

could impact refurbishing programs such as ours. HB 2626, introduced on Feb. 8, requires all manufacturers of computers, computer monitors and televisions to register annually with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

The manufacturer must indicate their intent to participate in a "manufacturer program" or the "contractor program" to provide the collection, transportation and recycling of

the three items. The manufacturer program is provided by a single manufacturer or group of manufacturers. The contractor program is overseen by DEQ and may be administered by a third party. Both programs provide a statewide system for the recycling of electronic devices. The bill prohibits charging a fee for collection of the three items.

What has happened to other nonprofit refurbishers nationally where these laws have

been created is that they cannot capture the material for reuse prior to recycling. I know of refurbishers in California who are paying to ship monitors into the state so they have monitors to give away with the computers they refurbish. Yikes!

Here are some facts: U.S. schools currently need 9 million additional PCs. U.S. charities need an additional 4.2 million PCs. Students of color are 30 percent less likely to

have a PC in the home. Ten thousand PCs per week are disposed of by the federal government. One hundred thousand PCs per day are disposed of by corporations and individuals.

If you like what NextStep does to bridge the digital divide in Oregon (we have refurbished 10,000 computers so far), please contact your legislators and let them know you support the importance of reuse before recycling. Rep. Jackie Dingfelder (D-HD45), is

viewpoint BY PETE SORENSON

Repeating the Past

Or a new approach for Lane County?

In order to continue to serve the public well, Lane County government needs more money. The question is, how do we get there? After more than 10 years of serving the citizens of Lane County, it's my opinion that enacting a flat rate income tax or placing such a tax on the May 2007 ballot is definitely not the way to get that badly needed revenue. In fact, I fear that this is a tragedy that will make it that much harder in the long run for Lane County to make the case to the citizens that more money is desperately needed.

First, a little history. October 30, 2000, was a great day for Lane County. That was the day that President Bill Clinton signed the "forest county payments law." The law gave Lane County an estimated \$47 million each year for six years. Of that amount, \$20 million could be spent on our county's general needs, \$20 million could be spent for our county's roads and \$7 million could be spent for our county's education service districts and the school children they support.

The recent votes by the U.S. House and the floor vote on the amendment in the U.S. Senate reaffirmed the intent of Congress to honor the federal government's responsibility. The Senate vote on March 28, 2007, was 75 to 22 to approve Senator Wyden's amendment for continued federal forest and desert county funding, a huge bipartisan show of support. Congressman Peter DeFazio had previously gotten funding in the House-passed bill. Was this all we wanted? No, but it will give us some more time for policy makers to keep working on the longer term federal solution. Perhaps in the future the federal government could make the payments to us based upon the amount of carbon federal forests sequester?

But more than six years after that day when President Clinton signed the temporary law, Lane County faces major problems. The first is that the county government, which has served people here for longer than Oregon has been a state, doesn't have enough revenue. I point out to my conservative friends that our tax base is the lowest in the state and that we get the smallest amount of revenue of any Oregon county. I point out that Lane County had 2000 employees in 1980 and has 1,300 employees in 2007. During that same period, the population we serve grew from 200,000 to 335,000. Lane County government is fortunate to have hard working and dedicated employees, but even they can't be expected to do more and more with tens of millions of dollars of reduced revenue.

But why does Lane County need more revenue? Basically, there is a squeeze on between the amount of revenue the county government can get from property taxes and the increase in costs. It's mainly because local control was substantially taken away from counties in 1990 when Oregon voters passed Measure 5. My conservative friends say that Lane County should live within its means. To that I say, yes, we should, and every year we do balance the budget, but we must also provide a high quality level of necessary public services. Lane County isn't just operating a jail and a system of prosecution; it's involved with many aspects of life in our community. I won't go into detail, but the services the county government provides are essential, and they are not frills. The federal and state governments require that Lane County provide many services, many without the state or federal funds to provide those services.

Let's look at voter attitudes. Back in 1994, the Lane County Board of Commissioners voted to enact a real estate transfer tax. It proved unpopular, and the voters circulated a referendum, and the tax was voted down. What about revotes? A revote is voting on something that people voted on one time, but then there's another vote. Two examples are bear and cougar hunting and "death with dignity."

In 1996 Oregon voters were asked to vote a second time on Measure 34, concerning bear and cougar hunting. It was voted down by a bigger margin than the original measure was passed. In 1997, Oregon citizens voted against repealing the Death with Dignity Law by a margin of 60 percent to 40 percent. The side favoring the Death with Dignity Law increased by 10 percent!



Lane County's commissioners have gone to the voters many times with a consistent theme: Lane County's public safety programs, primarily its jail and law enforcement functions, need more money. In essence, Lane County has said over and over, "Hey, hardcore public safety is a big responsibility of local government, and you'd want to support it, so vote for this measure." Recent examples of this approach have failed, with 51 to 62 percent voting no.

So we now come to one of the the biggest votes of the year for the Lane County Board of Commissioners, February 21, 2007. The vote was on enacting a county income tax, similar to the one involved in measure 20-114 a few months earlier. The 1.1 percent income tax would be dedicated to public safety; 60 percent of property taxes would be dedicated to public safety. It was supported by big business interests.

They liked that the tax would be paid 86 percent by income earners and only 14 percent by business. The historic vote was 3-2 in favor of enacting a flat rate income tax. Why did I vote no? Because I think Lane County needs public support, and it needs more money, and it won't get that support until the community – or at least the registered voters who vote – support what Lane County government does. We must learn from the history of the prior public votes and recognize that the public has been consistently rejecting Lane County measures, especially when the sole focus is on "public safety," often to the detriment of other services like parks or mental health or public health. Putting out a ballot measure to ask voters to vote again will get the predictable negative response.

I think Lane County is worth fighting for. I think a strong viable county government is important. We need public safety. But we also need people to make well baby visits; we also need nutrition education; we also need parks and open space; we also need to build a sustainable economy; we need more recycling and reuse and the economic benefits that would bring; we need our roads maintained; we need help for our psychiatric patients; we need people to count the votes of the public accurately; and we need our taxes assessed fairly.

After all, isn't one definition of insanity doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result?

So, in this particular season, there will be relatively little public information, no time for much community buy-in and no voters' pamphlet, and the same old scare tactics will be used even though those tactics haven't worked before. Will they work this time? Probably not. It truly is a shame that as a community we've lost precious months while the current board majority pushes a flat tax, regressive in nature – where all income earners, even the wealthy, pay the same rate of tax. It seems to some that when business pays only 14 percent of that tax, it's probably not a fair tax. On top of that, all of the revenue derived from the tax is devoted solely to public safety. This tax is similar to the one defeated in November 2006.

I think we know where this is going to go. Most recently the board majority approved cutting \$610,000 out of Lane County Parks to help with an estimated \$3 million current shortfall. Does that make sense? Park availability will decrease by one third.

What new approach would I like to see? The new approach is respecting the votes of the people, balancing the budget with what we have and building support for Lane County government. Instead of holding no hearings on the current proposed ballot measures, we should not only hold public hearings but hold open house opportunities for people to give their views and hear their suggestions. Bring the Board and senior county officials out to really listen to people. Let's respect the view that county government isn't just about one important aspect of what we do. Let's listen to ideas of efficiency. For example, it was brought to my attention that in the past when Lane County public works crews maintained sheriff's vehicles, it was faster and cheaper than it is now that the vehicles are maintained by privately owned facilities. The work has never been transferred back even though it might save as much as \$500,000 per year. Let's make those kinds of changes that show that the county government wants increased levels of efficiency. Let's get out there and listen to people and build the support for all of the good things county government does.

Change course or more of the same? The answer seems obvious to me.

Pete Sorenson is a Lane County commissioner.