



LWV Corvallis

Serving Benton and Linn Counties

October 2003



Public Forum
sponsored by
**League of Women Voters of Corvallis
And Corvallis–Benton County Public Library**



Does It Matter If Farmland and Forests Are Developed?

A provocative and insightful presentation by:



Jeffrey Kline
Research Forester
Corvallis Pacific Northwest Research Station
USDA Forest Service



Followed by Community Dialogue

Tuesday, October 14, 2003
7:00–9:00 PM
Corvallis – Benton County Public Library
645 NW Monroe Ave, Corvallis



For more information about this public forum, see page 3.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER: The Morning After

The news the morning of September 16 was good for the courts and criminal system since the jail levy passed, but it was bad for services and schools. The morning after the election is always a time for discussion about what went wrong. The Kids! initiative was criticized as requiring taxpayers to pay too much money retroactively. Citizens wanted to help schools but weren't sure that this local income tax was the best method. Two stipulations bothered voters – the seven-year timeframe and the authority of County commissioners to adjust the amount. In contrast, a similar Multnomah County initiative which passed has a three-year timeframe.

The State Legislature has the responsibility for funding school operations. One possibility rejected by the Legislature would have allowed local governments to increase the rate of taxation from \$5 to \$7 per \$1,000 of property value to fund local school districts. This option would allow citizens to vote on an increase in school funding through existing property tax systems. During the next legislative session, the Legislature will be reviewing options again, but in the meantime it will be a lean two years for schools.

Another funding option is voluntary donations. The Corvallis Public Schools Foundation received \$626,000 in donations last year. Laverne Pitts, Executive Director of the Foundation, said that 100% of the donations go directly to the school or program indicated. Textbooks are expensive – \$50 apiece – for an average classroom of 40 students; extra textbooks may be needed for larger classrooms. There are many classes operating with old ripped up books and replacements are needed. If band, drama or sports are your passion, you may donate to those activities. Send donations to Laverne Pitts at the Foundation, P.O. Box 3509J, Corvallis, OR 97333.

The Benton County Health and Safety Levy was defeated by a close margin, 55% to 45%. The defeat may have been due to the size of the schools levy on the ballot, adding to the no-tax attitudes. It also was an opportunity for voters to retain more of their tax dollars in a poor economic time. Voters were convinced that the jail levy was necessary, but they were not convinced that the health and safety services were necessary. The existing levy does not expire until July, so staffing cuts do not take effect immediately. The County has another opportunity to put the continuation of this levy on the ballot next spring.

The Benton County Commissioners should review the agency budgets and the levy proposals. It might be wise to make some decreases before any new proposals come to the ballot again. The County and local newspaper could provide better coverage of any future proposals, itemizing the number of positions and services provided. Voters need to be convinced that the services provided are necessary for the community at large.

Most state-funded government agencies have newly approved budgets and are adjusting to the limited funds. Due to the state income revenue shortfall, most agencies have taken losses in personnel or programs. Our League will be interviewing local agency representatives to gather information about the current services available. As always, members are needed for these tasks.

LWV Corvallis

P.O. Box 1679
Corvallis, OR 97339-1679
541-758-2922
www.lwv.corvallis.or.us

Board of Directors '02-'03

President

Karen Nibler

VP, Communications

Shelly Murphy

Secretary

Sue Mariner

Treasurer

Diana Carsten

Carolyn Madson, Pat Bishop
(Voter Service)

Doris Waring (Finance)

Liz Frenkel (Growth Mgmt)

Kirk Bailey (Affordable Housing)

Karyle Bucher (Events)

JoAnn Trow (Nominating Committee)

Marolyn Welch Tarrant (Membership)

Walter Barkan, (Special Projects)

Bulletin Editor – Kathy Seeburger

Mission

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

LWVOR

2659 Commercial St. SE, Suite 260
Salem, OR 97302,
503-581-5722, e-mail: lwvor@open.org,
www.open.org/lwvor

LWVUS

1730 M Street NW, Suite 1000
Washington DC 20036-4508
202-429-1965
FAX 202-429-0854
www.lwv.org

The bulletin is the newsletter of the LWV Corvallis and is produced nine times a year. Members subscribe through their dues. Membership is open to anyone 18 years or older.



JOIN THE DIALOGUE: OCTOBER 14 DISCUSSION ON FORESTRY & FARM LANDS

Jeff Kline, a research forester from the Corvallis Pacific Northwest Research Station, will set the stage for an October 14 LWVC–sponsored dialogue by asking the question: **"Does it matter if forest and farmland are developed?"** With research background in both forestry and agriculture, Jeff will review current thinking and research focused on development impacts to forest and agricultural resource lands. He also will discuss land use programs and policies.

Peggy Lynch will moderate the discussion following the presentation. This should be lively! Concerns that are sure to be raised relate to fire protection, problems related to the urban/rural interface, community vision and expectations --- and there are others.

Encourage your friends, neighbors and relatives to attend. Bring a STUDENT! Community involvement is at the core of resource protection, at the core of our statewide land use planning program, and at the core of our community's future. BEGIN HERE.

For more information: contact Karen Nibler at 752–8567.

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE ENDORSEES STORMWATER SDCs; CITY CONSIDERS SURCHARGE

A stormwater stakeholder committee (among whom the League was represented by yours truly) and the Urban Services Committee of the Corvallis City Council met periodically during the spring and summer of this year to develop a rate–setting methodology and recommended new rates for stormwater system development charges (SDCs). This work concluded on September 16, when the group unanimously endorsed resolutions to adopt a new stormwater SDC rate schedule that reflects current project plans and environmental requirements and to separate the improvement and reimbursement components of SDC collections. If adopted by the City Council, the latter resolution will allow the City to benefit from the additional ways in which state law permits reimbursement fees to be spent. (All SDCs are currently treated as improvement fees, which can only be spent for new development.)

At the September 16 meeting, Corvallis City Manager Jon Nelson announced that on October 20, the City Council will host a public discussion about a rate payer fee to subsidize infrastructure for future development. A 1% surcharge on City utility bills has been

suggested, along with the possibility of considering "other funding sources and variations (sliding payment scales)." Funds would be used for "infrastructure investments that build capacity and achieve City Council and Corvallis 2020 Vision Statement goals." Examples of possible projects include: "Participate in providing infrastructure to land purchased for affordable housing projects, participate in providing transportation and utility improvements necessary to support the Downtown Revitalization Plan, participate in providing transportation and utility improvements necessary for an OSU Research and Technology Park."

This proposal raises a number of questions:

1) Imposition of new taxes

Although it's being called a "contribution," the contemplated surcharge is, by any other name, a new tax. There does not appear to anything voluntary about it. After the October 20 discussion, the City Council will make a "decision on whether to proceed" on November 3. It is not clear what that means. Given the sensitivity of tax issues in general, and the imposition of new taxes in particular, has the effort and time to promote public awareness of this proposed tax been adequate?

2) Taxes for unspecified uses

The proposal cites examples of possible uses for the funds, but it does not appear to either require or limit their use to those purposes. Is "infrastructure investments that build capacity and achieve City Council and Corvallis 2020 Vision Statement goals" sufficiently specific?

3) Regressive vs. progressive taxation

Water and sewer are essential services. Urban and suburban life as most of us know it would be impossible without them. Is it fair or reasonable for all city ratepayers to be taxed at the same rate regardless of ability to pay? Is it good policy to impose so regressive a tax, even for socially worthy improvements? Are there ways to make the tax less regressive?

The October 20 meeting is scheduled for 7:30 PM in the Fire Station Meeting Room, 400 NW Harrison. Will you be there? Should LWV Corvallis be there? Is so, what position should we take?

NOTE: All the quotations regarding the proposal are taken from the September 18, 2003 memo by Jon Nelson to interested stakeholders on the subject of "Infrastructure Improvement Fund Concept."

(continued on page 4)

STORMWATER SDCS (continued from page 3)

Relevant League Positions:

.SDC (LWV Corvallis position)

Support for development impact fees, such as system development charges (SDC), which require new development to pay a fair share of the costs of development impact on the community.

.Criteria for evaluating taxes (LWVOR position)

A tax system that is based on ability to pay, but that applies a benefits–received principle wherever reasonable and that recognizes the role of social expediency.

.Sales Tax (condition of LWVOR position in support)

Regressivity is reduced through exemptions for items such as food, rent and utilities.

—Walter Barkan

SETTLE DOWN WITH A GOOD BOOK: LWVC BOOK CLUB

Leaguers can look forward to another year of good books and good discussions with the LWVC Book Club. The season starts off with *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank: Discovering a Forgotten Passion in a Paris Atelier* by Thaddeus Carhart. If you've ever wandered the streets of Paris or played piano, this memoir of an American living in Paris may bring back memories. Join us Monday, October 13, 7:30 PM, at Nancy Schary's, 1140 NW Fernwood. Please call Nancy at 752–1629 to let her know if you'll be coming.

Note that meetings are scheduled for the second Monday of the month. To get a head start on reading, here's the entire year's reading list. You'll journey from Renaissance Florence to revolutionary America, experience the 1940's in Montana, South America and Germany, explore the relationships between plants and people, and the vagaries of the human heart.

- **Nov 10:** *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye View of the World* by Michael Pollan
- **Dec 8:** *The Secret Book of Grazia dei Rossi* by Jacqueline Park
- **Jan 12:** *Feast of Love* by Charles Baxter
- **Feb 9:** *Founding Brothers* by Joseph J. Ellis
- **Mar 8:** *Winter Wheat* by Mildred Walker
- **Apr 12:** *The Power of One* by Bryce Courtenay
- **May 10:** *The Inextinguishable Symphony* by Martin Goldsmith

For more information about the LWVC Book Club, call Corrine Gobel, 745–7736, cgobeli@aol.com.

DECLINE TO SIGN OR SIGN TO DECLINE

As all of you, save those who have just returned from a year's sabbatical on Pluto, are probably aware, the recently completed session of the Oregon State Legislature was the longest ever. Lawmakers were caught between their reluctance to cut services and their reluctance to raise taxes to pay for them. Finally, a group of moderate Republicans broke with their party caucuses and joined Democrats to pass a budget. The budget entails an \$800 million tax increase, including a three–year surcharge on personal income taxes, to balance the state's accounts.

The Republican leadership, the Libertarian Party, the Constitution Party and several anti–tax organizations have joined in an effort to force a referendum on the tax package. If they are able to gather just over 50,000 valid signatures by November 26, there will be a special election on February 3, 2004.

The League opposes this effort by a disgruntled minority to undo a compromise on which it took eight months for a bipartisan majority to agree. The petitioners do not have a better plan. In fact, they have no plan at all, other than the mantra of "no new taxes." As research by the League (among many others) has repeatedly demonstrated, the kinds of reductions in public education and other essential public services that will be required to balance the state budget without the tax package are a false economy. The future costs for emergency medical services, law enforcement, incarceration, and lost opportunities for children far outweigh the tax changes.

Signing a petition, "just to get the question on the ballot," is not a neutral act. It deprives vital services of vital support. For example, consider the Corvallis public schools. The recently adopted state budget includes \$1.7 million more in state school funds for Corvallis than the budget under which the school system is currently operating. That money would be available now but for the threat of a referendum. If the petition drive fails, the money will become available after November 26. Otherwise, the schools will have to wait until the election on February 3, 2004. If the referendum succeeds, they will not get the money at all.

Your inaction is urgently needed. Decline to sign. (But please bestir yourself to the extent of urging others to do likewise.)

—Walter Barkan

(In addition to his efforts with the Corvallis League, Walter serves as Vice–President of the League of Women Voters of Oregon.)

LWVOR ACTION ALERT "DECLINE TO SIGN" ANTI-TAX REFERENDUM PETITION

TIMELINE FOR ACTION:

On September 9, 2003, referendum petitions began circulating which would give voters the opportunity to block the income tax surcharge recently passed by the legislature. Petition gatherers have until November 25 to gather the required 50,420 voter signatures.

BACKGROUND:

The longest legislative session in Oregon history ended recently after months of partisan debate over balancing the 2003–05 state budget. In the end an \$800 million tax increase was approved when a group of courageous legislators finally took action, after it became clear that tax opponents in the legislature had no alternate solutions for adequately funding schools, health care, and other necessary services. This increase includes \$545 million in the form of a progressive income tax surcharge, an increase in the minimum business tax (at a much more progressive rate than the current \$10 per business), and an extension of the current cigarette tax.

Before adjournment House Joint Resolution 42 was also passed, authorizing a joint interim committee on tax reform to deal with the fact that Oregon's reliance on income tax does not provide long-term, stable funding, especially during times of economic decline. This committee (12 House/8 Senate) is to write a report with recommendations by May 31, and a special session will be called within five days to consider the committee's recommendations, with the possibility that we will see something on the ballot thereafter.

The anti-tax effort is co-sponsored by Citizens for a Sound Economy and the Oregon Taxpayers Association, the former being a Washington, D.C.-based group providing much of the funding for signature gathering. If enough signatures qualify, a special election will be held on February 3, 2004, to put the issue to the voters. If the majority of voters agree to block the tax increase, it would trigger deep spending cuts already determined by HB 5077. This would include more than \$413 million for state schools, \$224 million for the Oregon Health Plan, and \$18.6 million for senior citizens and the disabled.

LWVOR supports HB 2152, the bill authorizing the tax increase, for several reasons. It provides a short-term solution to prevent continued financial disaster; the state's bond rating was in serious jeopardy; and most importantly, no other solutions were forthcoming. However, it is important to emphasize that the League will continue to support ongoing discussions on tax reform to put the state on a path for stable funding for the future.

If this petition succeeds it could very well negate the important progress that was finally made during the 72nd Legislature and put us right back to drastic measures such as shortening

the school year and putting the health and welfare of the sick and elderly in jeopardy. We urge you to inform your friends and neighbors of what is at stake and "decline to sign".

If you need more information or suggestions, please call:

Margaret Noel, President, 503-228-8120 or 503-581-5722
Kappy Eaton, Governance Chair, 541-344-2027
Marge Easley, Action Chair. 503-638-7023

-- Marge Easley

NEW MEMBERS: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

New member get-togethers are planned for Thursday, October 23, 2:00 PM and Friday, October 24, 5:15 PM. Both gatherings will take place at the New Morning Bakery in downtown Corvallis. For further information, contact me at 753-8145.

-- Marolyn Welch Tarrant

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE FORUM RESCHEDULED

The voter service forum on the League's Judicial Independence Program originally scheduled for October 28 will take place on November 4, 7 – 9 PM, in the Downtown Public Library.

Upcoming Events: October & Early November

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Oct 4 | LWVOR Fall Workshop, 9:30 AM – 2:45 PM, Phoenix Inn, 850 Franklin Blvd, Eugene |
| Oct 13 | LWVC Book Club, 7:30 PM, Nancy Schary's, 1140 NW Fernwood |
| Oct 14 | Farm and forest lands dialogue, 7 – 9 PM, Library |
| Oct 20 | City of Corvallis fee discussion, 7:30 PM, Fire Station Meeting Room, 400 NW Harrison |
| Oct 21 | Board meeting, 4 – 7 PM, Karen Nibler's, 2750 DeArmond |
| Oct 23 | New member get-together, 2:00 PM, New Morning Bakery |
| Oct 24 | New member get-together, 5:15 PM, New Morning Bakery |
| Nov 4 | Voter service forum on judicial independence program, 7 – 9 PM, Library
(Rescheduled from Oct 28) |