

Economic woes greet new commissioner

by Lanita Duke

Arnold Biskar, Multnomah County's new Commissioner, was appointed to fill the vacancy created when Dennis Buchanan was elected Executive Director.

Biskar, an accountant with interest in art, assesses the economic condition of Multnomah County as "lousy." "We have some real serious problems to contend with. We have the same problems that everyone else has in government and that is that services supercede our revenue. We have to decide where the monies will have to be cut. My priorities are going to be on delivering the maximum amount of services, but at the same time I do not believe in cutting jobs. We keep talking about the need to get employment back up again and everybody working. Somehow cutting jobs out of a budget doesn't seem the way to get the economy rolling again."

Biskar is prepared to make unpopular decisions, which will be opposed by at least half of the County he represents. Biskar believes in a

consolidation of County and City services. "We must redefine the role of government. My personal feeling is that some sort of consolidation is necessary to preserve the financial stability of our area. There is a duplication of some services and I do not think we need ten Commissioners for the City and County. We have five City Commissioners and five County Commissioners along with a County Executive. That is eleven officials for the City/County area. That's a lot of money wrapped up in personnel; there are other ways of doing it. As new as I am I do not know what those ways are but a lot of my energies will be spent finding out." Biskar recognizes the fact that East County has some real concerns about being swallowed up by Portland.

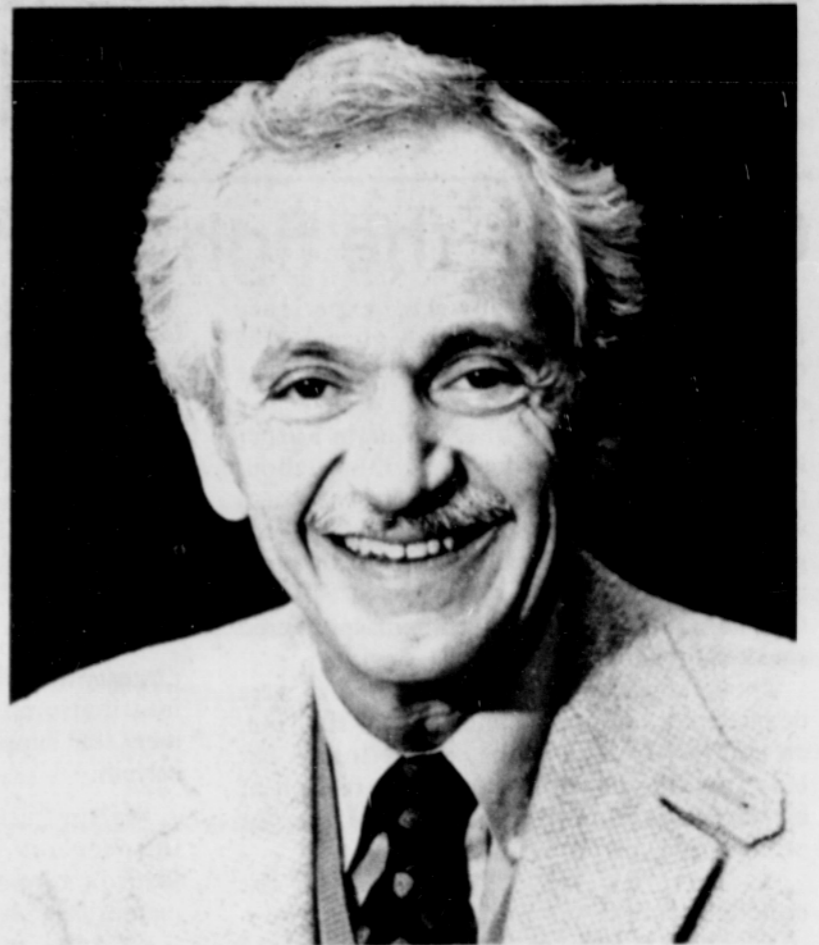
The major source of County revenue is property taxes. This November the voters came out against the continuous rise in property taxes with Ballot Measure No. 3, a property tax limitation measure that was defeated. "I do not know how we could reduce real estate taxes without supplanting them with some

other form of taxation. I do not think we can reduce property taxes without replacing them—we need the money. Either that or we would have to redefine the role of government; some of the things the County is doing now will have to be done by the State or regional government. For example, I do not think Multnomah County is the proper producer of health services (Project Health). That is either a State or a regional function. We cannot carry those services alone. It's too big for the County. If someone is hurting in Yamhill County it is going to affect the people in Multnomah County." Biskar said streamlining County government will create a new problem. "Efficiency breeds unemployment. If we start producing the most efficient possible government that we can produce we will need fewer people. Fewer people will do more work. We'll have trouble with the unions but will just try to work it out the best way that we can. We would have to re-train or place them in other areas."

The cuts in County, City and Federal programs are creating a popula-

tion of have-nots. "These cuts are wiping out a segment of our population; the lower middle class. There is a certain section of the population that continues to have money, but there is a much larger percentage of the population who does not. Now, we are able to avoid them but sooner or later we are going to feed their families some way. Taxation is just a way of distributing wealth. We are not doing enough of that right now so the country is not moving. If we do not do it voluntarily people might start taking it." Biskar believes what happened in Miami could happen here.

What can we, the public, expect out of Arnold Biskar, County Commissioner? "You can expect a lot. I want the public to know that whatever my decision is, there was a lot of effort in making that decision. My major concern is that people stay in jobs, be fed and cared for. But we must do this within the confines of a certain budget. I'm going to try and squeeze the last possible dollar out of that budget, so the County can do the things it's supposed to do for its residents."



COMMISSIONER ARNOLD BISKAR

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