

AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

By: Greg Empson – Gold Beach, OR - June 26, 2013

Curry County's voters recently decided a proposed property tax increase of over 25 percent was not the way to solve our county's financial problems. Curry's citizens said they did not want a law enforcement tax levy and the county should learn to live within its means. Rather than abide by the vote of the people, our commissioners have circumvented that vote by "borrowing" \$950,000 from the County Road Fund in order to hire more road deputies.

Last year commissioners borrowed \$700,000 from the County Road Fund. At that time, then commissioner George Rhodes was quoted as saying that according to HB4175 (Oregon House Bill 4175) the monies had to be repaid within three years. Former commissioner Bill Waddle was also reported as saying that the legislature approved a bill (HB4175) allowing Curry and six other counties to borrow money from the county's road funds. Our three present commissioners have "borrowed" taken \$950,000 from the road fund for the current budget.

It is morally reprehensible for our commissioners to deplete our road fund, knowing full well they do not have any way to repay these monies, have no intention of repaying the money, and according to HB4175 DO NOT have to repay the money. HB4175 exempts seven counties, Curry being one of them, from repaying funds taken from the road fund. This is not borrowing: it is taking. This is deception at its highest level. Our leaders can continue to deplete these funds that have been saved since the 1970's when our road department realized O&C monies would

someday come to an end. Commissioners are not borrowing road fund monies, they are taking them with no thought of repayment. This is no way to solve a problem. They are merely continuing to deceive the public, and kick the can down the road.

Commissioners have discovered a \$30 plus million dollar pot of money they can tap into and by doing so make HB3453 (Oregon House Bill 3453) a moot point. They can keep the governor and the state from taking over the running of the county by not allowing Curry to become insolvent. So much for keeping control local. They can keep their jobs, continue to flounder, and cash a paycheck twice each month while searching for ways to fix Curry's financial problems. Why are they even considering spending approximately \$25,000 for a September special election in which we will be asked to vote on a sales tax? Why bother when they have now found a road fund containing \$30 plus million that they can slowly deplete?

During recent union negotiations with both unions representing the county's employees, county leaders have once again caved into union demands. There has been no attempt to lower the \$1,000, or more, that each county employee receives each month for health insurance. Our county also agreed to continue paying the employee's 6 percent PERS (Public Employees Retirement System) contribution. These benefits, plus others are unsustainable, but as long as our commissioners can continue to raid the road fund, they have no worries. It is business as usual, and they continue to kick the can down the road.

County counsel was unable, or unwilling, to negotiate the union contracts so the county hired an outside attorney who specializes in

union negotiations. I am curious to know how much he was paid, and what was actually accomplished. Also, what exactly did he accomplish? What better time to cut unsustainable benefits than when the county has nearly run out of money?

When lay members of the Curry County Budget Committee suggested monies be taken from the Commissioners Office, David Brock Smith said commissioners took a 3 percent pay cut several years ago and that the gesture was not appreciated. Several years ago our county had over 200 employees and today it has slightly over 100. Why have commissioners salaries stayed at their present rate while the number of employees has been cut in half? Other than determining they can deplete our road fund, what are our commissioners accomplishing? What is their brilliant strategy for fixing the financial problems of Curry County?

They will continue to use deception and fear mongering in their attempt to circumvent the vote of the people. Some of the most deceitful fear mongering occurred during a county commissioner workshop February 4, 2013 when commissioner Smith said "July 1 is when we're going to have to go into a \$2.1 million budget scenario. We're going to have to lay off 65 employees. Those 65 employees have children in our school systems. That's two school teachers in our school system that will go away. That domino effect of losing these people..." This is simply not true and they continue to deceive the people who are paying their salaries. The voters of Curry County should be outraged at such behavior by our elected officials.