

Candidates Discuss Issues at Two Forums *continued from page 7*

Taxing Natural Resources

The candidates also had differing opinions on the use of taxes on natural resources as a funding source.

Hyde said Columbia County is the only county in Oregon that taxes aggregate. "I think it's a good thing and we use that to fund our road department, but I don't think we should use an aggregate tax to build everything we need. What's next, a tax on the 518 small woodlands owners on their trees? So, no I'm not big on taxing natural resources." Hyde later pointed out that the depletion fee was enacted as a voter initiative and the County Commissioners do not have the ability to rewrite it on their own, as an ordinance.

Yarbor agreed with Hyde, noting that he was criticized for receiving campaign funding from companies that mine aggregate. "That doesn't mean I have to do them favors," said Yarbor. "I never looked at it that way. As long as

they comply with the law, I'll support them. I support all business and industry in the county." Yarbor went on to explain that the current \$0.15/ton depletion fee raises \$400,000 to help repair the roads. "If we raise that fee and take the money and give it to another government agency, that's just like taxing the people because the people will end up paying it anyway."

Preheim said he thinks the aggregate tax is good and fair but hasn't been increased in years. He criticized the fact that when the fee was designed, it was created as a static tax with no automatic adjustment for inflation. "That was a bad bill. It should be rewritten and that fee should go up." Preheim also disagreed with Hyde's assessment of how the depletion could be changed. "As far as it requiring an initiative, that's what the County Commissioners can do. They have to have a public hearing and then they can place it on the ballot, like the CC Rider initiative that is on this

ballot. They could decide at any time to adjust that ordinance and put it out for a vote. They don't need a voter initiative, and have had plenty of years to do it," said Preheim.

Magruder said all natural resources are already taxed in the form of property taxes. "I think we could get carried away in dividing everything up into taxable units. We all pay property taxes, the timber companies pay a harvest tax, and the aggregate pay a depletion fee. We even pay a tax in a form when we buy a license to fish. I'm not sure how much we want to depend on one segment of our natural resource industries to support us."

Tardif suggested reviewing all ordinances to be sure they are all in compliance with their original intent. He noted that there aren't other 'value added' taxes like the depletion fee and discussed how the county used to work in partnership with corporate loggers to create beneficial tradeoffs. "Now what we see is all the timber being harvested, all the gates are being shut, and all the raw materials are being shipped out of the county to be processed," said Tardif. "There are no jobs here and that was the point of these laws when they were enacted - to create jobs for local economies. If that's not what they're doing then they need to be reevaluated." He also suggested that an audit of the depletion fees needs to be done to make sure the county is receiving what they are owed.

Funding CC Rider Transit

When asked how they would propose to fund and operate the Columbia County Rider transportation system, all candidates agreed that the county needs a transit system and almost all agreed that a Special Transit District might not be the best idea, but had differing and limited ideas about other ways to fund it.

Tardif stated that history has shown that special tax districts don't always work. "I want to see CC Rider funded and be a viable transportation system for our seniors, for our youth, for people who don't drive and want to get to Portland or Astoria," said Tardif. "The question is, how do we fund it?" Tardif suggested a model like Tri-Met uses to tax employers, but noted that Columbia County doesn't have enough large employers to make that work. He said he has spoken with people who have other ideas about how to fund it, but gave no other examples. He also noted that the county misses out on matching funds

and admitted that right now the only solution to bridging the funding solution is a special transit district.

Hyde noted that there are only two transit systems in Oregon that don't have a tax base to support them. "We have to have some type of supplement to make our transit system work," said Hyde.

Yarbor said he supports CC Rider but restated that he is against more taxes and stated when asked about the ballot measure, "If we give it to them now, how much will they want next time? I would support it 100% if they would run it like a business and I think people would be more likely to fund them if they did."

Preheim said he is against a transit district, noting that the county has a poor record of mismanaging special districts. He specifically criticized the upcoming election for the Board of Directors, stating that they were hand selected. "I think that's how we get the mismanagement that we've had," said Preheim. He suggested a payroll tax as a way to fund the system. He stated that CC Rider is not being transparent in how they are advertising the need for a transit district for seniors and veterans, when, in fact, the funding would be used to increase fixed route service. Preheim also questioned the qualifications of Transit Director Janet Wright. "She is a grant writer, not a transit coordinator and we need to hire someone who does that for a living." Preheim later stated, "Being a leader in the county is not always waiting to see what the voters say, but saying what you think yourself and being able to make a decision. You can't always have a survey when you want to make a decision. You have to be able to say how you feel, whether it's going to be popular or not."

Magruder took exception to Preheim's statement that special districts are mismanaged. She stated that the Commissioners would have a chance to listen to the voters on the ballot measure and then would have to either go back to the drawing board to find a way to fund it if rejected, or provide the proper oversight if approved.

Conn was the one dissenting voice when she said she approves of the idea of a special district and said Columbia County citizens need to invest in a transit district. Conn said a payroll tax is not a good idea. "We're trying to attract businesses, not encumber them."

ELECT JOEL YARBOR COUNTY COMMISSIONER

Like the first time I ran for County Commissioner, I feel our County is in trouble and going in the wrong direction. I'm running for my family and yours to ensure our kids and grandkids have a future in Columbia County, where they can work, live and raise a family like I have been blessed.

- * I have a proven track record in creating jobs and business driven tax revenues
- * Being a Veteran, I will diligently work to support the Veteran's of our County
- * I have the experience during hard times, balancing the County's budget 4 years in a row
- * I fought to keep taxes low while maintaining essential services
- * I worked to streamline the permitting process before and will do so again
- * Experienced and ready to start working for you Day One

- * I will work to keep the County doors open 5 days a week, if the County is not open for business how can we attract businesses.
- * I'll create a path, like many cities have, to create a mother-in-law housing ordinance and expand it to a family ordinance to help relieve our housing shortage
- * I'll work with public transportation to ensure we have necessary transportation for Veterans to the Veterans Hospital without raising taxes
- * I'll work hard every day to ensure your tax dollars are spent wisely and to the benefit of all our residents
- * I'll work to improve safety on Highway 30

My priority will be creating jobs and tax revenues from businesses. Working with the Port and the Building Department to ensure any potential business finds our County open for business and eager to help them succeed in starting or relocating in Columbia County



Terry's Gym



JOIN
THE TEAM!

503-901-1705
16720 Noakes Rd. Vernonia

True Value® START RIGHT. START HERE.™

Get Your Garden Ready

- Lawn Care Supplies • Insect Control
- Trimmer Line • Hoses • Seeds
- Potting Soil • Garden Tools

Family owned & operated for over 45 years
834 Bridge St., Vernonia (503) 429-6364



Don't Sell it!
Pawn it!
For fast
cash!



Baseline Pawn, Inc.

2245 Baseline St., Cornelius
(Across from Fred Meyer)
503-530-8119
State Licensed PB-0388

Open
everyday
at 9 a.m.