

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
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Opinion

The First Amendment
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." — Thomas Jefferson (1800)

Carefully Look at the Facts with Proposed Levy

(Editor's Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)

As the board presidents of Western Lane Ambulance District, Siuslaw Valley Fire & Rescue, and Western Lane Fire and EMS Authority, we ask our citizens to carefully look at the facts.

Current and past board members, our employees, and the citizens of western Lane County have worked very hard to put together one of the most respected ambulance districts in the State of Oregon, and we don't want to see it destroyed.

We are very appreciative of the support shown by our citizens to the hardworking men and women who provide your emergency medical care. In fact, during a recent random phone poll of voters in our district, 86.5% of respondents indicated that the operation and performance of fire and ambulance services in our area was pretty good to excellent.

Also, 78.5% of respondents felt they received a good value for what they pay in property taxes for fire and ambulance services. Only 5% felt they did not.

Where is this "vast majority" that

critics would have us believe opposes the ambulance district?

A proposal being considered by directors from the ambulance and fire districts is whether to expand the sharing of resources, not to merge the districts. This follows the highly successful sharing of admin-

GUEST VIEWPOINT

By **Cindy Russell, WLAD Board President**

Alan Burns, SVFR Board President

Jim Palisi, WLFEA Board President

istrative services for both districts which occurred two years ago, following many years of discussion and preparation.

The proposed expansion shows advancement in public safety at its best. Folding superlative ALS services with superlative fire suppression forces provides the best public safety available to the communities served by Western Lane Ambulance and Siuslaw Valley Fire & Rescue.

Two outstanding districts keeping separate budgets is financially sound currently. A gradual sharing of resources will allow districts to adapt while saving on administrative costs.

Eventually, a merger may make financial sense should voters approve it, but it's not under consideration at this time.

Unlike what has been said, this is not a merger of the two into one taxing district. There would be no changes in the tax rates currently in place for either district.

The local option levy for Western Lane Ambulance District, which is up for renewal this November, will still need to be approved by our citizens, as it has been every five years.

Since the local option levy was first approved by our citizens in 2012, our call volume has increased by 54% and we added three full-time employees to enhance our service levels. However, the tax rate we are asking our citizens to renew has not changed since 2012.

If a merger between the districts were to occur in the future, state law is very clear on what must happen. Citizens must vote to dissolve each of the parent districts and then they must vote to approve the formation of a new district.

It's not clear what a rushed vote on a merger proposed by Farnsworth, Pilcher, and Marks would accomplish. Let's secure the continuation of exceptional services to the Florence community first, through approving the local option levy renewal. Then we can discuss a potential future merger and allow the community to vote on it, if we choose to proceed.

Vote No on the Upcoming Ambulance Tax Levy

(Editor's Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)

As seniors in our community, most of us know that at some point we may need to rely on an ambulance in an emergency. It's not something people like to think about, but when you need emergency medical help, it should be efficient, high quality, and reasonably priced.

The vast majority of Oregonians are served by private ambulance services. Local county officials set standards that the private ambulance services must meet or be kicked out of the county. Simple as that. But residents in Western Lane County are being forced to pay for one of the last remaining government-run ambulance services in Oregon.

The local Western Lane ambulances are a relic of the past associated with the government-run hospital in Florence that closed decades ago. Nearly every other Oregon community has moved on from government-run ambulances, but here in western Lane County, we are saddled with a massively expensive ambulance service that too many of us know little to nothing about.

When most Oregonians need an ambulance, they are billed for what their insurance won't pay.

Instead, residents of Western Lane County pay THREE times for an ambulance ride. One special property tax, remaining from when the ambulance service was run by the hospital, and another local option levy property tax.

Together, we pay over \$1.6 million per year in property taxes to prop up a government boondoggle. Then you pay whatever your insurance won't cover for your ambulance ride — or

that special ambulance insurance program that the district sells.

Any way you slice it, we pay three times for a health care service that most Oregonians only pay for once. We are the outlier here in western Lane County with our overly expensive, gold-plated government-run

GUEST VIEWPOINT

By **Larry Farnsworth**

Former Board Member of the

Western Lane Ambulance District

ambulances.

It's time to stop nickel-and-diming local seniors and small business owners hit hard by COVID restrictions. The vast majority of Oregonians don't pay extra for this essential service. We should end this government-run ambulance relic.

The proponents of the ambulance \$5.4 million tax levy on this November's ballot will have you believe that the sky will fall if voters turn down their never-ending requests for our hard-earned dollars. They have a monopoly and, unlike private ambulance services, cannot be held accountable for how long it takes them to arrive at your house. The only people who can hold the government-run ambulance service accountable are the residents — like us — who can end their funding.

It's really okay to vote against funding this government-run operation in favor of a private ambulance service. There are many excellent ambulance companies with higher levels of professional certification who are ready, willing and able to provide excellent emergency medical service to our community. Coastal communities, including Depoe Bay, Newport, Lincoln City, Reedport, North Bend and Coos Bay, are all served by excellent private ambulance services with absolutely no tax

subsidy at all. Why should Florence be any different?

When government officials want to keep their hands in your wallet, it's reasonable to ask what you're getting in return. What we're getting in return for two property taxes and a third payment when you use a government-run ambulance is an expensive boondoggle that pays three supervisors each \$122,000/year to manage a small handful of people. The government-run ambulance district employees here make more than any ambulance employees in Oregon! The district is \$3.4 million in debt for the rich PERS retirement benefits its government employees enjoy.

If rich pay and benefits weren't enough, \$14,000 of our hard-earned tax dollars were spent this summer on a biased push poll by a Salem lobbying firm to convince us that this expensive boondoggle is actually a good idea. The push poll did not contain a single argument for why government-run ambulances are a bad idea. This "poll" was really just another expensive sham to pull the wool over our eyes.

Now, the ambulance district board is going to spend another \$20,000 of your money on a flashy promotional campaign. This is designed to get you to vote for continuing this government-run fiasco.

As long as residents don't know what's happening, the government officials assume that we'll keep paying for their lavish salary and benefits that most of us could only dream of making.

I'm done with government-run ambulances. We can modernize our ambulance services just like the rest of Oregon and stop nickel-and-diming our seniors and small business owners. Stop paying three times for an ambulance ride.

Vote NO on Measure 20-322.

LETTERS

"Dune" Celebration.

Tuesday's movie and informational session was outstanding. The Spice popcorn topping was out of this world and the 1984 movie by David Lynch was surprisingly great.

I'm looking forward to spice, more sandworms and good times when the new "Dune" movie is released this month.

I didn't think this was something I'd like, but I was wrong. I encourage you all to check out the "Dune" Celebration, since all of it was inspired by our dunes.

Learn more about this collection and collaborative celebration at citylightscinemas.com/dune-celebration.

— Jo Beaudreau
Florence

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The *Siuslaw News* welcomes Letters to the Editor and Guest Viewpoints as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Email letters to cmeyer@thesiuslawnews.com

TO BE CONSIDERED FOR PUBLICATION:

Letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large. In addition:

- Letters reflect the opinion of the writer. The *Siuslaw News* cannot verify the accuracy of all statements made in letters. Authors should ensure any information is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay, and include sources where possible.
- Letters have a suggested 300-word limit and may be edited for grammar and clarity.
- Authors must sign their full name and include their street address (only city will be printed), as well as a daytime phone number and/or email address for verification. The person who signs the letter must be the actual author. *Siuslaw News* does not accept anonymous Letters to the Editor.
- *Siuslaw News* will not print form letters, libelous letters, business promotions or personal disputes, poetry, open letters, letters espousing religious views without reference to a current issue, or letters considered in poor taste. Letters also may not be part of letter-writing campaigns.
- Writers are limited to one published letter every two weeks.

TO SUBMIT TO THE SIUSLAW NEWS:

Emailed submissions are preferred. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed.

The newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

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IMPRESSED BY CELEBRATION

I was absolutely impressed by the opening activities of City Lights Cinemas and Siuslaw Public Library District's Frank Herbert