

EDITORIALS

Levy will be a tough sell to county voters

We are glad that the Polk County Board of Commissioners has decided to refer a five-year countywide public safety levy to voters. It was the right decision and, in our opinion, a bit overdue.

But based on the early reaction from many citizens, supporters of the levy have their work cut out to convince folks that additional taxes are needed. And with the election scheduled May 19, they don't have much time to do that.

From what we have heard via phone calls, emails and, most notably, our Facebook page, there is a lot of misinformation, mistrust and misunderstanding out there when it comes to county government and how the public safety system works. It is clear that far too few citizens attended any of the nine public hearings commissioners held throughout the county, from Independence to Grand Ronde, Falls City to West Salem, to educate themselves on the public safety system and the need for such a levy.

Many people seem to believe Polk County government is loaded with money, overpays its employees and simply isn't prioritizing how it spends its money. That may be the biggest obstacle to overcome if this levy has any chance to pass.

Voters will be asked to decide if they want to add 45 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value to their tax bills for a five-year period starting in 2015-16. The owner of a home assessed at \$150,000 would pay an additional \$67.50 per year for this levy.

It wasn't too long ago — November 2013, to be exact — when county voters were asked to approve a four-year public safety levy with a maximum tax rate of 60 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. That measure was soundly defeated at the polls by a nearly 58 percent-to-42 percent margin — that after a poll six weeks before the election showed the levy passing with a nearly 60-percent approval rating and only a 3.75-percent margin of error. Something happened between then and the time voters received their ballots. That answer must be found and addressed during this campaign.

One of the leading ways supporters can pick up "yes" votes is through a complete financial transparency presentation. County officials and levy supporters need to show how Polk salaries compare to other similar counties. They must better demonstrate how various funds within the overall budget work and why certain monies can't simply be reallocated to another fund, say health and human services to the sheriff's department or district attorney's office. They need to continue to explain clearly that federal timber dollars, which helped pay for the majority of the public safety departments in years past, are gone and won't be coming back. They must demonstrate that the county really is working with a leaner workforce in every department, not just public safety, than it did five and 10 years ago.

All of that, and much more, will need to be done — and done quickly. The average person who doesn't follow government, has little interest in it and is only concerned with his or her tax bill must be convinced of the real need and what happens if this levy were to fail. If not, this measure has little chance at passing.

PUBLIC AGENDA

Public Agenda is a listing of upcoming meetings for governmental and nongovernmental agencies in Polk County. To submit a meeting, send it to the Itemizer-Observer via fax (503-623-2395) or email (kholland@polkio.com).

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 4

- Polk County Board of Commissioners — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.
- Monmouth Historic Commission — 6 p.m., Volunteer Hall, 144 S. Warren St., Monmouth. 503-838-0722.
- Monmouth Planning Commission — 7 p.m., Volunteer Hall, 144 S. Warren St., Monmouth. 503-838-0722.

SATURDAY, FEB. 7

- Polk County Fair Board Work Session — 7:30 a.m., Polk County Fairgrounds & Event Center, 520 S. Pacific Highway (99W), Rickreall. 503-623-3048.

MONDAY, FEB. 9

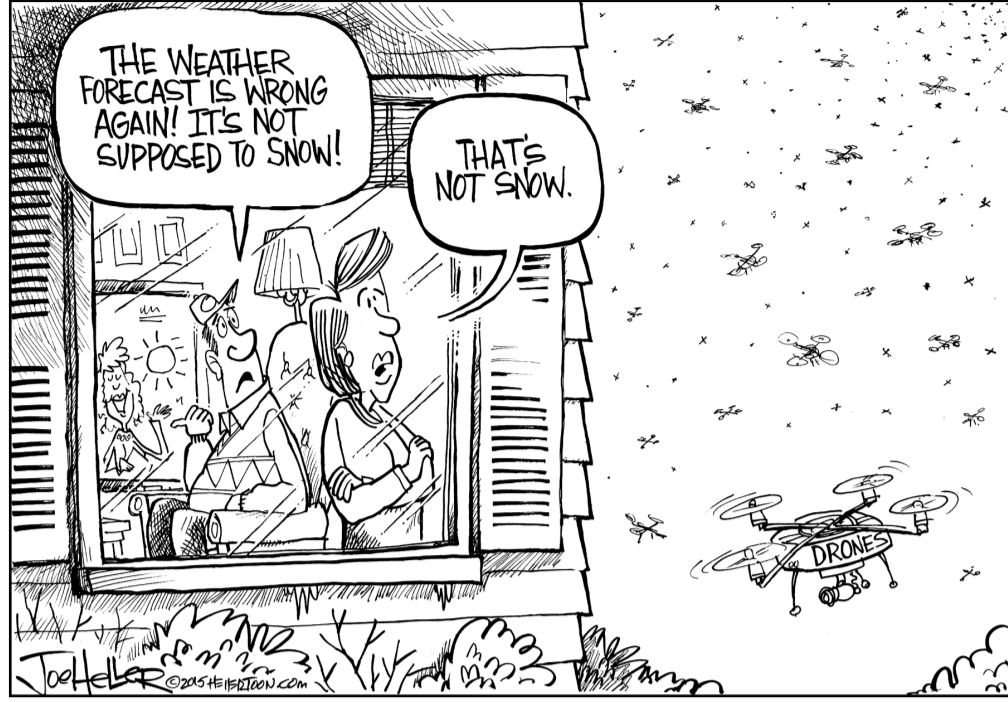
- Dallas School Board — 3 p.m., LaCreole Middle School, 701 SE LaCreole Drive, Dallas. 503-623-9664, ext. 2334.
- Perrydale School Board — 7 p.m., Perrydale School, 7445 Perrydale Road, Amity. 503-623-2040.
- Luckiamute Domestic Water Cooperative Board — 7 p.m., Luckiamute Domestic Water Cooperative office, 8585 Suver Road, Monmouth. 503-838-2075.

TUESDAY, FEB. 10

- Polk County Board of Commissioners — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.
- Dallas Planning Commission — 7 p.m., City Hall, 187 SE Court St., Dallas. 503-831-3502.
- Independence City Council — 7:30 p.m., Independence Civic Center, 555 S. Main St., Independence. 503-838-1212.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 11

- Monmouth Library Advisory Board — 7 a.m., Monmouth Public Library, 168 S. Ecols St., Monmouth. 503-838-0722.
- Polk County Board of Commissioners — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.
- Monmouth Park and Recreation Board — 7 p.m., Volunteer Hall, 144 S. Warren St., Monmouth. 503-838-0722.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Donations for dog shelter appreciated

The Dallas Police Department wishes to extend its gratitude to Skip and Betty Lowrie and friends for their ongoing support of the Dallas Police Department dog shelter.

The Lowrie family and friends donated \$845 and 129½ pounds of food to our shelter this winter alone.

Donations from the Lowrie family and their friends, along with individual donations from other individuals, allow us to improve our shelter. We are proud of the success of our animal control program, and especially our ability to reunite dogs with owners.

When a dog is loose in the city, officers try to locate the owner using searches of our licensing program. Even if the dog does not currently have a license or is missing its tag, we can sometimes find the owner by matching dogs with expired licenses in the area. We can also get owner information from microchips if the dog has one and it has been registered. Finally, residents of Dallas provide temporary foster homes for some dogs until the owners are found. These resources mean many loose dogs never have to go to the shelter.

If a dog does end up in our shelter or in foster care, we put the dog's information out on Facebook. This

has a very high success rate of reuniting dogs with owners. After a waiting period, we also try to find unclaimed dogs new homes.

Thanks to all of this community support, we only had to send 10 dogs to the humane society for them to try to adopt out in all of 2014.

Lt. Jerry Mott
Dallas Police Department

Simple battle cry: No more new taxes

With the possibility of the second-highest property taxes in the state and the lowest income rate per family here in Polk County, it's not good for the home owners. Too many foreclosures hurt our property values.

It's time for our county and state to just live within their general budget. Stop taxing us to make up for your shortfalls and start standing up to the contracts that kill your budgets, like PERS.

Send a message — vote "no" on all levies.

Kenneth Mayer
Dallas

Good Samaritan thanked for help

On Jan. 23 at about 11:30 a.m., I fell when crossing the street at the corner of Main and Walnut in Dallas. A gentleman saw me fall, stopped,

and came to my assistance.

He helped me up, got me under the eaves of the building and called 9-1-1 for medics. This gentleman stayed with me until the medics arrived. When the medics started checking me out, the gentleman left.

No one got his name or phone number, so I have not been able to contact and thank him in person or over the phone. I am hoping he will read this and know I want him to know how thankful I am for his assistance.

Carmen Moya
Salem

Look at different options than levy

Before asking, again, for money from tax-strapped residents, Polk County should reorganize personnel within the sheriff's budget.

There is nothing in Oregon law requiring deputies in the jail. Put officers back on patrol and replace them with professional corrections officers, providing \$12,000 to \$25,000 savings per month for patrol deputies.

If the voters pass this levy, it will be a year before we see 22 new personnel. It will be another two years before they finish their training cycle. What do we do when the levy runs out?

Steve Pickering
Dallas

WANT TO WRITE A LETTER?

Letters to the editor are limited to 300 words. Longer letters will be edited.

Election-related letters of all types are limited to 100 words. Writers are limited to one election-related letter per election season. Election letters from writers outside of Polk County are not accepted.

Each writer is restricted to one letter per 30-day period.

Letters that are libelous, obscene or in bad taste will not be printed. Attacks by name on businesses or individuals will not be printed.

Letters to the editor that are obvious promotions for a business, products or services will not be printed.

The Itemizer-Observer does not guarantee the accuracy of facts presented by letter writers; dissenters are welcome to respond. Letter writers who disagree with other published letter writers should maintain a civil discourse and address the subject, not the author.

Letters, like all editorial material submitted to the newspaper, are edited for length, grammar and content.

Letters must include the author's name, address and telephone number. This includes letters submitted via the I-O's website. Names and cities of residence are published; street addresses and telephone numbers are used for verification purposes only.

Letters must be submitted from individuals, not organizations, and must be original submissions to the I-O, not copies of letters sent to other media.

Letters of thanks to businesses, individuals and organizations are limited to 10 names. The deadline for letters to the editor is Monday a 10 a.m. Letters submitted may not be retractable after this deadline.

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Visit the *Itemizer-Observer's* website, www.polkio.com, for past Letters to the Editor, editorials and more local opinion pieces regarding Polk County issues

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