

How Not to Sell A Needed Tax Measure

Back on July 6, when Republicans in Josephine County were still full of patriotic fervor and probably a little indigestion from the Liberty Watch barbecue across from the Courthouse, our Commissioners convened what they thought would be a very short meeting that had nothing on the agenda but some employee awards and approval of the consent calendar. However, Bill Hunker decided to show up and give Commissioners a little history concerning the long tradition of governmental incompetence in this county.

Hunker stuck to his three minutes with precision as he related what he thought were boondoggles, bungles and bankruptcies. Commissioners sat silent as unlit firecrackers as Hunker talked about the sacredness of the county's 58 cent tax rate and how that apparently attracts a good class of people because if it was raised Josephine County would become the "Appalachia of Oregon."

July 6 meeting

Bill Hunker – Merlin Oregon, It's kind of a small group here this morning.

Baertshiger – Yeah, they're all dressed in Burgandy, referring to the color of the empty chairs.

Bill – I couldn't make some other meetings so I'm here today. I'm reading always because I can get more in in three minutes. I'm tiring of the incessant drumbeat that Josephine Citizens only pay 58 cents per thousand for the permanent taxes. The answer's 'yes, we do.' It was frozen in May of 1997 by Measure 50. That measure was an obtuse way of showing that Josephine County was at the time the most prosperous county in the state of Oregon. We had no property taxes from 1970 to 1980 and very minimal tax base through the ensuing years. We were rolling in money. We built projects, we bloated the county government to 696 employees in 2003. Boy those were the days my friend. County leadership thought it would never end. But did they ever put any rainy day funds away? The answer was no. Commissioners stood by for years and did virtually nothing as 40 lumber mills closed, one by one. But nobody seemed to notice and nobody seemed to care. In fact, Commissioners themselves were often the ones who thwarted our economy's plans. Remember Coachman trailers? Well, the Commissioners killed 100s of Merlin jobs. Or the Paradise Ranch debacle that bankrupted an entire bank. Or the many times Josephine County made state and national headlines: "Wallace County propaganda for \$108,000 bus shelters, Sales tax defeated by 77 percent, or twice employing referendums to defeat property rights overreach. Or how about the panic driven request to have the governor take over the sheriff's department. We've endured decades of reactive, not proactive, county leadership. The citizens trust their Commissioners to protect the county but they fumble the ball time and time again. It's therefore galling to hear that we're the problem because we only pay 58 cents in taxes. Let me say clearly it is only our low property taxes that keep Josephine County from becoming the Appalachia of Oregon. The very best magnet that Josephine County possesses is our low tax rate because everything else has been stymied by reactive leadership. Even our outstanding health care industry fueled by our disproportionately large retirement community exists because of our low taxes. Let's stop blaming the citizens for the county's failures and begin to hold our

county leaders responsible. Reminds me of the old adage, failure to plan on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part.

DeYoung – Thanks Judy for what she does. I was watching the news this morning just caught where the New York Times usually publishes the Declaration of Independence every Fourth of July. This year they didn't. They said 'I think it was employee oversight.

Fowler – It was their 100th anniversary of doing that.

DeYoung – Yeah, hundredth anniversary and they missed it. So I appreciate...we can count on you (he says pointing his finger at Judy) You know we are gonna lean on you for that because it's a great event. Thank you very much for putting all that together.

Mr. Hunker, you are looking at one Commissioner that's been here two years, one that's been here four years and one that's been here six years. And everything you mentioned (voice raising) right up there at that microphone happened well before we took office, yet you want to blame us (emphasizing words). We're not blaming the citizens for 58 cents. We're only bringing out that 58 cents is what is frozen by Measure 5. Now, to get back to...oh you think we will be Appalachia if we came off 58 cents? You drive seven miles to Rogue River and it's two dollars and eighteen cents or something like that per thousand. When we collect one million dollars in property tax with that 58 cents, Jackson County collects four times that because they're at two dollars and eighteen cents, or two twelve, don't quote me on that, just over two dollars. Four times what we pay. So when we collect a million, they collect four million. Their assessed value is five times the assessed value in Jackson County then it is here. I want you to listen. That means when we collect one they collect twenty million dollars to our one million. It is the 58 cents that's the problem Mr. Hunker, And other than that we can only deal with levies, we can deal with levies or we can deal with taxing districts. And both of them, every time anybody wants to fund that sheriff's department there's the No New Tax people pounding up and down in front of the Courthouse with a No New Tax sign yet they want 24/7 patrol. They want the jail open. They want to have a full and vibrant law enforcement community. This time we're leaning strictly on law enforcement. Anything that we come up with as a board and put to the voter I can almost guarantee you will be against it because it will be a raise in some sort of revenue to fund law enforcement. And (in louder stern voice) to set up there and tell us that we are remiss in our duty, I take offence to that. And I really don't appreciate it (Fowler nods his head) because you know what? We aren't remiss in our duty. We're trying to figure out how to fund law enforcement with something that maybe, maybe will work once and for all. But nope! We're going to get fought tooth and nail and you can better believe it, we're in it for the fight. Because if we don't have law enforcement you gotta look at the long range thing. Do you think we're a tourism community now that all the mills have gone away? And it wasn't us that stood back and watched the mills go away one at a time and didn't do anything. And it wasn't us that didn't put away a rainy day fund. Can you imagine what it woulda been if the former Commissioners way back when when the timber industry was booming, put 15 percent aside, or 10 percent into a local bank, what would that bank balance be? We could have no or low interest loans for new businesses come here. We'd have streets paved with the best asphalt money can buy, imported from Tiawan or wherever. But I guarantee ya, that ain't gonna happen. (All this time

Baertschiger is reading some paperwork) We didn't stand by. We didn't stand by (pointing up and down the dias) so don't blame the Commissioners and politicians for it. Cause we're here fighting for you whether you know it or not or whether you appreciate it or not. It would be every once in a while somebody say 'you know I think they're doing a good job.' But that ain't how it happens around here and we're willing to take that (swinging his pen at the other commissioners). We'll take it on the chin every time. And you stand up to the mike for your three minutes, well guess what, that's your priveledge, because you know what, we got kicked off of YouTube because I wouldn't censor somebody at that microphone when I was chairman. You want a letter of apology? Nope. Not gonna do it. That microphone is sacred. And we're gonna leave it that way. But if we would've just put the money away, but we didn't put the money away did we. That is not our fault. So when you say the Commissioners and the people are remiss did you also mention the bus shelters out there? I voted against it. I voted against it every time. I fought that tooth and nail. It still went through and that was at City Council that did it, not County government as you mentioned...that the Commissioners did that. I'm sorry, you've got your sights set I think on a whole bunch of different targets and you're not willing to say I'm gonna help one of those targets get something done. I'm willing to do that. I know you probably got some good answers for law enforcement funding. Well good. We're writing those down. I'd like to see what that is, in writing. And we'll put it on our list. Commissioner Beartrigger is gonna have four forums. Four. He's already had one. We're gonna have four more with which people can say what they can do and what we think will fund law enforcement. And then we're gonna land on one and when we land on it we're gonna expect some people that are normally "nos" to come along and at least kick it into neutral and give law enforcement a damn chance in this community instead of constantly, constantly "I'm not gonna come off of my 58 cents." Well you don't have to come off of 58 cents sir, We're gonna have something in front of you that your 58 cents is safer, it's gonna stay right there. Ain't no doubt about it. We have never said, I asked, I asked the question. Is there any way that we can come off of 58 cents. Can we put it to the voter to add, you know change the tax base from 58 cents to a dollar and fifty-eight cents. No. You can't. Statutorily and legislatively you can't. So we'll stay at your 58 cents and we're not blaming you for the 58 cents. This is state government and we got caught with our hand out. Former Commissioners didn't say aww, let's raise this up cause there's an anvil gonna drop on us here one of these days. We oughta be a buck fifty-eight. Nope. It stayed at 58 and when the curtain fell that's it. We're stuck with it. And we've been dealing with it ever since. It's been at a tremendous amount of time and effort from the Board of County Commissioners and from the City Council and everything, trying to fund law enforcement. You would think law enforcement would be the first thing on people's list. But anything comes up it's gonna take five cents, ten cents 50 bucks, a hundred bucks, five hundred dollars a year, it's a 'no.' Because 58 cents is the reason why people move here. I disagree with that a hundred percent. Now I've lived here 72 years. I don't like sales tax. I don't like taxes. I also don't like lawlessness. And you bet. And you smirk because I say I don't like taxes. But you know what? You got another way to pay it? And win the lottery or somethin? I didn't think so. It's gonna take taxes, a levy or something in order to cover law enforcement. The state's not gonna...they send us all the money they can. That's one time money. It is not stable funding for law enforcement. So we're gonna do our best out here Mr. Hunker but what you state, blaming us Commissioners for that and I do take it

personally. You blame us because we're the problem and nobody else is the problem? I disagree with that. The voter is gonna get everything put right in front of him. That's transparency. We're not gonna pass anything here and force anything down your throat. But we will refer something to the voter. Thank you. 19:49 to 27:42 6 minute rant.

Fowler – leans over puts out his hand and says Commissioner. Nicely done. Nicely done. I could've said it better myself. It's easy to come in here every few weeks and tell us how things should be and are in your own mind. But I say you get off your wrinkled retirement ass and get on a committee (Herman looks over at Fowler) or run for...Baertshiger interrupts
"Commissioner restrain yourself" or run for Commissioner instead of coming here and tossing rocks like a small child. (Baertschiger squirms in his chair). You may be articulate but you're also very stupid and that annoys me to no end. That you think representative government is supposed to get up and tell you what to do. You've lost your way sir. Thank you Mr. Chair.

Baertschiger – Judy I'm glad everything went well. I'm sorry I couldn't stay for the whole thing but I had a houseful of people from out of the area but you guys did great. Um...you know I know people are frustrated over the funding but I'm gonna...you know if you look at my record in the Senate and how many floor speeches I gave on closing down mills in Josephine County. I actually had a good conversation with Gov. Kitzhauber at the time and he, if you'll remember, actually did help out our last remaining mill. But. I'll be frank. The anger needs to be pointed at Wyden and Merkley. They have obstructed harvesting timber on federal lands. Wyden has been in there over 20 years and he is the major reason that we do not have timber revenue in Josephine County that paid for everything. So let's put our anger at where it needs to be directed. As long as Wyden and Merkley are senators for the state of Oregon you are not gonna see it. it's just simply that because it will take movement from the Senate and if both our senators aren't in favor ain't gonna happen. So I hope you go to their town halls and I hope you give them the riot act. Cause that's where this all came from. That's why we're in this problem today. With the federal government controlling 70 percent of the land in Josephine County and not paying, that's where you need to direct your anger. I only been Commissioner for two years. I criticized other Commissioners long time ago, going way back. About how they spent the money. But anyways, that's water under the bridge. I can't do anything about it now. But I wish people would start directing their anger at the real problem. And the real problem with timber receipts and funding for Josephine County lies right at the feet of Wyden and Merkley.

Matters...the fair's coming in august theme we're back. It's our obligation to keep the county fair alive.