

SCHOOL ADVOCATES PLAN NEXT STEPS IN AFTERMATH OF MEASURE 97

Springfield School District board member Erik Bishoff says he was “not surprised, but disappointed” that Measure 97 didn’t pass.

“We might have to make some cuts this year, and it’s likely going to mean class sizes are going to get larger,” Bishoff says.

Now that the measure has failed, members of the education community and supporters of the Measure 97 campaign are working on next steps to push for a fully funded school system, which includes plans to lobby the Oregon Legislature.

Ballot Measure 97 proposed a tax increase on corporations making more than \$25 million in Oregon sales; the funds would have supported education, health care and senior services. The measure failed to pass this November, with 59 percent of Oregon voters giving it a “no” vote.

Multnomah and Benton counties weighed in favor of Measure 97, but all other counties tipped against it, including Lane County, with “no” votes totaling 52 percent.

Oregon underfunds its schools by \$1 billion a year, ac-

cording to the state’s Quality Education Model, and education advocates hoped Measure 97, which would have brought around \$3 billion a year to the state, could have helped Oregon to fully fund its schools.

“The failure of Measure 97 doesn’t change the fact that we must find a way to adequately fund our schools in this state,” says state Rep. Phil Barnhart in an email to *EW*. He supported the measure and says he continues to advocate for better school funding.

The state of Oregon faces a budget shortfall of \$1.35 billion for the 2017-19 biennium, according to Oregon’s Legislative Fiscal Office.

It’s still uncertain how this budget gap will play out, but local school districts could see cuts.

“I hope we can find a way to cut as few frontline, feet-on-the-ground teaching positions as we can, because we need our classes to be manageable,” Bishoff says.

The Springfield School District recently added some mental health and counseling services, and Bishoff says he would hate to see cuts happen right after recent gains by the

district.

“For me, personally, it’s going to be about remaining vigilant and looking for opportunities to lobby up in Salem,” Bishoff adds.

“A Better Oregon,” the coalition that campaigned to pass Measure 97, plans to continue its work by taking its cause to the Oregon Legislature in 2017. According to the campaign, it will keep advocating for “large and out-of-state corporations, not families or small businesses,” to pay their “fair share in taxes.”

Barnhart points out that the campaign drew attention to Oregon’s school funding system and its problematic tax code. The cause itself isn’t going away, he says.

“All state senators and state representatives need to hear from their constituents that having good schools is important enough to have taxes that can pay for them,” Barnhart says. “So I would ask everyone who cares about good schools for our kids to stay actively engaged with their state representative and state senator ... Make sure they know what you believe Oregon needs.” ■

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leadership to fix Eugene or
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This is about community.
This is about all of us.’*

— TERRY MCDONALD,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

CELEBRATING VETERANS HOUSING IN THE SHADOW OF TRUMP

PHOTO: TRASK BEDORTHA

When First Lady Michelle Obama issued her “Mayor’s Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness” in 2014, Eugene stepped up to the plate, setting a goal of getting 365 of Lane County’s military vets into homes — an average of one per day for a year — through a broad coalition of local government and nonprofit agencies working together to secure funding and real estate.

Eugene knocked it out of the park, exceeding its goal by housing 404 veterans in the span of a year. According to St. Vincent de Paul Executive Director Terry McDonald, who participated in the challenge, you can hold that number up to a much larger city like Portland (around 600 vets housed) to understand the success of the local effort.

“Lane County’s effort was quite remarkable, given the size of our community,” McDonald says of Eugene’s Operation 365, spearheaded by the county’s Poverty and Homelessness Board. “This community stands out pretty much

everywhere as an example of what you can do when you have the political and nonprofit sectors working together to achieve the common good.”

In fact, the success of local efforts led to an invitation to the White House for the Eugene coalition. Last week, McDonald — along with Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy, Lane County Commissioner Pat Farr and Eugene City Manager Jon Ruiz — attended a convention of community leaders from around the country who participated in Michelle Obama’s initiative.

According to McDonald, there was “an undertone of sadness and tension” at the Nov. 14 White House gathering, as the Obama administration hands off leadership to President-elect Donald Trump and his team of alt-righties — a fact that has many wondering about the future of progressive programs such as veteran housing (along with the fate of the nation as a whole). In a sense, this was “Joe [Biden] and Michelle’s last hurrah,” McDonald said of the

atmosphere of uncertainty.

And yet, McDonald indicates that Lane County’s mission of assisting the needy remains clear. “This is not a time for us all to be looking back in sadness and in fear,” he says, noting that an issue like veterans housing is not a partisan issue. Rather, it’s a community issue that affects everyone.

“We don’t dwell on the problem as much as we try to fix it,” McDonald says of the effort by SVdP and other agencies to end homelessness. “There may be trepidation about what’s coming down the line, but this community and this organization are going to continue to plow the field.”

McDonald says that, Trump or not, there are clear problems to work on at the local level. “You can run around in fear, but the reality is I have a world to live in,” he says. “At the end of the day, I’m not looking for national leadership to fix Eugene or Springfield’s problems. This is about community. This is about all of us.” ■