

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Voters must believe levy will be of value

The law enforcement levy that will be on the May 16 ballot is meant to provide expanded coverage for rural areas of Columbia County. There is no doubt that it is needed.

The sheriff's office is underfunded and understaffed, as most voters already know. The only potential barrier to passage of the levy is whether people believe they will get what they are paying for.

As both rural and city residents in this area know, city police respond to law enforcement emergencies in rural areas long before anyone from the sheriff's office is available. This results in city residents paying for rural law enforcement without reimbursement from the county and, at the same time, being left without police officers when they go to rural areas to help.

At this time, the City of Vernonia is trying to develop an intergovernmental agreement with the sheriff's office in order to clarify how expanded law enforcement would be delivered. There are many options: Four or five of the twelve new deputies the levy would provide could be stationed on the west side of the county, along Hwy. 47. But, if they were stationed in St. Helens and responded only after getting a call, they would be of little value to the people who need their services.

Another approach would be to have resident deputies, in the Vernonia and Clatskanie areas, who work out of the city police departments. Again, it would require four or five deputies to cover the area seven days a week.

Sheriff George Hulit wants to provide all deputies with laptop computers in their cars and develop a network of computers in all law enforcement offices in the county. This could eliminate a lot of the time deputies now use to file reports, etc., in St. Helens—if it is used properly.

Until a delivery system for enhanced law enforcement is worked out in a satisfactory manner and with a *written intergovernmental agreement*, it's unlikely to convince the voters that there will be any substantial improvement.

It is incumbent on the law enforcement community to reach a quick and efficient agreement.

Arraignment of sheriff doesn't cancel election

It is distressing, to say the least, to have Columbia County Sheriff George Hulit arraigned on criminal charges, no matter how minor they may be. Nevertheless, he has pleaded not guilty to the charges and will seek his day in court.

At this time, Hulit should not be considered the same as Commissioner Bruce Hugo, who admitted his guilt without even waiting for an indictment.

As difficult as it may be, when voters mark their ballots—yes or no—on the law enforcement levy, it's important to consider the question without dwelling on who is sheriff.

But whatever you do—remember to vote!



The Josi Report

By Rep. Tim Josi
Oregon Representative, District 2

Proposed changes in Oregon's Workers' Compensation Law, embodied in Senate Bill 369 and amended in the House, seeks to rectify potential problems that may arise from recent court and Workers' Compensation Board decisions that appear to create an unbalanced system which is more sympathetic to workers than to their employers' well being. The idea is, of course, to strike a balance where legitimate and reasonable compensation is granted to workers in a timely fashion so that the worker and the employer are not placed in adversarial roles, especially if those positions are inherently biased against one group or the other.

One of the primary concerns of the Legislature is to reinforce the concept of sole remedy, which is in jeopardy from recent court rulings. In order to have a sound and effective workers' compensation program, all employers and employees must know that the decisions made to compensate workers are made on an impartial basis. There are limits both on payment to the worker and responsibility of the employer; once a decision is made that an injury is not covered by Workers' Compensation, there is no further avenue of recourse against the employer, such as a civil suit.

To make the changes more palatable to workers, the bill calls for increased compensation for permanent partial disability benefits and for increased benefits for surviving spouses. It also allows for treatment of injured workers by out-of-state physicians, which takes into account that some people working in Oregon do not live in the state. In addition, there are provisions which accelerate the payment

of settlements, which may or not prove to be beneficial to workers, especially if the new rules do not allow proper time to submit and verify claims.

While a worker could conceivably be granted increased benefits, one of the major changes and clarifications made by the bill would make it much more difficult to prove that major cause of an injury is job related and not tied to some pre-existing condition, therefore, limiting the number of cases that will be declared eligible for workers' compensation. The worker may not even need to be aware of the pre-existing condition or have been treated for it to be denied benefits.

For a worker to be granted benefits for an injury, the worker's doctor must be able to base diagnosis on objective findings that must be consistently reproducible, measurable or observable. Physicians will no longer be able to use subjective verbal information regarding pain supplied to them by their patients as verification of an injury. This means, for instance, that chronic back pain, the cause of which cannot be consistently verified by physical observation and measurable means, will probably not be accepted as a claim.

I believe these revisions favor the employer at the expense of the worker. Business has already saved \$2 billion since the initial passage in 1990 of compensation reform. If the bill is not changed to increase the ability of workers to have legitimate claims approved, Governor Kitzhaber will veto the bill.

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The Says

By Dale Webb, member
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The water gently flows through the logs and limbs of the very small creek as it springs forth from small springs in the hillsides. As more and more water merges, the creek gains enough force to dig holes in the stream bed after falling over logs. The water flows on,

depths of these pools and man is unaware, until now.

This year the stream has something new to flow through, a strange contraption made of plastic pipe and plastic mesh. This device spans the whole creek and seems to catch everything that flows into it, including all the migrating fish. The fish are forced to swim into a

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