

FAQ

LETTERS

What voters need to know about OSU Extension Service District

By PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITER



Caleb Glenn, a 4-H member from Hermiston, washes the tail of his steer during the 2017 Umatilla County Fair.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Umatilla and Morrow County voters in the May election will decide whether to add two new tax districts to fund staff and operations for the Oregon State University Extension Service. Both counties have their own ballot measures that each propose a property tax rate of 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Residents are asking questions about what this will mean. Pendleton City Council candidates even had to field a question about the Extension Service district at Thursday night's forum.

Here are some of the most frequently asked questions:

How much will the tax bring in?

The tax would raise approximately \$1.7 million in Umatilla County and about \$700,000 in Morrow County.

It would pay about 25 percent of what the Extension Service needs to operate. Regional administrator Mary Corp said that is needed to help offset state funding cuts and meet a mandate to find local revenue to fill the gap. Over the years, she said, the Extension Service has relied on multiple methods to meet that requirement, but none have been stable and sustainable. The new tax would fix that, she said.

Who collects that tax revenue and where does it go?

The county collects the revenue, and the funds stay there. Oregon budget law mandates the district's tax revenue would get its own fund and not go into the county general fund.

Corp also said the budgets from the two counties would remain separate "all the way until paying the bills."

What would the new tax revenue pay for?

Both agricultural research and 4-H, though the specifics will be decided with each new budget. Corp said she could not pin down what percent of the funds would go toward 4-H, but the Extension Service is proposing to use the reve-

nue to expand 4-H education by adding a new educational program assistant and a 4-H educator.

Corp said the tax would not go to support administration.

Could the tax revenue support building projects or improvements?

Yes, but Corp and other Extension Service personnel stated their plans are more about staffing support and better equipment. Besides, Corp said, the local Extension Service lacks capacity for building improvements.

How much would I pay in property taxes if this passes?

Hermiston is under tax compression, meaning property owners will not see an increase in their taxes if Measure 30-126 passes. The new service district would cut into the revenues for other districts, including public safety districts.

The tax rates are available at www.co.umatilla.or.us/at/index.html.

Who would oversee the new district?

Umatilla County counsel Doug Olsen said the county board of commissioners would be in charge because the district would be a county service district, the only one in the county. Likewise, Morrow County's board would oversee the district there.

County service districts are not the same as special districts, such as fire protection or water districts, which have their own boards of directors.

County commissioners also would appoint a budget committee for the district. Corp said Ore-

gon law specifies the budget committee would have to consist of the three county commissioners and three non-board members. Again, one for Umatilla County and another for Morrow County.

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said with similar districts in 25 of Oregon's 36 counties, the county could look for a model "that is working well elsewhere should it become necessary." An advisory committee would be part of the model, which Corp and others already formed.

Could the county raise the rate?

No. The measure calls for a maximum permanent rate of 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. That means the county board of commissioners could not increase the rate beyond 33 cents. County boards could seek less than the rate, however.

What are the tax rates of the 25 other Extension Service districts?

They range from 1.5 cents to 56 cents per \$1,000. The local proposals would be the second highest rate among the districts.

Will the counties continue to fund the district even if the taxes pass?

Yes, in the short term. Olsen said should the districts pass, the tax collection deadline is April 30, so revenues would not be available until 2019. Umatilla County is giving about \$397,000 for fiscal year 2018-19, and Morrow County also plans to provide funds. Morrow County for fiscal year 2017-18 gave about \$167,000.

How long the counties would provide the fiscal support remains a question.

Givens a hard-working commissioner

I support Larry Givens in his race for Umatilla County Commissioner. Although I do not know his opponent, I just can't see the case for making a change. Larry has been a conscientious and hard-working commissioner, and has given of his time and energy over and over again on behalf of the citizens of this county.

As a regular exhibitor at the Umatilla County Fair, I appreciate his efforts to get the fair up and running at its new location on Airport Road. Larry knew that we long ago had outgrown the old fairgrounds in town, and he worked with the City of Hermiston to develop the new fairgrounds out by the airport into a first-class facility. Last year's fair, the first in the new location, was a great success.

Whenever you go to a farm-related event, you will see Larry there. Whenever you have a problem involving county government, you can count on Larry to roll up his sleeves and try to address it. That's why I think we should keep him in place, working for us in Umatilla County. Re-elect Larry Givens as our county commissioner!

MARIANNE SMELSER
HERMISTON

Re-elect Givens as county commissioner

I urge the voters of Umatilla County to re-elect Larry Givens as our county commissioner. He has been a hard-working, hands-on commissioner who has devoted countless hours to help move Umatilla County forward.

Larry is a life-long resident of this county. His experience as a teacher, school administrator and rancher, along with his proven ability to get things done, have served us well. The thing that impresses me the most about Larry is that he actually listens to people in a sincere way, identifies a problem and then sets out to find the best way to solve it, whether it is land use, economic development or a budget issue.

I see no reason to change, just for the sake of change. Let's keep what

is working. Let's re-elect Larry Givens!

BILL HAMPTON
PENDLETON

Numbers aren't everything in judge's race

I've heard that one of the judicial candidates for Umatilla and Morrow Counties has suggested that he is better qualified to be judge because of the large number of court appearances he's made in the last year or so. I wouldn't attribute any level of competence to just coming to court over and over again.

I've been practicing law in Eastern Oregon for 18 years now. Coming to court repeatedly can mean that you haven't done the job right, you aren't prepared, or you weren't thorough in investigating your client's circumstances. Appearing repeatedly on the same case certainly increases your "appearance" count, but the only thing it really suggests is that the client is incurring a lot of attorney fees.

Quantity of appearances is no indication of quality of representation or of knowledge. Would you go back to the same doctor or mechanic or plumber if you never got well, or your car or plumbing continued to fail? Or perhaps a large number of appearances simply indicates that a lawyer has a steep learning curve, something I have personally observed in a few cases. It sure doesn't bode well for a client that a lawyer needs so many hearings to get the job done.

Do not be influenced by such silly, meaningless statistics. True professionalism isn't measured by how many times you charge your client for appearing in court.

Rob Collins is superbly qualified to be your next circuit court judge. He is a lawyer's lawyer, recognized and respected by colleagues who hire him for their own personal cases. Join me in voting for Rob Collins for Circuit Court Judge.

KITTEE CUSTER
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