

JUST SAY "NO"

by Jim Bice

A special interest group is trying to take over Coos County. They would have you believe that Commissioner Kevin Stufflebean has somehow acted improperly and should be removed from office. Nothing could be farther from the truth. With half-truths and innuendo and the support of certain members of the press, they have created issues that don't, in reality, exist.

The claim is that Commissioner Stufflebean acted without proper public input when he voted to lay-off 22 members of the county road department. This is nothing but an effort to muddy the waters and confuse those who don't fully understand the workings of government. The truth is that no public hearings are required by either law or public policy.

Every department manager in the county has the authority to fire or lay-off employees. The deci-

sion to do so can be made for a variety of reasons and no approval is required by either the county commissioners or the public.

In the matter of the road department, Commissioner Stufflebean was acting Roadmaster after the resignation of Larry Van Elsborg. Stufflebean had full authority to manage the road department as would any other department manger in the county. Rather than make a unilateral decision regarding the layoffs, Stufflebean chose the high ground and brought his proposed reorganization plan before the full Board of Commissioners and asked their approval. No public meetings were required. Even so, at the Commissioners' meetings, which were open to the public, on December 3 and 16 of last year, Stufflebean stated that if action were not taken immediately, the road department would only be able to afford 7 employees by the end of 2010. The

union representative for the road department workers was notified on December 23 that lay-offs were imminent.

The subject of reorganization of the road department is nothing new. It has been discussed by the Board of Commissioners for at least five years. It is primarily the reduction in revenues that brought matters to the situation we have now. There just isn't enough money to continue operating the department inefficiently. For several years, many maintenance projects were tabled because so much of the department's revenue went for personnel costs and there just wasn't enough to purchase materials. Even though now, former Roadmaster Van Elsborg expresses concern for public safety due to the cutbacks in personnel, several years ago his proposed solution to the budget problem was to discontinue maintenance on 72 county roads. Was he concerned for the safety of county residents then?

A couple of years ago the commissioners suggested that a citizens' board be established to analyze and make recommendations regarding the operation of the road department. Van Elsborg was opposed. If the safety of the county roads was so important to him, why did Van Elsborg not

reorganize the department when he was in charge? This is not to denigrate the fine work that Van Elsborg did when he was Roadmaster. It just seems odd that he is now criticizing a situation that he had the power to change but chose not to do so.

Another criticism leveled at Stufflebean and the commissioners is that they want to use \$450,000.00 to resurface a portion of Beaver Hill Road to accommodate Oregon Resources efforts to establish chromium mining in the area. This is only partially true. That money was allocated and the resurfacing scheduled prior to Oregon Resources' application and the work would have been performed anyway.

These are only a few of the allegations of wrong doing aimed at Stufflebean. An examination of public records indicates that in every instance the situation has not been as stated by the recall petitioners. They have tried to lead the public astray by misstating the facts.

The actions by Commissioner Stufflebean and the other commissioners have been completely legal and proper. Their job is to manage the county's money in a manner that best serves the public interest. Just as in most of our homes, when the income falls, cut

backs must be made.

There is absolutely no reason to recall commissioner Stufflebean and give control of the board of commissioners to a group that has only their pet interests on their agenda. If we start penalizing every public official for making the tough decisions and acting in the best interests of their constituents, even if those decisions are unpopular, what will be the quality of the people who are willing to serve in the future? Even now, consider the unfilled vacancies on many of the areas boards and commissions. Do we want to establish a precedent that doing the right thing will get you penalized?

Be sure to mark your ballot and vote NO on the recall of Kevin Stufflebean. This could be one of the most important elections in years because the outcome could change us from a government that acts according to rule of law to one that acts according to populist agendas and not in the best interests of all of the people.

BENEFIT CONCERT FOR SALVATION ARMY FOOD BANK

A Benefit Concert for the Salvation Army Food Bank will be held on Saturday, April 25 at 6:00 PM in the North Bend Middle School cafeteria. Admission is one non-perishable food item.

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