

Josephine County Commissioners Report

Week of May 10

Taking a lesson from the recent recall attempt, Josephine County Commissioners decided their salaries need to be a separate consideration instead of lumped in with all non-union employees when raises are considered and voted on.

“These comparisons are a moving target,” said Commission Chair Herman Baertschiger who claimed he didn’t know he was giving himself a raise when he voted to approve a five percent raise for non-union employees, which includes elected officials. “I would feel more comfortable if the Commissioners were probably separated from the other group.”

Commissioners Dan DeYoung and Darin Fowler agreed after DeYoung pointed out their salary raises were listed on the recall. Then they spent about 20 minutes trying to come up with a motion that articulated their intent. It was confusing since Finance Officer Sandy Novak said they would need four motions to back out of the non-union category while Human Resources Director JJ Scofield tried to walk them through it. At one point Fowler got frustrated and said, “Somewhere we got off and we’re talking past each other now.”

Non-union employees, which include department heads and elected officials such as the sheriff and county clerk, get raises based on the recommendation of a Compensation Board, currently consisting of Ken Beatty, Joe Spagualo and Debbie Simmons. Scofield is responsible for presenting them with the data they need to make recommendation. Scofield scans other Oregon counties about the size of Josephine, then presents the Compensation Board with an average. The Board limits compensation to either five percent above Scofield’s numbers or five percent below.

It was discovered that the raise Commissioners got was slightly above the five percent mark, Scofield said, so the Compensation Board recommended the Commission get no increase for the next fiscal year. They did consider separating Commissioners out, Scofield said, but couldn’t come to a consensus on that so instead, made the recommendation they get skipped over for raises this time around.

During this discussion, Sheriff Dave Daniel, who was still in the room after his budget presentation, raised his hand. When called on by the Chair, he rose and went to the podium.

“For the record,” he said, “I have absolutely no interest in taking a 1.7 or 1.6 percent raise based upon my staff. They’re going to get hit and they’re going to be struggling as well and that is just absolutely not right.”

DeYoung pointed out “for the record” that this isn’t the first time Daniel has refused a raise in consideration of his department’s financial situation.

Just prior to the Commission compensation deliberation, Daniel presented his 2022-2023 budget. Even with severe cutbacks to patrol, he’d still have a deficit of \$1.6 million, he said. The following year, without the funds the county scraped up this year from COVID relief money and

other sources, the deficit will be more than \$5 million he said. He does have money for the Josephine Marijuana Enforcement Team which funds six detectives (four of those positions are vacant right now), an analyst, ½ a sergeant's time, ½ a deputy DA's time and ½ an evidence tech's time. However, even with the money to hire these people, they are hard to find for a position that may not be permanent, Daniel noted. Earlier the county imposed a hiring freeze in his department because of his financial situation. In spite of that, Daniel said he is applying for more grant money from the state and will be lobbying for more permanent funding for marijuana enforcement in June.

"I do want to point out that this fiscal crunch has impacted us in the ability to move forward. It's basically set us almost a year back because we're on a hiring freeze. And so I cannot impact our patrol services division right now by sliding people over then not being able to hire then backfill their positions and currently, as you probably read in the paper the other day, it's the same with the Oregon State Marine Board and their grant monies for a marine deputy who just resigned and moved on," Daniel said.

Other departments presenting their budgets this week were Forestry, Facilities, Fleet (vehicles) and Internal Service Funds. All those department heads warned of increasing costs and Novak said they won't be getting as much from the federal government to make up for the lack of timber receipts. This set Commissioners off on a rant about "giveaway" projects to protect public lands.

After the budget session on Tuesday May 10, Commissioners' Weekly Business Session May 11 was short and calm...at least until Baertschiger and Fowler unleashed frustrations with the Grants Pass Daily Courier. DeYoung was absent. They had a brief public hearing to annex two more households into the library district so they can pay the library levy and enjoy access to the county libraries funded by that levy. Fowler said this reminded him to do the same since he recently moved out of the district.

"Is there an application for that at the library?" he asked the library representatives at the meeting. They said that's how it's done. Just pick up an application at the library and submit it, then wait for it to be approved by Commissioners.

Commissioners also signed a proclamation designating May 15-21 as National Police Week. Fowler read the entire proclamation.

During the period for citizen comments Board regular Judy Ahrens said she thanks policemen whenever she sees one and recently sent thank you cards to policemen in the Grants Pass department. Then she rambled on about something she read in Epoch Times about body transplants in China and warned Commissioners to be on the lookout for that here, then referred to another Epoch Times story about the government using credit cards to track people.

Fowler thanked Ahrens for her "timely information" and said, "Epoch Times is a popular magnet to the truth as instead of making stuff up like some papers do." (Note: The Epoch Times, while portraying itself as a neutral voice, is actually a far-right international propaganda newspaper that accuses prominent Democrats of being communists, spreads COVID disinformation and is

affiliated with the Falun Gong religious movement in China. It champions Trump and spreads conspiracy theories including claims of fraud in the 2020 US election. The NY Times called it a “global-scale misinformation machine.”)

That set Baertschiger off on the Daily Courier.

“In the commissioners race I don’t endorse anybody. I don’t feel comfortable in doing that because I’m going to be working with one of those so I’m not like the Courier that makes these endorsements and on the Courier I’m just amazed at how our hometown newspaper for over a hundred years has been hijacked by the progressive left and is using as a tool and I’m just so disappointed in their inability to just report the facts as they are and inform our community of what’s going on. It’s really sad that such a great newspaper has been decimated by people that have come here from other places,” he said. (Note: Last week on his weekly call-in to KMED’s The Bill Meyer Show Baertschiger did say he thought John West was the best commission candidate.)

Then Fowler got in on the Courier-bashing....” If I could sir, you’ve sparked something. Didn’t the Courier a couple of years ago say “hey, we’re going to stop endorsing people for city council and commissioner. We’ll just bring the information.” Well now they’re back to endorsing when there’s a candidate they particularly think leans their way (Note: The Courier suggested Brian DeLaGrange, an Independent and Gary Richardson, a staunch Republican, had the most experience in government and would make good commissioners).

Fowler – “And that’s unfortunate to see that obvious change. I’m sure there’ll be reason for it. I don’t know if we’ll see Scott Stoddard’s opinion on the front page like we saw when the horse racing thing was there with his picture on the front page...that was embarrassing. But I share your notice of change that the community stuff they write is great. They have great articles on what’s going on. High schools and different non-profits and different things that happen but when it gets to politics they just turn themselves inside out. They can’t help it. Too bad. Because we really enjoy that paper and I haven’t got it for like 6 months now cause I couldn’t have my wife looking at that crud every day.”

Commissioners’ May 11 Administrative Workshop was an additional opportunity for Daily Courier bashing since little else besides approval of three timber sale contracts was done. DeYoung again was absent but Fowler and Baertschiger were still sore about the May 10 editorial that said the three sitting commissioners have “all displayed an aversion to facts over the last two years, insulting the intelligence of this county with continuing episodes of rumor-mongering, conspiracy theories and flat-out falsehoods, many of which have been well-documented in this newspaper.” The paper endorsed candidates DeLaGrange and Richardson over the candidate Bill Meyer called Baertschiger’s “buddy” John West. The editorial said West’s “fact-challenged smear tactics...cannot be ignored as an indicator of what kind of commissioner he would be. The evidence is clear: He’s cut from the same cloth as the misinformation-spreading Baertschiger and DeYoung.”

These were war words, according to Baertschiger.

“You know, yesterday’s Daily Courier telling that the three commissioners are dishonest. I’ve had it with that. I’ve got a long repertation (Baertschiger’s word) of bein’ honest and direct. I will continue with that and I’m not gonna let the Daily Courier spew out this dribberish (another Baertschiger word) to push their agenda forward. Ain’t gonna do it. So I’ll fight back.”

Fowler joined him. “I appreciate it. We been fightin’ back for a few years now. So, I’ll join ya.”

It was unclear how, besides ranting during Commissioner meetings, they would fight back.

The Bill and Herman Show

May 10 2022

KMED Radio host Bill Meyer and Josephine County Commission Chair and Chair of the Oregon Republic Party Herman Baertschiger mused on the chances a Republican could be elected governor by as little as 38 percent, then spent most of the rest of their time ranting about former House minority speaker and current Republican gubernatorial candidate Christine Drazen’s vote to put menstrual products in boys’ bathrooms and how little power local elected officials really have. They got so absorbed in their conversation Baertschiger forgot to gripe about the Daily Courier.

Bill – What was the supposed need?

Herman – I feel sorry for those taking care of the plumbing in the schools. These will end up in the toilets.

Bill – How did this get started? Almost a year ago. Everyone voted for it. Every Republican. Every Democrat Communist vote. Everyone piled on including Christine Drazen. How stupid to get rid of Columbus Day then put pads in boy’s bathrooms.

Herman – It got tied up with what we call end of the session haggling. Ok? Cause if you look at it, it was first introduced in February 23. It was introduced. It had its first public hearing in March and then it was pretty quiet. This bill really didn’t do much until the end of the session and then it popped up in the last part of the session. So the session ended on June 26. It was passed out of the House on the 21st and passed out of the Senate on the 26th. So that tells me that...you know I don’t know what the end of the session haggling was...but that tells me this bill was part of that and was just thrown in there and that’s how it happened.

Bill – Ok so why the difference between the House and the Senate? I’m looking at the Senate. I’m actually looking at a few brains that are, you know, actually turned off because there were 11 No votes in the Senate.....then I’m looking at everybody in the House looking at a laydown. What is going on here? Does haggling explain stupidity? I’m trying to understand this, please.

Herman – Well, it is haggling. It’s end of the session haggling and that’s how it works. I never liked that kind of stuff but this is a bill that has grown legs. I think everybody thought this would be a foo foo bill and just go away but boy I’ll tell you what. You talk to people about this, Democrats and Republicans both reasonably minded people all say what the heck is going on?

Bill – Because once again this bill seems to be about blurring the lines on reality. At least that's kinda how I'm seeing it. What about you?

Herman – Yep. Yeah, I mean this just plays into the wokism to the extreme. I mean come on. Really? Really? Why do boys need these in their bathroom?

Bill – Now the thing is though, now this is something that's concerned me about the public schools in general. Are we at a time now where the parents of daughters are no longer required to provide for their children? We're not supposed to provide food, we're not supposed to provide menstrual products and as parents you're not supposed to provide a home pretty soon. Is that where we take this? I'm not trying to be hard-hearted about this Herman but there does seem to be a situation where, the left especially and the right seems to be helping them out making the government school the provider of all. It's not gonna be the government that provides, it's the government school that provides all. Is that a little bit of a concern out there?

Herman – I have a big concern. I watch my grandson go to school every day and I ask you wanna make breakfast? No the school provides breakfast. School provides lunch. School provides everything. And I don't know about you but when I went to school if I got a free lunch it means I gotta work in the cafeteria to get it.

Bill – I'm just wondering what kind of message this sends to the future generation when absolutely everything is no longer the responsibility or the purview of the parents. That's why I get concerned. The more government school service provides the more they say, "Oh the parents really can't have much say about what's going on because, well, these are services." And these services are needed. Whether it's the abortion, whether it's the gender affirming care as they like to call that or whether it's menstrual products. It sends a bad message I think.

Herman – Oh I think it's horrible. You know parents need to be involved in their kid's upbringing and if they don't their gonna get a product that maybe they're not too keen of. So I tell parents "pay attention." A lotta parents come up to me and say what can we do about public schools and I say probably nothin'. If I were you I'd get a night job and send my kids to private school so that's a...it's a sad day but this is what is happening. It's happening right before our eyes and bills like this just perpetuate that madness that's going on in our public schools.

Bill – By the way is this the same type of haggling, in your opinion here Herman, um...like I said having been inside but on the outside looking in at this point...is this what gave us the ridiculous, the anti-noose bill and we're going to change the state song because it mentioned free men, founded by free men and getting rid of Columbus Day and all these other things? Is that all part of the haggling or did Republicans get something for it? Do you even know? Just curious.

Herman – You know I don't know the exact facts because I wasn't there on the 21 session but I will tell you I'm very familiar with how that process goes down in the declining days of the session.

Bill – You know it really makes...do you understand though, as Oregon Republican Party Chair and I know you have to remain candidate neutral...do you know how difficult it is to gather support for a Republican gubernatorial candidate today who voted for these kind of things?

Because you could vote for Tina Kotek and get the same bills! Does anyone understand the difference of how this stuff can damage people in the future?

Herman – Well I've always told the freshmen that came in the Senate when I was the leader, I says you can never take a vote back. So always be very careful how you vote. It's etched in granite. When that gavel comes down that's the end. And you can never take it back and I've watched some legislators take some votes that have haunted them in the past. Jason Atkinson was a good example. When he voted for the dam removals on the Klamath, which imposed a special fee on everybody's Pacific Power bill, he was the vote and to be quite honest that's probably why his time in the Senate was terminated. So, we're exhausted I should say.

Bill – Yeah. I dare say so. Sure.

Herman – Yeah, and that's what happens and I used to tell people...I used to also tell freshmen be very careful on bills you sponsor. I see these they go "Oh this is a great bill I'm gonna sponsor." Well you don't know what that bill's gonna look like at the end of the process.

Bill – It could be completely gutted and stuffed into something out of recognition as when you signed on as a sponsor and you'll be tagged as the sponsor later on. When it ends up being bad.

Herman – Exactly. Now this bill here on the tampons, uh, Bill, there are no Republicans as chief sponsors and no Republicans, I'm looking really quick as regular sponsors. This was a pure Democrat bill. One hundred percent pure Democrat. So it really makes you scratch your head and that's why I know this is part of the end of the session haggling.

Bill – But still if there is end of the session haggling you just vote no. The Democrats want to have, you know free menstrual devices for the island of misfit humans whatever it is, the boy's bathroom – fine. Let them own it. Why not?

Herman – I was not much of a transactional politician Bill.

Bill – Hey, what's the latest on the Sportsman Park? Any movement on that?

Herman – Well yeah, it's a three part process. The first part of the process is being able to categorize the properties in a place where we can transfer em so we accomplished that last week. The next part will be contracts and then the third part, if we approve the contract as written, then the third part will be the actual transfer so we're moving along. We still got to deal with a few things. Some housekeeping stuff and you know there was a grant...I just love it Bill...there was a grant given about 35 years ago out there for \$11,000 to construct some restrooms and part of the conditions of that grant is that the entire complex has to be held in public trust. But we are finding out there are some other provisions...but just think a this, the federal government can give you \$11,000 and control that property in perpetuity forever. Can you believe that?

Bill – Yes I can which is why when I look at the cities, "Oh there's grant stream funding" I say no you're dancing to their tune. Just say no. Just say no just like when the Democrats come "we have a menstrual equity bill" don't sign on and just vote no, vote no. I don't know

Herman – I know so we're working through that with the Department of Interior. I'm pretty certain we're gonna get there but still, you know our parks director said it might jeopardize our future grants and I just why would I sign any future grants to tie our property up forever.

Bill – But you see this is the process and why I think there's been a real war on the rural counties here in Southern Oregon that we get to the point where...now weren't you and I talking the other day about what is the actual money you had to control as county commissioner in Josephine County isn't it like five and a half million dollars a year? I think is all you have actual control over?

Herman – Five and a half million dollars is how much people contribute through their property taxes and then with some SRS funds...our General Fund is actually the part that the Commissioners can actually move around a little bit.

Bill – Yeah a little bit.

Herman – It's about thirteen and a half million dollars out of almost a hundred and eighty.

Bill – But the vast majority of the funding going through there is either pass through or grant-stream funding with strings attached by other government agencies right? The state or the federal right?

Herman – That's right. It's like we have two and a half million dollars in our transportation account there that pays for the busses and stuff like that...

Bill – Oh, that pays for the coal-fired busses, right?

Herman – Yeah, the coal-powered busses and so we have a deficit for our sheriff's office but I cannot move any of that money over to the sheriff's office cause its dedicated funds for the coal-fired busses.

Bill – But I'm curious if all the people, candidates running for county commissioner, understand that. You can't just automatically say there's two million dollars for the electric buses. That's stupid so let's move it over here. You can't do that can you?

Herman – No, and you know I can't say that the candidates should know all this because Bill, I'm pretty savvy on stuff but moving over to the county side I am absolutely fabergasted (Baertschiger's word) on what little control county commissioners really have. So if you go back a hundred years, local government was funded by local people and county commissioners had about 100 percent control over everything. That has flipped now. And I have very little. Eighty-six percent of the money coming in are grants now and those grants are all dedicated funds. I can't do nothing with em. You have the road tax that has to be used for roads. That goes to Public Works. You can't move any of those funds around. I mean there's funds sitting in all these different departments. I just can't move em around to fund our sheriff's office.

Bill – That is a heck of a note and a frustrating end to this but you have to get people to understand, especially when, like I've talked about this before with candidates for office "I'm gonna come in there and I'm gonna get rid of the fraud, waste and abuse blah blah blah." Ok go

ahead. Give it a shot. You're still only taxed at 58 cents per thousand where in Jackson County two bucks and a penny per thousand. The vast majority of the money is by all of the other state and federal agencies that are controlling here so as far as I'm concerned I'm with grant stream-funding. Give me a final thought...

Herman – And that's what has happened with our public schools. The local control is gone. I mean with this bill this last session it even makes it harder for them to hire and fire a superintendent. So the control of our public schools now resides with the state and federal government. It doesn't reside very much with our local school board and again if you look back a hundred years I think there was like 135 thousand school boards a hundred years ago and now there's only like 19 thousand.

Bill – So the moment people were upset because they were seeing a lack of equity between school districts at that point and you say, "Oh let's just send all the money to Salem and then have them dole it back." That was the end of your local control which is why I'm thinking that the only thing you can do is quit and leave it right now for the time being.