



City/County consolidation

by County Commissioner Gladys McCoy

Why is consolidation an issue today having been defeated in 1974?

I would say that it is more appropriate of an issue today because of the difficult economic times being experienced by all levels of government.

While I believe the consolidation of governments may be more difficult to achieve, I am equally convinced that, when the facts are known about the amount of money required to maintain duplication of services in the unincorporated jurisdiction, there will be a demand for consolidation of these services. Additionally, almost all of the citizens in my District live within the city limits of Portland. Some of the tax dollars that the County collects from them are used to pay for County services which are used exclusively by unincorporated areas. Urban subsidy to unincorporated Multnomah County is a well-documented fact. This situation must be corrected, and, if re-elected, I in-

tend to promote and encourage that change.

Historically, consolidation of governments has occurred only after some major scandal or financial crisis. I submit the people of Multnomah County will respond to the concepts before a crisis because it is the "Oregon way."

These are some of the duplicated services provided by both County and City governments in dollar amounts allocated for 1981-82 budgets:

Services	County	City
Parks	\$1,198,403	\$13,538,172
Planning	681,150	2,137,130
Permits	1,072,023	3,871,724
Police	11,734,719	30,945,643

This is only a fraction of the services provided by both governments. The population of Multnomah County is 562,640 of which approximately 366,000 live in the City of Portland. This leaves a population in the unincorporated area of

Multnomah County at approximately 196,640. These residents use exclusively the above services at the expense of urban residents.

I submit this is not the most useful use of tax dollars. Granted, there is a citizen effort underway to form a new City in east Multnomah County. I support that effort and feel that it should be given an opportunity. However, that is not to say that a new City will be formed. Our efforts to consolidate services should move forward. Further, we should also develop a relationship with other incorporated cities besides Portland. These efforts and the exploration of other efforts must be started now if we are going to have credible information to share with the Charter Review Committee in 1983.

Again, I welcome your comments on this issue. Please write or call my office at 284-5219, or stop by.

1981: The first year

by Rep. Ron Wyden

1981 was a special year for me: my first year serving Oregon's Third District in Congress. The year brought with it a few surprises—and a few disappointments. But all-in-all, it was a good beginning.

One of the first things I learned upon arriving in Congress is that the Federal government is indeed obese, muscle-bound and maybe even senile.

But it was refreshing—and instructive—to see that the Federal government, if pushed, still has the ability to perform.

Let me illustrate. As I was heading into a meeting last year, a distressed man stopped me and began relating an all-too-typical tale of woe about how his Social Security payments had been botched and, now, he was deeply in debt.

This was a man who had worked all his life and was spent physically at age 62. He had raised six children, umpired Little League games, lost his wife. He was alone. His only company: his pride. Now that was threatened, too, as he had begged for extra time to pay his rent, to pay his utilities, to pay his food bill.

He was desperate not so much because he was without money, but because the Federal government had stolen his dignity.

After I finished my day's activities, I returned to my office and began making calls.

Before long, the puzzle was unraveled. The short-cut thinking, the unresponsiveness, the who-cares attitude had fallen away.

The man's check was in his hands within a week.

Afterward, the man—his dignity restored—told a member of my staff that he was so desperate that day he came to see me, he was prepared to return home and end his life.

It's a lesson I'll never forget. I also learned in Washington that there is a feeling nothing is new.

Everything has been tried. Most everything has failed.

I just don't buy that. The people of Oregon didn't send me to Washington to sigh a lot, and occasionally break out into tears of despair.

No, I learned there are lots of ideas left untried—good ideas.

For example, everyone told me that now—in this budget-cutting era—was not the time to push for badly needed senior citizen centers in the inner east side of Portland.

I disagreed, and began organizing efforts. While it is just a tad too early to report complete success, I am proud to say that the response has been tremendous. And, I am hopeful the first of those centers will be under construction before the year is out.

There were also those who said there was no way to control runaway health care costs.

I disagreed with that, too. With the help of everyone I could find, including the medical community, I was able before the end of 1981 to introduce legislation aimed at dealing with escalating health care costs—not by strong-arming anyone, but the tried-and-true method of sensible incentives.

Finally, I learned that there is rampant cynicism in the Federal government that if something can

go wrong, it will go wrong.

Promises made are prescriptions for promises broken. What government delivers is what no one wants—shattered hopes.

This was the hardest lesson to deal with.

Then it dawned on me that the trouble was that the premium in government has been on creating something new—not on making what already exists work better.

No place is that more true than the Congress.

Let's face it, the Congress is a place where politicians rate their success by the number of headlines they collect. And you get precious few headlines when engaged in the methodical exercise of legislative oversight.

One of my most frustrating moments last year was when the Energy and Commerce Committee, largely at my insistence, held a thorough oversight hearing on the implementation of the Northwest Regional Energy Act—an act that in a very real way will determine what each of us will pay in electric bills the rest of this century and beyond.

The hearing drew only modest coverage. Then, afterward, there was a column that labeled the hearing boring.

Maybe it was. But it also was worthwhile because it caused changes, changes for the better.

Perhaps the most striking lesson I learned in 1981 is that we can be better—and we can do better.

In next week's column, I will discuss how I think we can achieve that end.

Election set amidst violence

While the eye of the world are on Poland, the killing in El Salvador continues with U.S. aid. An estimated 32,000 persons have been murdered in El Salvador during the past two years by the military junta that governs the country and by the paramilitary units supported by the junta.

In the face of increasing strength of guerilla forces, the government has called for elections in March.

The Organization of American States (OAS) recently approved a resolution sponsored by the United States that advocates holding elections in El Salvador without previous negotiations to guarantee the participation of all political forces in that nation.

The proposal was adopted after three days of intensive lobbying by Secretary of State Alexander Haig. Mexico, Nicaragua and Grenada voted against the proposal and Panama, Suriname, Trinidad and Tabago, and St. Lucia abstained.

The OAS disregarded the proposal made by the revolutionary forces of El Salvador, the FMLN-FDR, which were represented by Nicaragua. The FMLN-FDR expressed its willingness to start peace talks with political and military representatives designated by the junta. The FMLN-FDR considers elections to be a valid and necessary channel for the expression of the people's will, provided the conditions and climate exist for the people to fully exercise their vote.

At present these conditions do not exist. A state of siege, martial law and press censorship exist. Assassination of union leaders, political activists and church leaders continues. If elections are held without prior negotiations, only those parties approved by the present government will be allowed to participate.

The OAS also ignored a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 3rd urging a political solution "without intimidation or terror" be found to the Salvadoran conflict in order to establish "a democratically elected government." It condemned the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in that



Demonstration at Portland's Army Recruiting Station protests training of El Salvador officers and soldiers in the U.S.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

country. The General Assembly appealed to all governments to refrain from intervening in El Salvador and in what is viewed as a tacit reference to the U.S.: the resolution urged that arms supplies and military aid to El Salvador be stopped.

Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto said of the OAS resolution, "It tends only to strengthen the position taken by those who refuse to cooperate in creating conditions that will guarantee free and truly democratic elections."

This view is held by France and Mexico who in a document issued last August recognized the Salvadoran revolutionaries as representa-

tive and an entity that has to be included.

Mexico branded the OAS resolution as "a bad precedent" that will worsen the tension in Central America. The Mexican representative to the conference said the resolution "can only embolden those governments which would like to get rid of their enemies, at once, by all-too-familiar methods."

The Mexican newspaper *Uno Mas* branded the resolution as "a disaster for the Salvadoran popular sectors" since it means that the war will be prolonged, "thereby increasing the risks of a general conflagration in Central America."

Fair Share asks shut-off moratorium

by John Blank

Plans are afoot to make utilities wait until April 25 before shutting off your gas or electricity, if you don't pay your bill.

Oregon Fair Share is planning to ask Public Utility Commissioner John Lobdell to institute a shut-off moratorium on home utilities. If Lobdell turns down this request, Rep. Gretchen Kafoury will push for a hearing on a shut-off moratorium bill before the House Energy and Environment Committee in the current special session of the legislature.

It's even difficult to assess the magnitude of the problem, since the Public Utility Commission (PUC) rescinded the requirement that utilities report all shut-offs to it. However, the Community Action Program (CAP) Directors Association claims that in 1980 1700 households per month were shut off statewide by PGE alone.

Activists view the moratorium as necessary to save lives. The situation this year is even worse than it has been in the past. At the same time as the depression has made more people unable to pay, Reagan administration relaxation of federal regulations has made it easier for utilities to shut off services, even if customers are entitled to energy assistance money.

Under current law, customers do have minimal defenses against shut-offs. Utilities are supposed to give you three notices before they shut off your gas or electricity: 15 days prior, 72 hours prior, and immediately prior to shut-off. Furthermore, the last two notices are required to be verbal (not just a piece of paper hung on your door); and at the time of notification the utility must explain both the possible options to shut-off, and the possible available assistance.

Possible options to shut-off include the "medical" option and the "ten per cent plan."

Under the medical option, no shut-off is supposed to take place if a doctor, registered nurse, licensed nurse practitioner, clinic or agency providing health care notifies the utility by phone, and in writing within 14 days of the phone call, that a shut-off will significantly endanger the health of the customer or someone in the household. Unless the condition is chronic the health certification must be renewed every 30 days.

Under the "ten per cent plan," no shut-off will take place if before the shut-off date the customer pays 10 per cent of the overdue bill or \$10 (whichever is greater) and signs an agreement with the utility company to pay the remainder with 10 months.

According to energy activist Kathy Weaver, director of CAP energy programs for Columbia County, utilities are prone to disobey these rules. In one case, according to Ms. Weaver, PP&L turned off a diabetic's electricity (needed to refrigerate his insulin). Had the utility obeyed the requirement to give verbal notification, they would have been aware of this life-threatening situation. In another case described by Ms. Weaver, a 72-year-old man, who had suffered brain damage, had his heat turned off by Northwest Natural Gas while he was in the hospital. When Ms. Weaver spoke to the utility about this, their representative said that if the man had really cared about his gas bill, "he would have called us from his hospital bed."

If a utility is threatening to shut you off, you have the legal right to an appeal. You should immediately call the Public Utility Commissioner's Consumer Assistance Section, 1-800-452-7813 ext. 6600 toll free (or write them at Room 300, Labor and Industries Building, Salem, OR 97310). When you appeal before a shut-off the utility cannot shut off your service without approval from the Commissioner; when you appeal after a shut-off, the Commissioner can order service restored until a final decision is made.

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