

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.

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

RESPONSIBILITY AS VOTERS

One of my responsibilities as the Voter Service Chair for the League of Women Voters of Lane County is to make sure county residents are informed about election ballot measures that are of relevance to them.

This November, there is only one county measure on the ballot. Measure #20-322 is a five-year option levy for emergency medical/ambulance services in the Western Lane Ambulance District. The district provides emergency medical services for over 20,000 residents across about 564 square miles in western Lane. It is staffed with 15 paramedics and EMTs that operate three ambulances 24/7.

The current option will expire in 2022 unless renewed. Since initial passage in 2012, service, call volume and operating costs have increased and property tax limitations set by Oregon’s constitution have restricted revenue growth.

Renewing the levy will allow the district to keep pace with growing demand in the community. Median assessed household income in Lane County is estimated to be \$8/month and, if approved, will generate a little over \$1 million a year for each of the five years from 2022 to 2027.

If the levy fails, Fire/EMS Chief Schick states that it will cause a 25-26% budget decrease that will require staff cuts. This will mean a reduction in ambulance coverage and emergency services for the district.

— Paula Grisafi
Director of Voter Service,
League of Women Voters of Lane County

WHAT ABOUT THE BI-MART PHARMACY STAFF?

For over 25 years, we have enjoyed the courteous and professional treatment from the caring staff at Bi-Mart Pharmacy. They have been there for us for filling prescriptions, administering inoculations and sharing vital medical information.

Our thinking was that an organization that is employee owned would be there for us in the future. Not the case. It seems Walgreens isn’t interested in the small town of Florence and our residents — and what about Bi-Mart?

Are they willing to just toss their loyal and trusted employees out with the trash? There are other reliable pharmacies in Florence and changing over to them is no problem. What troubles me is the lack of concern for our loyal and very efficient pharmacy staff. Where do they go, what happens to them and to their families?

We shouldn’t be surprised that in our misguided thinking we are more interested in lies than truth, we put criminals ahead of victims, illegals and their demands ahead of legal residents, and trusted and loyal employees are discarded like so much garbage. What a sad day for us all.

— Dusty and Trish Rhodes
Florence

(Editor’s Note: Bi-Mart Pharmacy will close mid-October. Patient files have been transferred to Walgreens pharmacies in some areas. For more information, visit www.bimart.com/rxchange.)

LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR WESTERN LANE AMBULANCE

To the citizens of our community, I am in support of Western Lane Ambulance District Operation Levy renewal.

The level of service that Western Lane Ambulance District provides is one of the highest in the state. I say this out of unfortunate experience.

Paramedics saved my husband’s life with decisive decision making, treatments and higher than normal level of care for Paramedics.

To even consider a for-profit private ambulance service in the area is unnerving; Western Lane Ambulance has done everything for the community it serves. The greatest benefits to our community are the men and women who provide the highest quality emergency medical service and live locally. Privatization could break this vital connection with the people in our communities.

Due to the paramedics of Western Lane Ambulance, I was able to have eight years more with my husband and for this, I will always vote “yes” to support the district.

— Nelda Graf
Florence



SOMETHING’S MISSING

I’ve read everything in the Siuslaw News over the past months regarding the Ambulance Tax Levy and, after much consideration, have decided to abstain from casting a ballot.

The reason is that the coverage has been inadequate. In none of the articles and letters has the following information been provided for comparing Western Lane Ambulance District to the private ambulance services used by other coastal communities:

- 1) Comparison of WLAD patient fees to fees charged by the private ambulance services;
- 2) How the private ambulance services are funded; that is, beyond patient fees; and
- 3) Average total compensation including all benefits of WLAD EMTs and paramedics compared to average total compensation of similarly credentialed employees of the private services. That would include employer contributions to all retirement plans.

In the case of PERS-covered WLAD employees, this would mean the annual employer cost of amortizing the present value of the employee’s accrued monthly benefit at retirement.

I’m disappointed by the failure to investigate this essential information

I must also say that spending \$14,000 (if true) for a push poll this year does not give me confidence in WLAD’s stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

— Jim White
Florence

SELECTIVE VIEW OF HISTORY

I am writing in response to the letter written and published on Sept. 4, “A Focus on this Great Country” by Linda Payton.

The writer states the economy was wonderful in 2019 and blames President Biden for all that is wrong in the country.

Mr. Biden didn’t take office until Jan. 21, 2021. By that time, people were already in the throes of the pandemic, Trump had already, with control of the Senate, authorized two stimulus payments.

The letter writer seems to have a selective view of history.

I would like to ask — do the good old days include the senseless murder of Emit Till or the three young men who were killed because they were registering people of color to vote? Or was it back during the rule of thumb when men could beat their wives, children and horses with a stick the width of their thumb?

And to all the folks who only get their news from one source, please research stories from multiple sources before saying what is accurate news.

— Maggie Bagon
Florence

SUPPORT WESTERN LANE AMBULANCE DISTRICT LEVY

Everyone understands the need for a professional, quality ambulance service that will respond quickly if a medical emergency means dialing 911. Thoughts are scattered between being terrified and the lurking “What will this cost?”

Some people are using scare tactics to discredit the value of the current public Emergency Medical Services (EMS) provided by the Western Lane Ambulance District (WLAD). After listening to both sides and doing research on the difference between public and private ambulance services, it is clear that EMS provided through a public agency are more community-oriented and specifically put people first.

For corporate-run, for-profit businesses, the primary concern is the bottom line.

When WLAD arrives to provide a lift assist or determines no transport is needed, there is no charge. Even with transport, balances can be put on a payment plan or a hardship request can be submitted. No one is sent to collection.

In a for-profit business model, you will be charged regardless of transport and might end up in collection.

For my small home in Florence, last year

the total WLAD tax was \$83, or \$6.90 per month. That provides me and everyone in the 564 square mile district a Critical Care Advanced Life Support unit with specially trained Critical Care Paramedics, Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) to help recover from a hospital stay, state of the art ambulances and equipment, a special off-road ambulance, SAFEKIDS program for seatbelt clinics, water safety and bicycle helmets as well as First Aid and CPR classes available for a small fee. What a bargain.

The net result is an easy decision to support the WLAD local option levy on the Nov. 2 ballot — and to ask every member of the district to support this outstanding organization.

— Beverly Sherrill
Florence

VOTE YES

In Florence, we need to keep the Western Lane Ambulance District. If you have seen the Western Lane Emergency Medical Services vehicles around town, you know they are here. Where would some independent service come from?

I have lived in Florence for 21 years and have had a few episodes where I was required to go to the emergency room at our Peace Health hospital. Within minutes, Western Lane was at my doorstep.

I even had one bleeding event, where the EMTs arrived in minutes and addressed the problem, which enabled me to see my primary doctor the next day.

We do not need some independent providers in our area. Where will they come from and what will their response time be?

Vote Yes.

— Win Jolley
Florence

WHAT WESTERN LANE AMBULANCE OFFERS TO THE COMMUNITY

(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.)

I am Cynthia A Russell, RN, a sitting member of the Board of Directors of Western Lane Ambulance District. I am speaking to you as a citizen of Western Lane County and a retired RN. I think it is time to speak out about the discussion going on about WLAD and the professionals that work for the district.

I had been working in medicine for 50 plus years before I retired from the local hospital last year. I had worked in many capacities throughout my career. Multiple times I had the opportunity to work shoulder to shoulder with many different emergency medicine healthcare providers in various cities and states.

I can speak from personal knowledge and experience that we in this community are very

lucky to have the men and women from WLAD working for us and with us. They are highly educated and trained professionals.

The public needs to stop and look at what they do.

These are professionals that work at least 240 hours per month and are very well educated; in fact, they hold some certifications that exceed the required certifications to do their job.

They walk into your home when they are summoned and, on average, they get to your side faster than most agencies. WLAD meets or exceeds the state requirements for response time 98% of the time for a rural area.

They come in with full knowledge of what drugs and equipment they carry and the effects and side effects of each course of treatment that they use.

They are out there alone — unlike myself, who worked in a protected environment of the ED (emergency department) with a physician at my side, they are seeing and acting on what they are

presented with. And they do it with compassion and knowledge.

These are professionals that are committed to the district and to the community that they serve. Most have been working for WLAD for more than 15 years.

Not only do they work for us,

GUEST VIEWPOINT

By Cynthia A Russell, RN, Retired
Citizen of Western Lane County

but they care about us. Not that long ago, we had a case of a hospice patient that needed extra help but did not need to be hospitalized.

The crews that night worked with the ED physician and brought the patient to the ED but not inside it so that the ED MD could evaluate and prescribe. Saving the patient and family from having to move the patient around so much, WLAD returned the patient to his home and made sure that the needs of the patient and family were met.

I can assure you they were not

charged for those services.

Those crew members were recognized by WLAD administration and also the hospital administration. They didn’t do it for the recognition but rather for patient care, safety and comfort.

In addition, WLAD has a Mobile Integrated Health Program where a paramedic goes to homes to check to make sure people are doing OK, and to see if there is anything

that needs to be provided for them to prevent them from needing to go to the ED. The local hospital is funding this through grants and WLAD is administering it. This saves the hospital from unnecessary ED visits and decreases the number of transports for the ambulance district.

This program is one of 24 in Oregon out of over 150 agencies licensed by the state for transporting patients.

Then there is the TLC program that is offered through WLAD, where hospice patients are taken on a last ride. Ambulance crews

take people to see something that they want to see one more time — or for the first time — before they die. This is often to see the ocean again, go to Shore Acres or other places like that. It’s almost like granting a last wish.

I have also seen paramedics off duty step up to the plate if they are witnesses to an event, stepping in to save lives or help with situations until others arrive.

These are men and women dedicated to their profession and to our community.

In addition, the district offers CPR classes to the public, gives out bike helmets and has a Car Seat program. These are just a few examples of what our district does for us.

I ran in the elections for a position on the board because I knew just what fabulous service we were getting from Western Lane Ambulance District. I wanted to make sure that service continued and would be available when my family or myself need those services.