Cuts should not be made in our pockets

By MORTON H. SHAPIRO
OSEA Executive Director

The editorial board of the Capital Journal, Salem's evening daily newspaper, wants to pay for a tax limitation program out of the paychecks of OSEA members. The editorial board wants to do more than that. It wants state employes to give up their money without a fuss. The C-J editorial board has long been a critic of "Big Government." That's fine, "Big Government" needs active critics. Unfortunately the board thinks that the bargaining unit employe whose average salary is about $1,100 a month is Big Government. The enemy is not the worker in the laundry room or the welfare specialist with a case count of over 200.

I spoke at a meeting of state agency personnel managers recently and told them:

"We will not allow public employes to be made whipping boys and girls (of the property tax revolt). The public expectations of government is great, but taxpayers don't want to pay the freight. The state is not going to take it out of the hides of our members . . . We are not going to allow our members to bear the brunt. We are not going to allow salary freezes or cuts in personnel. Look at the city of Memphis where police and firemen have walked off the job. That's the forerunner of what we will see here if state officials try to dump on public employes."

The C-J editorial board says this statement is ill-timed and irresponsible. The editorial headline screams "Shapiro goes too far with threats of strike". The editorial does not mention near double-digit inflation. The editorial does not mention downward reclassification of certain people without changing their duties. The editorial does not mention the dramatic increase in work load in many agencies without an increase in staff.

I did not threaten strike; I talked about the Memphis strike. I did not quote out of context like the editorial does. I did not use soapbox rhetoric. If any member of the Capital Journal staff had been there they would have heard what I said and how I said it. I also think there is irresponsibility here -- the editorial board's and Ballot Measure 6.

Despite the Capital Journal's anti-union headlines, OSEA members should not take the fall for taxpayer anger over big government and its shortcomings.

We are not going to give up our negotiated pay increases; we are not going to negotiate any less vigorously to recover the buying power we are losing to inflation.

What we are going to do is campaign vigorously for the defeat of this measure. We take this stance not so much because we believe Oregon has the best

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of all possible tax systems, but because we believe that Ballot Measure 6 would create more inequities than it attempts to solve. There's more than our self-interest as public employes involved here; there's our self-interest as taxpayers, as home owners and renters and our self-interest as MODERATELY-PAID WAGE-EARNERS WHO WILL BE HURT MORE IF THIS MEASURE PASSES THAN THE WEALTHY OR BUSINESS.

As you read this column, the Oregon Legislature will be in special session. The governor has given them a model alternative to work from. The OSEA Board of Directors has not taken a stand on the governor's plan. However, it appears to address many of the inequities in Ballot Measure 6 and it is "Oregon grown."

I think we can clearly see at this time that the taxpayers want a pound of flesh from somewhere. The public has directed most of its ire at public employes; it does not distinguish between management and labor. It believes, for example, that public employes cannot be fired. It believes that we are overpaid and underworked. It takes for granted the cant of newspaper columnists who take cheap shots in print and pander to the notion that a property tax cut will mean windfall of money and should result in no loss of services.

But who will be taking the beating after the tax cuts are made? Will it be management or will it be the motor vehicle rep who gets yelled at because the public had to wait in a long line to get their license renewed?

The first of November is going to be a busy time for OSEA. We will nearly literally be walking from the General Council floor to the bargaining table. Less than a week after that you will be standing in the privacy of the voting booth. You must be aware that on Nov. 7 you are voting on a negotiated salary increase and improved benefits as much or more so as when you vote to ratify the bargaining settlement in the spring. California state and local government employes are not getting wage increases this year. Some aren't even getting annual merit increases.

That's what we're up against as we prepare for this next round of state central negotiation. It will take a strong union to protect the buying power of its members. For my part, I will work to prevent OSEA members from being penalized for forces beyond their control, be it inflation or public anger with government.

The level of service, indeed the size of government at all levels is the real subject of debate. The amount of service, however, must be distinguished from the treatment accorded those people who work for government. Their salaries and benefits, their rights and privileges should not become substandard, because whatever the level of government service, its effectiveness depends entirely on those who deliver it.

This is the important distinction that must be made. Let the public decide to limit government service or cut government regulation. But no responsible analyst should try to shift the focus from spending cuts in service delivery to spending cuts in workers' incomes and workers' right to decent working conditions.

Local governments look at life after '6'

Although the general election is still more than two months away, Measure 6 has already slowed the growth of government.

Examples include the state and City of Portland hiring freezes, postponement of planned expenditures by the City of Salem and an indefinite delay in plans for a new gymnasium and recreation center at Chemeketa Community College.

College President Arthur Binnie told the board of education passage of Measure 6 would jeopardize state funding for the project.

And according to the opinion of Attorney General Jim Redden, it would also prevent community colleges from seeking serial levies and such projects.

Marion Co.

SALEM -- Marion County's Hal Brauner doesn't know yet where cuts will have to come in the $33 million budget he administers if Ballot Measure 6 were to pass in November.

The county chief executive notes that at the time he spoke with The OSEA News there were so many variables it was impossible to know how much the county would have to cut. Instead, he has county staff, augmented by interns, finding out exactly what the county does and why.

Brauner is quick to say that the possibility of property tax limitation "is not something to ignore" and that if there were no revenue off-set it would mean "a reduction in program."

His best estimate, however, is that the county would have to cut approximately $1 million. All of that would have to come from the county's $13 million general fund budget. The remaining $20 million are dedicated funds over which the county administration has little control. The two largest single items in the general fund budget are the sheriff's department and the regulatory agencies such as the building inspector.

Brauner has basically divided what the county does into three areas: because they are a state statutory requirement; because of a board of commissioners ordinance, or because they are "a nice thing to do." In cases of legislatively required programs, Brauner said the county may go to the legislature and say "take it out" if some form of tax limitation requires significant cut-back in budget.

Generally, Brauner says that the whole business will go through the usual, though "improved budget process." When asked if, for that reason, Ballot Measure 6 might be a good thing, he said: "The whole tax revolt has made government more cost-conscious and to look at its programs and that's good. Unfortunately, it will have a greater impact on the most efficient level of government (local government as opposed to the federal government)."

Brauner says that his county currently is operating within a "hold the line" budget and that most one-time or special projects, such as the parking structure, have come out of earlier budgets so he will have relatively little to cut in any event.

Specifically, the interns are making a catalogue of county services, coupled with the statutes or ordinances requiring them, any off-setting revenues they produce and the discretionary authority the county may have in providing the services. This project has never been completed other than in the budget document and it doesn't do a good job, Brauner said. Once he can show the county commissioners the revenue source of each service and whether it benefits the general putlic or whether it's a user-benefit, decisions can be made. Those decisions will be made by the commissioners through the political process, but it will be made more on considered fact, believes Brauner.

Brauner said he expects a preliminary report from the interns in about a month. Following that, the report will have to be verified with each department. The whole task will be completed around the first of the year -- the time the county starts its normal budget process. (Though Ballot Measure 6 will be voted on in November, it will not take effect -- if passed -- until July 1979.)

Chemeketa

"Chemeketa looks at 'life after Measure 6'," proclaimed the headline in a Salem newspaper recently. And that's exactly what local government leaders around the state are doing these days.

Passage of Measure 6 would mean a projected 23 percent loss of revenue for Chemeketa and the challenge for college officials is to figure out how to get along with less money without wiping out programs or making drastic job cuts.

One method apparently will be reorganization. Responding to the publishing of a list of college administrators and their salaries in Salem newspapers, Board Chairman Michael Holland vowed the January reorganization would result in fewer administrators. He also said the salaries of those remaining will not rise as rapidly in the future.

Another method Chemeketa officials are using is a "package" approach to program budgeting. By placing proposed expenditures together with accompanying information such as the purposes, costs, expected results, affect on the college if cut and possible alternatives, college administrators and board and citizen budget committee members will get a closer look at specific areas of the budget.

The goal of the procedure is to avoid indiscriminate "across the board" cuts which may eliminate, for example, 23 percent of all expenditures from salaries to paper and pencils.

Employe salaries are by far the largest expenditure and the possibilities of cuts in jobs and a legislatively-mandated salary freeze loom large if Measure 6 passes.