

# Time is Running Short

LESS THAN A MONTH FOR SIGNATURE GATHERING TO PUT PAYROLL TAX ON NOVEMBER BALLOT

By Henry Houston

**A**s Lonnie Douglas addresses about 20 people at Whirled Pies interested in gathering signatures at Whirled Pies to refer the Eugene City Council's payroll tax to expand public services in Eugene to the November ballot, Rush's "Tom Sawyer" plays in the background.

At first the song doesn't mean much, but when "No, his mind is not for rent/ to any god or government" hits, it speaks as a metaphor for Douglas and Eugene Springfield Solidarity Network's (ESSN) fight against the payroll tax.

Douglas is the chief petitioner and board member of ESSN, an organization focused on supporting civil and economic rights of all working and poor people, and says voters ought to have a say in deciding whether to impose a payroll tax.

The Eugene City Council, though, says there isn't enough time for a vote and that it'll cost the city money to continue temporary police funding.

Douglas needs signatures from 10 percent of the voter turnout from the last mayoral race, which was in 2016. He needs to collect nearly 6,000 signatures by July 11 to challenge the City Council-approved ordinance on the November ballot.

Douglas says the petition is about telling the council that they can't shove a tax "down our throats." He adds that he isn't against taxes to raise revenues for public services but voters should have a say in how the government does it.

He says challenging the tax through a citizens' initiative didn't occur to him until the councilors shot down the idea of having voters decide whether to impose a payroll tax.

During that work session, the more conservative Councilor Mike Clark expressed concern about voters referring the tax to the November ballot where voters could shoot it down. The only way around this is to control the narrative by the council itself putting it on the ballot, Clark said. Only left-leaning Councilor Betty Taylor, agreed with him, resulting in a 2-6 vote.

Since the payroll tax is a city ordinance, only voters registered in Eugene can sign their name to challenge the tax on the ballot, although anyone who works in Eugene is on the hook to pay the tax.

Douglas says that right after he filed paperwork to challenge the ordinance, he went to Saturday Market and gathered about 30 signatures in two hours.

If the tax goes into effect July 1, 2020, as planned, employers would pay a rate of 0.21 percent on gross annual payroll. Employers with fewer than two employees would get a 25 percent discount on the first \$100,000 of gross payroll.

Employees earning \$12.01 to \$15 per hour will pay a lower percentage of 0.3 percent of annual gross wages, and those making more than \$15 per hour would pay

0.44 percent. That means someone making \$15 per hour has to pay \$7.80 a month.

The payroll tax will increase revenue to public services, most of it (65 percent) going to Eugene Police Department.

City projections indicate the city won't receive the full \$23.6 million from the payroll tax until 2025.

Minimum wage earners are exempt from paying the tax, which Douglas is happy about. What concerns him is if that person gets a small pay raise — like 10 cents. After paying a 0.3 percent annual tax, they'll be earning less than minimum wage, he says.

He says Mayor Lucy Vinis and Councilor Emily Semple have already reached out to him to talk about the petition, but he says he won't back down from filing it.

Semple tells *Eugene Weekly* that referring the payroll tax to voters could be problematic for the city because the tax would replace temporary funding that will expire next year. She adds that EPD hasn't expanded since the Great Recession in 2008.

"If we have to wait until November and if the vote passes, we'll be six months behind and will have to cover public safety with savings account money or abandon all the improvements made since Chief [Chris] Skinner started," she says in an email.

She adds that by adding some exemptions to the payroll tax, the council is acting as progressively as possible. And if the tax doesn't pass, the City Council will have to start over and find another source of revenue.

Semple does admit that the council could've done more to increase outreach and education about the tax, saying that the public didn't know — and probably still doesn't know — why it's needed. And that when a new tax is talked about, people's first reaction is: "Hell no."

For Douglas, the tax is a continued war on the working class that has been going on for a long time.

"It's just another battle we have to fight," he says.

*For more information about the petition, how to sign it or volunteer, visit [SolidarityNetwork.org](http://SolidarityNetwork.org).*



BY PAUL NEEVEL

## Chip Radebaugh

"I was 'Chip' from day one," says Chip Radebaugh, whose given name is Charles, like his optometrist father, Charlie. Born on an Air Force base in Texas, Radebaugh lived on another base in Japan until age five, when his family moved to Cottage Grove. He came to Eugene with his mom when his parents separated a year later. "I went to the YMCA summer camp when I was a kid," he notes. After graduating from South Eugene High School and from the University of Puget Sound, where he studied psychology and business, Radebaugh spent four summers as a fishing guide in Alaska. "It was awesome," he says. Returning to Eugene, he worked in real estate and joined the Y once again. "I've always turned to it for social connection," he says, "and for mind and body conditioning." He noticed a young woman, Elise, in a step aerobics class, was introduced by mutual friends, and they began dating. Together, they moved to her home state, Colorado, to study at the University of Colorado. "I got law and MBA degrees, she did veterinary medicine, and we got married," he says. "We moved back to Eugene in 2006 and renewed our YMCA membership." Chip Radebaugh began working for Rainbow Valley Design and Construction in 2007. He is now a partner and general manager of the company. Elise opened her holistic veterinary practice, the Healing Paws Wellness Center, in 2008. In 2010, Radebaugh approached the Eugene Family YMCA to ask, "Can I lend a hand?" He's been a member of the YMCA's volunteer board ever since, and is currently its president. "The Y is an important community hub," he says. "It's the largest after-school care provider in Lane County, serving 17 elementary schools. Each day those kids get a healthy snack and participate in athletic and artistic activities."