

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Answers to budget ?? readily available

A Letter to the Editor from an organization called Taxpayers United of Columbia County (see Letters, "Taxpayers group questions budget" page 11) asks many questions about the county budget, but makes no effort to supply the answers and, instead, denigrates the budget-makers by innuendo.

An organization such as this could be helpful—but only if they do their homework. In an effort to urge the organization to work toward constructive criticism of the budgetary process, here is some basic information they should have obtained before making public comment.

In this county, the commissioners, sheriff, assessor, treasurer and county clerk all receive the same salary. Neither of the two eligible commissioners (Hugo and Sykes), nor the county clerk, accepted the 6% PERS pickup, they pay their own. The sheriff, assessor and treasurer accepted it.

Most of the Corrections Department revenue is "pass-through" money; money that comes from the state and is earmarked for specific purposes. The commissioners have very little control over that money and very little of the department's revenue is from property taxes.

There are over 600 miles of county roads and no property taxes are used to maintain them. Road Dep't. funds derive from gasoline taxes, surface mining (sand and gravel) depletion fees and forest trust lands reimbursement. The Steel Mill road is an economic development grant (lottery money) that will be available only if a proposed steel mill comes to the county. If not, the money stays with the state for other economic developments of their choice. There are also other grants and grant requests on the budget that may never materialize.

Circuit Court and District Court costs are paid directly by the state, the money doesn't go through the county so the costs don't show on the county budget.

DD (Developmentally Disabled) residential facilities and Mental Health funds are also pass through monies. State law requires, but does not pay for, a director of emergency services. Some of the money for department operations comes from the state Dep't of Energy and some from PGE.

Fringe benefits will vary for individuals, depending on family size, because family members are included in the employees' insurance coverage. The current union contracts require employees to pay part of their own medical insurance coverage, reducing taxpayers' costs by \$250,000 in the current fiscal year.

Much of this information may be obtained by looking at the Resources (income) part of the budget. The remainder (and much more) is readily available by asking the commissioners or department heads.

If members of Taxpayers United are serious about watchdogging the county budget, they should attend budget meetings. Budget meetings are open to the public and questions are allowed. The next county budget meeting will be April 4, 1995, Room 308 in the courthouse. Call the commissioners' office (503-397-4322) for the time.



The Josi Report

By Rep. Tim Josi
Oregon House District 2

The first week of the 1995 Oregon legislative session has been very eventful. The opening day was marked by the swearing in of Gov. John Kitzhaber and a call for bi-partisan co-operation in resolving the issues facing the state during this biennium.

Some legislation being introduced will look familiar, as it relates to many of the same subjects discussed in the last session. These include relaxing environmental regulations, reducing the scope of LCDC, strengthening private property rights in relation to public interests, determining the future administration of the Education Reform Act, and further developing the Women's Health and Wellness Act.

Of interest to our communities will be the re-evaluation of factors that determine whether land should be designated as farm/forest or allowed for development. Continued work to restore coastal fisheries, and proposed legislation by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Department to require recreational clam digging licenses are also being considered.

Residents of communities adjacent to the Tillamook forest should be especially concerned about Senate Bill 104 and Senate Joint Resolution 2, which affect county receipt of funds from the Tillamook State Forest. Introduced by the Superintendent of Education, Norma Paulus, these bills would have disas-

trous consequences for virtually every community within my legislative district. If these bills are passed by the legislature, SJR 2 would be placed on the ballot for the next general election. If passed, it would amend the Oregon constitution and allow the state to take timber revenues earmarked for our schools and local taxing districts and place it into the Common School Fund. SB 104 is the enabling, statutory language and would take effect only if SJR 2 were approved by the voters. The counties acquired ownership of these lands after the Tillamook burn and deeded them to the state, without compensation, with the understanding that when the forest had recovered and was ready for harvesting, the state would share those revenues with the corresponding counties. These bills would breach the state's contract with the counties that entered into the trust agreement with the State. I consider this to be a very underhanded and devious plan to help the state gain revenues to which it is not entitled. I will fight this attempt in every possible way and I suggest that we all need to join together with a united voice to defeat this legislative effort. Send me your letters and I will see to it that your voice is heard here in Salem. In future reports, I will keep everyone informed as to what is happening and how you can help.

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Sykes will be missed on Board

The resignation of Michael Sykes from the Columbia County Board of Commissioners is a blow to residents in the Vernonia area.

Over the years, as voters in this area finally overcame the feeling of estrangement from county government, it was obvious that Sykes had a great deal to do with that change of attitude. The reason was apparent: He didn't simply *pretend* to have our interests at heart, he really was concerned.

There is no doubt that Sykes is an excellent choice for an economic development specialist at the Port of St. Helens. He is knowledgeable, intelligent and reliable, but equally important is his overwhelming desire to bring good family wage jobs to Columbia County.

He has served county government well and we regret his going, nevertheless we wish him well.