

Josephine County Commissioners

March 27, 2022 meetings

The Women's Crisis Support Team got a spotlight at the Wednesday, March 27 meeting of the Josephine County Commissioners. Commissioners also heard a progress report on the removal of the old hospital on A Street in Grants Pass and did some politicking from the dais now that the threat of recall has been removed. Wednesday evening Commission Chair Herman Baertschiger held an information-gathering forum on funding the Sheriff's Department that was more partisan drubbing than idea gathering.

Women's Crisis Executive Director Ray Dinkins gave a brief overview of what the team does during his appeal for a grant renewal that Commissioners have to sign. His non-profit organization provides domestic violence intervention and prevention and is a safe shelter agency serving all of Josephine County. He said the Justice Reinvestment Grant made it possible to save the lives of victims of violence and credited his amazing staff with helping hold offenders accountable. In 2021 his shelter serviced 418 survivors with 83 provided with shelter. Currently, he said there are five adults and five children being sheltered.

Commissioner Dan DeYoung asked if there had been an increase in domestic violence during the year COVID had people shut in. Dinkins said they didn't see an uptick in the numbers but the intensity of the violence rose.

Susie Ellwood, a Survivor Advocate in Illinois Valley said Justice Reinvestment funds help provide emergency shelter, safety planning, assistance with protection orders, support groups, peer counseling, a crisis line and financial assistance for victims of domestic violence. In 2021 her agency served 548 unduplicated victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, trafficking, elder abuse and dating violence. They also helped 31 victims leave illegal grow sites. She said they see "a lot of victims" in Illinois Valley.

Finance Director Sandy Novak stepped up to the podium with an update regarding the hazardous waste materials disposal at the old hospital site. A grant of \$172,000 is paying for the cleanup. Contractors are nearly done and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality will be signing off on the project after inspection. The next cleanup will be a fuel storage tank under the building, she said. Commissioner Darin Fowler asked if the tunnel from the hospital to a large house across the street had been closed off. Novak said there had been some discussion about a tunnel but she didn't know if it was included. Fowler, who said he went on a tour of the building, said he was told the tunnel was a passageway for nurses who boarded in the house.

During Public Comments only one person had something to say from the podium. Judy Ahrens was there again discussing trash and eyesores around the community. She said she was tired of picking up after people. She also announced a meeting for people who don't want to send their children to public schools.

Raymond Smith of Cave Junction called in to bring up a county charter provision that says voter approval is required before any fee can be established by the county. He was referred to the Charter Committee. Josephine County Republican Party Chair Holli Morton tried to call in but struggled with her connection.

Another caller named James asked the Commission to send a letter of support to the Klamath County Commissioners in support of not taking down Klamath River dams.

Commissioners responded to the comments by affirming they would indicate to Klamath they are firmly in support of their effort to prevent the dismantling of the dams. Baertschiger said if they don't stand up for the Klamath dams environmentalists will come for all dams. "We don't have the dog in the fight they do but we kinda do because at the end of the day the 30,000 foot view is that the environmental community wants all dams out. All. Columbia River, Snake River. All. All dams gone. And so if they are continuing being successful and removing dams what's to stop them from removing Lost Creek or Applegate? So I think we do kinda have a dog in the fight because like I said the main objective of the environmental community is all dams. Gone." (Note: the Klamath dams belong to Pacific Power which has indicated they are too old to repair so they are taking them out. Tribes in the area are also concerned about the dams' effects on migrating salmon)

Fowler responded to Judy Ahrens' discussion about trash by trashing the City of Grants Pass:

"About the trash in the city of Grants Pass. Our city is lagging behind in solutions. We don't have enough trash pickup, we don't have enforcement of some of the camping laws due to a judge's decision, and our city is slowly doing nothing about it. it's very disconcerting because you know Grants Pass is three to five years behind Eugene and Portland in solving the homeless crisis. And let's go look at Eugene and Portland, they're starting to change their mind about how they're going to do this and they're starting to clean up some of those street camps especially in vulnerable areas where cars might be traveling too close. Los Angeles is cleaning theirs up, so let's not build a tent city for those folks to come here. Could you guys get your stuff together over at the city and move our city along faster and not just run in the trail and the smoke and the dust of people like Portland and Eugene and Salem?" (Note: Grants Pass City Councilor Brian DeLaGrange is running for the seat being vacated by Fowler)

Commissioners then turned to personal gripes during Matters from Commissioners. DeYoung was riled about a letter to the editor and an opinion piece in the Grants Pass Daily Courier last week. He said he took pride in being a "burr" under Editor Scott Stoddard's "saddle" and said his supporters tell him to keep it up. This was in reference to the March 27 editorial about DeYoung's penchant for making up statistics and some letters to the editor criticizing the board last week. Baertschiger addressed the owners of the newspaper by saying "In my opinion it saddens me the Voorhees family has turned over that paper to individuals that constantly, constantly attack conservative thinking. Period. That's where it's at. The Voorhees family in my opinion, are letting these individuals weaponize the Daily Courier to promote liberal ideas. That's my opinion."

Baertschiger's Forum on Sheriff's Patrol Funding

Commissioner Herman Baertschiger touted this forum, held Wednesday evening, as an opportunity to gather people's ideas about providing funding for the Josephine County Sheriff's Department. During his regular call-in to the Bill Meyer Show on KMED Tuesday, Baertschiger said the forum he's hosting will be "citizen driven as long as I'm in the commissioner's office. I'm a facilitator I'll answer the hard questions but I'm just the facilitator."

However, it seemed more like a political hit against Oregon's Democratic Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and if someone had an idea Baertschiger disagreed with he tried to argue it down. After Larry West told Baertschiger the Board should be budgeting for outcomes, the Sportsman Park could be used to generate revenue and that lottery funds are used by other counties to help fund the sheriff's department, Baertschiger shot back, "I have to disagree with you. I do think we budget for outcomes, and the Sportsman's Association, I don't know how you're gonna generate \$4.5 million outta 2500 people out there. On lottery funds you can't count on them because the legislature changes the rules all the time."

Baertschiger began the forum with his version of the history of timber receipts in Josephine County and how they supported the county for years, until Wyden and Merkley came along and stopped timber harvests out of concern for the environment. Baertschiger had charts to illustrate his points, but no one was listing people's suggestions on a board.

Commissioner candidate Mark Seligman and John Knapp, who is running against Sheriff Dave Daniel also got their comeuppance. Seligman vented his familiar contention that it's the county's fault there is so much illegal cannabis around and Knapp said he could run the department more efficiently and wouldn't need a tax to support it.

Baertschiger, replying to Seligman, said "thank you for that very well-articulated campaign speech."

"What you're doing tonight is a campaign for this levy. Don't tell me about campaign," replied Seligman

Sheriff Daniel also accused Knapp of campaigning who in turn accused Daniel of campaigning.

Rikki Brown took the podium to say a funding district for the sheriff was the only reliable way to support county law enforcement and explained why. A sales tax is too dependent on a good economy, if you try to tax marijuana plants the more you tax the less plants there will be, and levies can get voted down by a disgruntled constituency. "A district is the only way around property tax limitations. That's what I'd like to see," she said.

Jay Meredith made an appearance to say the county should pursue a lodging tax and suggested charging utilities some kind of tax. He said Curry County implemented a property registration ordinance which taxes out-of-town property owners. Bill Hunker from Merlin suggested money for the sheriff could come out of a squeeze on all county departments. Baertschiger said in Josephine County most of the money funding departments is earmarked and can't be used any other way. He then launched into his problem with grants. "Even if they took a hit we couldn't take their money," he said. Hunker argued that an across-the-board hit would emotionally support the sheriff's department.

On recruiting more volunteers, Daniel said he already has about 25 or 30 who help in the courts and the substations and if you count Search and Rescue, he has another 100 or so. He said volunteers can't be used for patrol or situations where the use of a gun is involved because "our insurance would drop us."

Ron Smith asked if a solution would take into consideration the 40 percent inflation expected. Baertschiger said he's had that conversation with all county department heads and told Daniels to expect his gas bill to be about \$70,000 more this year.

Several people said they were fed up with the illegal grows in the county and asked if property confiscation could help fund patrols. Daniels explained that state law says that money can only be used for training and equipment and it's considered unethical to go around seizing property to fund the sheriff. People will start accusing you of just doing that for money, he said. Baertschiger added that it takes a long time to confiscate property because it goes through a court process first.

Both Daniels and Baertschiger emphasized they are not trying to grow the sheriff's department with whatever funding plan they come up with. They are just trying to replace the funding. Daniel said right now he is providing 20/7 patrols and with funding he'd be able to go back to 24/7. Baertschiger also reminded those in the room that any funding involving a tax will have to go to the voters for approval.

"I've always believed the government shouldn't tax the people. People should tax themselves," he said.

The meeting broke down into people just talking from the audience so their comments weren't recorded. Baertschiger finally brought the meeting to a close after an hour and 34 minutes.

The BS Brother's Show

On Tuesday's March 26 Bill Meyer Show Commissioner Herman Baertschiger spent the first half of his regular call into KMED radio bashing the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Bill asked Herman about the March 27 piece by Editor Scott Stoddard saying "DeYoung Resurfaces a Bogus Statistic"

Herman – Well....the problem with Mr. Stoddard is he'll never poke his head out of his little cubical down at the Courier to actually gather up the facts. You know I'll tell ya the back story on that state police report. Now remember doesn't that sound a little corny, that the state police commission a report then all of a sudden retract it? Well, I'll tell you the back story to that. When I was in the senate I made a speech on the senate floor and I said, you know I'm gonna have to paraphrase cause that was a few years ago, I either said 75 percent or I said the vast majority of the marijuana grown in Josephine County leaves in the black market. And the Democrats said (in falsetto) Oh nah nah nah nah...you don't know. Now these are the same Democrats that live in Portland and not Josephine County. So shortly after that that report came out from the state police ok. And Governor Brown went through the ceiling. I mean she ripped on Travis Hampton (Superintendent of Oregon State Police) up one side down the other so he had to retract it of course when....

Bill – Well you have to understand though when you work in the OSP you work at the pleasure, essentially you work for Gov. Brown. Is that the case? Really?

Herman – Exactly. Yes. So he had to retract it so of course to save face he had to have excuses why he had to retract it. Now what's really...I remember how furious he was over that. And what was really

interesting and it saddens me it wasn't too long later as soon as he reached the age to retire which is pretty young, I wanna say its 55, he retired. As soon as he reached the age of retirement he was outta there. And also, Dave Anderson, the Captain, as soon as he reached his age he was outta there. They had it, had it with Democrats running things. They knew how bad things were.

Bill – So it was just a purely partisan response? Or take on the marijuana disorder? Problem in the area. Was this a partisan response? Really?

Herman – Yes! Oh, listen. Just look at everything that goes on the Democrats. When it doesn't go their way, they just turn a blind eye. I mean look at our president, tromping around world, I don't even think he can tie his shoes, and everybody's singing it...you remember the old saying the emperor with no clothes, well that's Joe Biden. And everybody knows it but they just turn a blind eye. I mean you see it. Just look what happened the other day at the press conference. Oh I didn't say any of that. Well, What! So um, that's what they do when it's not going well for em and as I pointed out they just turned a blind eye.

Bill – OK, well, how does this though, how does this work with so called bogus pot statistics? Because Christopher Hall, that's the gentleman I talked to from the Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District. I don't know if he's a partisan, I didn't ask him of his partisan, or if it was a political position but the Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District was trying to track down and get to the bottom of how much water is being stolen and what it's doing to them, you know, the quality of life there. I thought it was a pretty well-done story and they're saying 82 percent of the grows were illegal and that's just there. Now I know you can't just extrapolate it to the entire two-county area, Jackson and Josephine, but that kind of tells you there's a bit of a problem going on. Wouldn't you say? And so why does anybody talk about bogus statistics at this point. That's all I'm getting at.

Herman – Yeah! And how come Oregon marijuana is showing up in Amsterdam. I mean come on. Scott Stoddard pull your head outta your cubicle and take a look around. You know the guy is never asked to visit any of these grow sites after the sheriff has raided em. The guy has never...you know...I just can't believe...

Bill – Now is this just a personal thing with you though, Herman? Because the paper has not been real supportive.

Herman – Oh, absolutely! I wasn't surprised that somethin' was gonna come out. I told Commissioner DeYoung after our Tuesday meeting with the Mayor; the Mayor wanted us to make fireworks illegal in Josephine County. Ok. And the reason was, is she does not wanna make...so fireworks are legal in the City of Grants Pass for the Fourth of July only. (Note: Grants Pass Mayor Sarah Bristol, at a city/county meeting, said many of her constituents were expressing a concern about fireworks in this dry year. Fireworks are not allowed to be sold inside the city limits and their use is only allowed on Fourth of July within city limits)

Bill – Right.

Herman – And she would like that to go away but doesn't wanna do it so she wants us to make it illegal to purchase um, and then that way she says well people's pets get upset and stuff...

Bill – Well, I think there is a legitimate concern about potential fire danger. I don't think it's going to be all that wet this summer. I'm sayin.

Herman – Well....you know, I been in this business a long time and I even checked with Tyler over at ODF and he agreed with me, it's never been historically been a problem because it's later in the evening when the humidities are high and if somebody happens to start a fire they're there to put it out immediately, so....but let me also reiterate that we are in fire season and anybody that is within ODF protected lands and it is fire season they're still prohibited from doing fireworks so make that perfectly clear cause you can't have any kind of open flame. But anyway...

Bill – So it's the implication then the City of Grants Pass wanted the County Commission to take the fall for probably enacting a relatively unpopular ordinance. Is that kinda where it was going?

Herman – And every time we criticize, get sideways with the Mayor this kind of crap comes out. Now remember...

Bill – Now what kind of crap? You speak about this kind of crap. What's that?

Herman – Oh, where they attack us. Especially in these opinions. You know they just absolutely attack us. And ya know, I'm kinda pissed off on this because if you look at the end of it, he just says we're makin' false statements and how do they actually know they're telling us the truth. So he's trying to impugn my character, which is...I gotta pretty good record of telling it how it is and that's why I've never thought much of Mr. Stoddard or his pen. You know, because of Bristol (Chris Bristol, Sarah's husband) is an editor there the Voorhees are letting these people weaponize the newspaper in a political arena and that's pretty sad Bill.

Bill – Alright. That's what you think is going on. A little bit of payback. Alright. Let's shift it back to some points of county concern here for a little bit because you've got a meeting tomorrow on sheriff's funding and what's the lay of the land on that because I ended up talking with Jackson County Sheriff Nate Sickler yesterday. I'm hoping to talk with Dave Daniel too in the next few days. Especially after we have this meeting but the hunt is on for additional law enforcement money, isn't that the case?

Herman – Yeah, so traditionally both Jackson and Josephine County, more Josephine than Jackson the funding stream for law enforcement came from timber royalties. OK? And over the years that simply evaporated...

Bill – And they're not coming back any time soon right? As far as we can tell.

Herman – As long as we have two Democrat senators adamantly against any type of timber harvesting is that ever coming back. It's just that simple. OK? Now there's nothing I can do about it. As long as people vote for these guys we're not gonna see any more harvesting of timber. And also pressures from the large landowner, ah, the large timber landowners in the state of Oregon, they don't want federal timber cut either. So between those two things, it's simply not gonna happen Bill.

Bill – OK. So since we know there's not going to be funding coming from that anymore...in fact, wasn't it true that Josephine County did not even have a property tax for a while because there was so much money coming in. Right?

Herman – That was in the 70s. That’s correct. And so when Measure 5 passed that froze your property taxes, which is a good thing.

Bill – Yeah Josephine County kinda got screwed because the levy was so low at that time. So it can’t grow that much.

Herman – And Jackson County’s was quite a bit higher so they’re in better shape but Josephine County was just very, very low and it froze it so it only goes up 3 percent a year from that point. But we still had funding comin from timber royalties so everything was Kosher but now with these Democrat senators and pressure from large timber landowners don’t expect it to end any time in the future.

Bill – Now Nate Sickler, Jackson County Sheriff, this week when I talked to him said that he doesn’t see much of a support for a regional sales tax or county sales tax. He doesn’t think there is much chance of something like that floated. It’s being discussed in Josephine County still? Or is that kind of off the table at this point. What do we know and where we going to find out more about this?

Herman – Well, it is an option. OK? There’s really about three options. Um, some sort of sales tax, a law enforcement district, which would create a board of directors and so forth just like any other special taxing district.

Bill – Yeah, well that ends up being a permanent increase in the cost of living for Josephine County residents.

Herman – Absolutely. And/or a levy. But the reality is, the reality is, um, you know, we’ve kinda banked our timber receipts over the years but that piggy bank’s about done Bill. And we’re not receiving any more. So come July of 23 if we don’t find some other source of funding then the sheriff’s department, you know, ya can’t pay for it ya can’t pay for it. So a certain part of it is gonna go away.

Bill – Hmm. So are there suggestions that the Commission is bring forth in this meeting? Could you tell us a little bit about that meeting too? What that’s all about?

Herman – You know, my belief, my political has always been that government should not tax people. People should tax people. Citizens should tax themselves. Not government. And that’s how I approach this. My approach to this is, this is the reality, this is where we’re at so there’s two questions. The questions are “what type of sheriff’s department do you want and how much are you willing to pay for it?” Those are the two questions to the citizens. The citizens of Josephine County are the ones that are going to make the decision.

Bill – Now this is going to be on Wednesday night, tomorrow night at six o’clock and you’re putting on this meeting at the Ann Basker Auditorium in Grants Pass. The Citizen Discussion on Law Enforcement Funding...is what it is technically known as then. So there is no pre-planned agenda, it’s just totally open, you think? About this?

Herman – You know the mayor came out front page....”the Mayor’s against the sales tax.” That’s Ok. I can appreciate that. But then I turn around and say so what’s your solution ok? Is the solution to cut the sheriff’s department. Get rid of patrol? Or is the solution to try to find some way to fund it?

Bill – What do you think about it realistically. What is your opinion as a commissioner on this kind of question here Herman? And the reason I bring this up is that Linda and I went out to the coast over the

weekend, when I was gone last week for a few days on vacation and when you're on the way to California and you're driving on 199 and through the Kerbys and the Selmas and the Cave Junctions and everything you just realize how massively huge Josephine County is. As a land mass. But yet, not a lot of people out in the rural lands. I think you'd concur with me on that wouldn't you?

Herman – Yep.

Bill – So OK. How can there possibly be enough resources with most of the population over in the Grants Pass area and surrounding area to really cover all that area effectively? To me it almost seems like a fool's errand. Maybe I'm wrong about that. I was just talking about the kind of distances and land that you have to cover there. I don't know how you do it right now.

Herman – Yeah and well Bill, remember, you don't have the kind of coverage in rural America like you do in urban areas.

Bill – True.

Herman – Even the Mayor says I live in town and I have a three minute response. You will not have that.

Bill – And you have a considerably higher taxes within the City of Grants Pass for that reason though. In order to have that.

Herman – Exactly, and that's why there's a rural, urban difference in people's opinions, but at the end of the day, if you do have an incident it's most unlikely that law enforcement is gonna be there shortly. However, can they show up and then try to find the perpetrators. Ok? If you don't have a sheriff's office to find the perpetrators the perpetrators are going to continue to do what perpetrators, what criminals do. So that's the difference, and you know, I hear people all the time saying you know the sheriff is doin' a great job especially doin all these marijuana issues and the sheriff is really trying and the sheriff is this and I says are you willing to give more money to the sheriff and boy then people start backstepping a little bit.

Bill – Yeah, everything's fine until you're asked to pay for it. Especially in this inflationary time. I don't know Herman. I don't know if there's gonna be much of a chance of anything getting passed and I'm sorry to throw cold water on things, I'm just saying realistically where people are finding themselves right now. And there is a....Jackson County needs a new jail, you know, it really does need a new jail. The jail is too small. We're cutting loose too many dirtbags. It's just the way it happens and uh...I imagine you may not have the jail problem in Josephine County but you have other problems. Fair enough? You gotta different problem.

Herman – Incarceration is a very expensive business because of all of the mandates we have to meet to incarcerate. You know, I mean you just don't open up a jail door and throw em in there then twice a day throw em some water and some bread and butter, you know. You gotta take care of all their medical needs and blah blah blah blah and so it's very expensive to incarcerate anybody anymore. It drives up the price. And it's also very expensive to have officers and all of the equipment and the gear and everything. These are all expensive things so back again, fundamentally as a politician, and remember Bill I have always said that government should not tax people and I was on the revenue committee for all those years and I voted no on every tax cause I said it should always go to the vote of the people. People need to vote taxes, not politicians So I still look at it that way but if they want...like I said, the two

questions are what level of sheriff do you want and how much are you willing to pay. Those are the discussions for the citizens of rural Josephine County.

Bill – Then what will happen with the information that learned from the Wednesday night meeting?

Herman – Well, the pathway, there's really four pathways. The sales tax, it doesn't look like that's gonna fly, the law enforcement taxing district and then there's a levy and the fourth path is do nothing and then, um, severely downsize the sheriff's department next year.

Bill – So what happens March of 2023 without any additional funding? And I imagine we'll still be looking at 7 or 8 percent inflation in costs each year too.

Herman – Oh yeah. I would say the patrol goes away.

Bill – So we're back to where it was six, seven years ago.

Herman – Yep. Exactly.

Bill – Alright.

Herman – And six, seven years ago we didn't have this marijuana problem. You know the unsolved homicides in Josephine County is concerning too.

Bill – Is there any real help? I talked to Sheriff Sickler in Jackson County about that yesterday but is there any real help coming to Jo County on that particular issue and I'm wondering is there even that much to worry about in some respects because there isn't going to be any water to steal this year. I'm talking about the illegal grows. The Illinois Valley problem again.

Herman – There'll always be water for somebody to steal Bill. Illinois River's not going to completely dry up but, um, it's a mess. It's a mess. You know all the other counties in the state of Oregon funds their law enforcement through property taxes because they didn't have the timber royalties we had over the years. So we are, you know, and I get criticized when I say we do, us and Curry County have the lowest property tax rates in the state of Oregon. Hurray for us! That's good! That's a good thing! Except, now we've lost our funding for the sheriff's department and so now what are we gonna do. And you can thank our Democrat senators. I really, I pin the blame on them Bill because they....Oh they go 'Oh we got secure rural schools and we got payment in lieu of taxes.' You know, the federal government manages 70 percent of the land in Josephine County and does not contribute now. Does not contribute. So I have to contribute. I'm a property owner. I have to contribute to Josephine County. Why does the federal government not have to contribute?

Bill – Uh, because, uh because it's the federal government Herman. Don't even need ta, it's kind of a rhetorical question. As far as the pot stuff, are you getting help or is there going to be help available or is that maybe a Sheriff Dave Daniel question.

Herman – Well you gotta remember Petition 110, that dipped into the marijuana enforcement fund and now the legislature this last session....um, so when the legislature passed the regulation on marijuana they created a law enforcement fund that would go to the counties that had to deal with this marijuana...enforce the regulation set forth by the legislature. So that was a pretty good fund. Well initiative Petition 110, uh, in that petition it said that it could dip into that fund so now their taken

money from law enforcement. And then this go-around with the legislature they dipped in it again saying that humanitarian organizations could dip into that to help with the narco slavery....

Bill – Which seems to be more concerned about the people brought in rather than what’s actually happening with disorder in Josephine County. OK I get that problem. Hey Herman...

Bill takes a break to allow callers to contribute to the conversation.

Bill - Cohen has a question – Cohen asks “Has the \$32 billion to fund police including local county sheriffs by the federal government. Has this been taken into consideration?”

Caller Al suggested the county only allow fireworks “New Years Eve when nothing burns.”

Herman – We already open up New Years Eve. I’m just talkin’ Josephine County.

Herman closed by saying the forum he’s hosting will be “citizen driven as long as I’m in the commissioner’s office. I’m a facilitator I’ll answer the hard questions but I’m just the facilitator.

