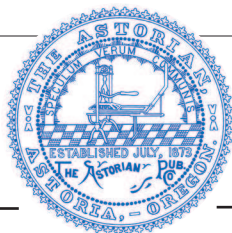


OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Vote 'yes' for health district levy

Local police, fire district levies also worthy of consideration

The only countywide tax measure on the May 15 primary ballot is a \$3 million levy for the Clatsop Care Health District.

The district operates three long-term care facilities in Astoria and Warrenton, plus an in-home care agency. Measure 4-192 would allow it to address deferred maintenance needs at its Clatsop Care Center — built as a hospital in 1926 — and expand services at its memory care facility.

The levy would fund a generator backup, technology upgrades and security measures — a new system would allow staff to monitor residents who wander from the facility.

The health district also hopes to purchase one bus for the care center and another one for the memory care center. It currently has one old, lightly used bus at its disposal. Priced about \$80,000 apiece, the new buses would allow the transport of residents to medical appointments and also create opportunities for trips outside the memory care facility.

Lastly, the revenue would fund a program at the memory care center that is used in only one other facility in the state. Using the Montessori Method, an instructor would establish a basic curriculum and



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

The Clatsop Care Center in 2016.

allow patients to organize their own tasks.

The five-year levy would impose a 23-cent tax per \$1,000 of assessed property value, according to the county assessor's office. That translates to \$46 more per year for a \$200,000 home.

The health district has turned around its finances since hiring Aidan Health Services, a private management firm based in Salem. After finishing last fiscal year with a deficit of roughly \$600,000, management reported a \$24,000 surplus through March of this year.

Now that the finances are in order, it's time to address the district's pressing needs. The money would allow improvements to both its aging facilities and residents' quality of life.

It's always a tough sell to ask taxpayers to reach deeper into their pock-

ets, especially with large bond measures looming on the horizon this fall for a new county jail, school projects in Astoria and Warrenton, and the South County's Sunset Empire Recreation District.

But we believe the health district's request is reasonable, and deserves your "yes" vote.

Warrenton police

Warrenton voters are asked to renew a five-year levy to help finance the police department.

The tax is 28 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, according to the city, or \$56 a year for a \$200,000 home. The money pays for a full-time police officer and partially finances another officer.

The existing levy expires at the end of June 2019. The city has had a police operations levy since 1999.

City officials say the police department is having difficulty keeping pace with population growth and development, and that there will be cuts if the levy does not pass.

This is not an increase. Public safety is the most important service government provides, in our opinion.

We recommend you vote "yes."

Rural fire districts

Voters in two local rural fire protection districts are asking to renew their five-year tax levies.

The Lewis and Clark district seeks \$887,000, a 20 percent increase from past measures. That's 90 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, or \$180 per year for a \$200,000 home.

The money would go for maintaining emergency services, paying employees, replacing fire equipment and other operational costs.

The Clatskanie district, which extends into Clatsop County by Bradley Summit, hopes to renew a \$5.3 million levy at the same rate as the previous measure, citing similar cost needs. That's \$1.25 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, or \$188 per year for a \$150,000 home.

Rural fire districts are generally a good bargain. Without the protection they afford, rates for homeowners insurance can become astronomical.

Both levies are also worthy of consideration for "yes" votes.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

British cyclists pedal the coast for a cause

They told me the sun came out as soon as they crossed the Washington state border into Oregon. What a fitting metaphor for two angels on bicycles — burly Union Jack angels — but angels nonetheless.

Sam Jack and Craig Craven — he goes by "Wes," like the horror film director — were among the British who fought the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Craven, 34, married and the father of two, is from Wales. Jack, 31, is from north London. They arrived on the North Coast this spring as part of a cycling tour from Vancouver to San Diego. The mission is to support Help for Heroes, a British counterpart to America's Wounded Warrior Project, a group Jack knows well.



R.J. MARX

Craven and Jack served together in the Royal Engineers bomb disposal unit. Familiarly known as "sappers," the teams provide essential support to all areas of the British Army in peacetime and on operations.

Over the course of their military careers, Jack and Craven served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Germany, Cyprus and Canada.

Craven spent 10 years on duty in Afghanistan. Jack did five, until 2010, when he took a round to the head. A bullet went in through Jack's eye and around to his brain, about a millimeter away from the brain stem.

Initially, doctors gave Jack only a 10 percent chance of survival.

"Then it went to 20 percent," Craven said.

Of Jack's fighting team of 120, 12 others were injured and one died.

Jack received serious, life-changing injuries. "I'm very happy to be here walking and talking, let alone cycling through the coast."

Help for Heroes

Jack was hospitalized for three months; rehabilitation extended for three years. "That's when Help for Heroes took over," he said.

Help for Heroes is credited with helping more than 17,000 veterans. "Together, building lives," is their motto.

Founder Bryn Parry served for 10 years in the Royal Green Jackets before leaving the military in 1985 to become a



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Tom Dideum of the local bicycle group, Old Spokes, left, with Wes Craven and Sam Jack on a stop as they ride along the coast.



Sam Jack

Sam Jack in uniform.

cartoonist, a career he maintained for 23 years.

In 2007, Parry and his wife Emma met wounded vets in an Afghan military hospital, inspiring the couple's mission to help those with injuries and illnesses attributable to their service in the British Armed Forces. Help for Heroes runs four recovery centers in England.

Through the organization, wounded veterans participate in the annual Invictus Games, where athletes from 18 countries compete in 10 different sports — including bicycling.

Because of the support he received from Help for Heroes, Jack decided he wanted to give back to the organization.

After "too many beers" one night, Craven proposed the ride across America. "Sam said, 'Let's do it,'" Craven recalled.

Craven didn't own a bicycle, much less have experience in bicycle maintenance.

support, Dideum said as he accompanied Craven and Jack on their leg from Seaside to Cannon Beach. "What they're doing is pretty amazing."

With a shoestring budget, the cyclists are "relying on the kindness of strangers, really," Craven said.

So far, they have found assistance from police, fire, military veterans and "all-round good people" in the course of their ride.

In Raymond, Washington, they'd been washed out for days. After making a call, they found lodging in a local pastor's house.

Their stay began with a birthday party for a 4-year-old, with 20 young guests, a celebration followed by the milking of a cow.

Craven said he is "pretty sure" Washington state is the hidden land of Atlantis.

"It never stops raining," he said. "We come into Oregon and literally the sun shines."

As the bicyclists prepared to head down the coast, they welcomed the challenges ahead.

"Yeah, we're stubborn enough to do it," Craven said as he donned his helmet, preparing to head south along U.S. Highway 101.

"The good news is once you get over the hill at Neahkahnie Mountain, it's all downhill," Dideum said.

"I'll just walk," Jack said.

Jack and Craven said they hope to cover 50 miles a day, sightseeing along the way.

As we read headlines this week, the ride of the two British veterans reminds us of the painful toll of war, not only of lives lost, but those on the road to recovery.

Two suicide bombings in Kabul killed 25 people, among them, 10 journalists. About 14,000 American troops remain in Afghanistan, a conflict in its 17th year. Those stationed there — American, British or international — risk their lives daily for our safety.

"Not a day goes by that I haven't thanked God for keeping me alive and giving me this second chance at living," Jack said.

As of this writing, the cyclists have raised more than twice their funding goal.

To provide support, visit justgiving.com; search for "Canada to Mexico: the long ride down."

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian's South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.

Good day, Oregon

As they planned their tour, Jack and Craven reached out to contacts in America, including Seaside's Al Smiles, who subsequently introduced them to Gearhart's Tom Dideum, of the local biking group Old Spokes.

The group provided logistical and moral