# Funds hang in balance

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contingent of some 100 officials from AOC member counties. They'll visit the offices of the appropriate officials to pitch the plan for extension.

Chairman Dwight Ellis of the county board said that the goal is to secure the funding for another seven years. That would give counties time to prepare for not receiving the funding.

Commissioners have been notified by members of Congress that they have support from the administration to appropriate the money for at least one more year.

A one-year extension would provide up to $401 million nationally for 700 rural counties in more than 40 states. Oregon's share, combined with receipts from federal timber sales, could total approximately $270 million.

"Acknowledging the difficulty in a multiyear reauthorization of this program prior to the Sept. 30, 2006, expiration of the program's authority, we commit to working with you to enact a one-year extension of the program, at full funding levels, and finding mutually acceptable offsets," wrote Mark Rey, undersecretary of agriculture for Natural Resources and the Environment, in a letter to U.S. Sens. Gordon Smith, Ron Wyden and Larry E. Craig.

"The administration's commitment to work with Congress for a fully funded one-year extension of the current program is important and welcome news, but it does not make it a done deal," said a letter addressed to county officials from AOC officials.

"We still need to find funding sources for the offsets," the letter continued. "It is a very difficult budget environment right now, but we are working with our team of lobbyists in Washington, D.C. to identify and secure a menu of potential funding sources to offset the cost of the safety net for the proposed one-year extension or the six-year reauthorization…"

The letter was signed by Gil Riddell, AOC policy manager, and Curry County resident Rocky McVay, executive director of O&C Counties Association.

"Reauthorization is critical for Oregon's counties and schools," the letter continues. "We continue to work for full reauthorization. Nevertheless, we need to view the administration's commitment for a one-year fully funded extension as a positive step."

Hopes are that a full extension of the funds for rural schools and counties can be enacted by year-end.

Some Oregon counties, including Josephine, need the money or county services will be slashed.

**ILLINOIS VALLEY SENIOR CENTER held a hoe-down and ice cream social Saturday evening, Aug. 26. Music was provided by a group of Illinois Valley tuneful aficionados. (Top photo from left) Adam Miller, Scott Taylor, Doug Kendall, Paul Weller, Gail Middleton, and Robert Hirning. (Left photo, from left) Mick Shepherd, Paul Weller, and Gail Middleton. Those attending the event said that such evenings are typical of the fun activities provided by the senior center.**
**(Photos courtesy of Jess 'My batteries died' Goldtrap)**

# CJ Council hears county facing titanic money pit

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general fund discretionary revenues. Without O&C, it would receive during the next fiscal year $808,297, a drop of more than $1 million.

*During the next fiscal year, the Health Services Division would receive $352,382, a decrease of $473,597.

*The library system would be given $394,627; a reduction of $530,373.

*The planning program funding would diminish from $372,624 to $158,970.

*Instead of $938,299 the forestry program would realize a cut of $537,998.

*During the current fiscal year, the offices of the county board, assessor, clerk, district attorney, legal counsel, surveyor and treasurer received $3,025,504; but without O&C the amount would drop to $1,290,752, a cut of $1.7 million.

With all that in mind, Raffenburg points out that significant increases in the county tax rate could be forthcoming.

"The county now collects only 58-cents per $1,000 assessed property valuation," he notes, adding that it is "the lowest rate in Oregon" and that it brings slightly less than $3 million per year in property taxes.

"The shortfall from the loss of O&C will be $15 million" which equates, he said, to "$3 in new tax assessment per $1,000 just to make up for the loss."

He further projects that a property tax rate totaling $4.78 could be necessary for fiscal '08-'09 "just to deliver the same levels of service in place today."

Results he lists:

*Services will decrease or disappear.

*Taxes will rise to keep current services.

*There will be a combination of program and service cuts and new tax revenues.

A loss of "a minimum of 150" of the 600 county employees is forecast in a worst-case scenario between fiscal '06-'07 and '07-'08 without continuation of O&C.

Raffenburg reports that the board of commissioners has been addressing the potential lack of funds. "Changes have occurred and more are coming," he notes.

"During the past six months we have worked to accomplish three very important changes so that the county would be in position to deal with the effects of the revenue cuts and shortfalls." He lists them as follows:

*"Changing the management style within county government to make it more efficient, flexible and accountable.

*"Changing the county organizational structure by reducing the number of departments from 12 to four. It will help reduce costs by allowing the natural economies of scale to be applied to like-kind services by having one department director instead of three or four."

He further cites "controlling personnel costs." New nonunion personnel rules, adopted by resolution by the commissioners, "brings the cost of benefits paid to employees into line with other similarly sized public and private employers in our region.

"Gone are the nine-weeks paid leaves, multiple benefit plans and automatic pay increases," said Raffenburg in his report. "Without the specter of losing $15 million in federal revenue," he said, "it may have been possible to control costs without a significant loss of program services. But the loss of this revenue will affect services.

"Without the $15 million, everyone in Josephine County will be forced to decide which of these newly unfunded or under-funded services, if any, they are willing to pay for directly."

# Two-alarm apartment fire injures one; $100k damage

One resident was burned in a two-alarm apartment fire, but others in the two-story dwelling escaped injury, said Grants Pass Dept. of Public Safety (GPDPS), which estimated damage at $100,000.

The blaze at the four-unit apartment at 1735 Medart Lane was reported at 9:29 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 27. First-arriving units reported that the building was "fully involved." Three apartments were occupied.

A second alarm was issued, bringing units from Illinois Valley Fire District, Rural/Metro Fire Dept., and Rogue River Fire District. In all, seven engines, a ladder truck, a firefighter support unit, and an American Medical Response (AMR) ambulance responded.

Reported as suffering burns and smoke inhalation was John James Murphy, 53. AMR took him to Three Rivers Community Hospital, where he was being treated for burns and smoke inhalation.

During the course of extinguishing flames, firefighters found a pet cat in one apartment. The cat, "due to smoke inhalation, was limp and unresponsive." AMR medics revived the animal, and it was turned over to Josephine County Animal Control because the owner was unavailable.

There were no reported injuries to emergency personnel. GPDPS is investigating the cause of the fire.

# OLCC aims enforcement work to prevent sales to underage

Local law enforcement agencies and the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) are stepping up compliance checks of liquor sellers this year and finding that the sales-to-minor rate is down slightly from 2005.

During the first six months of 2006, OLCC, police and sheriff's deputies tested 1,025 liquor businesses on their ID-checking practices: 772 licensees or their employees said, "No sale" to the minor, while 253 made the sale. This is a 75 percent compliance rate, up from 72 percent for all of 2005, OLCC noted.

During 2005, OLCC and local law officers conducted 1,132 compliance checks; 329 licensees sold to the minor, but 813 refused -- a 72 percent compliance rate.

During a compliance test, OLCC or police send in a minor volunteer who attempts to buy alcohol from the business. Under Oregon law, alcohol sellers are required to examine the ID of anyone who appears 26 or younger.

"Our goal is to check at least 1,500 liquor businesses in 2006 and to reach an 80 percent or higher compliance rate," said Linda Ignowski, director of OLCC's Enforcement and Compliance Services Division.



**All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded the individual.**
**- Albert Einstein -**