversation Project, Oregon Humanities offers free programs that engage community members in thoughtful, challenging conversations about ideas critical to our daily lives and our state's future. For more information about this free community discussion, please contact the Vernonia Public Library at 503-429-1818 or library@vernonia-or.gov.

Oregon Humanities (813 SW Alder St, #702; Portland, OR 97205) connects Oregonians to ideas to change lives and transform communities. More information about Oregon Humanities' programs and publications, which

include the Conversation Project, Think & Drink, Humanity In Perspective, Idea Lab, Public Program Grants, and Oregon Humanities magazine, can be found at oregonhumanities.org. Oregon Humanities is an independent, nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities and a partner of the Oregon Cultural Trust.

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