

# First Friday <sup>TM</sup> Opinions And Editorials

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## County Spends All Our Library Money on Police Result? Less Police Than Before

Did the library money just vanish? County Commissioner Dave Toler and Sheriff Gil Gilbertson explain.

First Friday: People say to me, 'If we *have* to make a choice between a library and police, we're going to choose protection every time.' Well, now what's happened is there's no library and there's *less* police than ever. So people wonder, did the money that was supposed to be for libraries just evaporate? We sacrificed our community centers – so what's going on?

County Sheriff Gil Gilbertson: Well, first off, the amount of money that we've got to work with is 3 million. That's what comes in in taxes each year to run the county government. The O&C extension was 12 million, split in half with 6 million for this year, 6 million for next year coupled with the 3 million that comes in from the property taxes anyway. So, we're talking about 9 million dollars total for this year and for next year.

Commissioner Dave Toler: Y'know Dale, we were only guaranteed one year's funding. There is a strong likelihood it will be the last year of federal county payments this county will ever see. The best scenario right now is a four-year phase-out, and then it will be over. It looks like fifty-fifty one way or the other. To me, it was time to really prioritize what our programs are and make public safety, keep it as best we can, to the level it's been.

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**Commissioner Toler:  
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Gilbertson: I see a tough question coming here (laughs).

Friday: Well, yes sir. The public is cutting *you* more of a break than Dave and certainly more than his other Commissioners, because you're new and you inherited this situation.

Gilbertson: So, why do we have *less* law enforcement now? Is that the question?

Friday: That's the question. Despite money problems, you received the same funding as last year. Why *do* we have less patrols than before?

Toler: The Sheriff has faced a couple of issues. One is, some injuries and some disciplinary issues have lost people on the ground. Some people have, I think, been let go for performance reasons. It's lack of personnel.

Toler: And that leads to the most important thing, I think Dale, is that these are not jobs that anybody can just get in, can just sign up and go to. These are jobs that take a special patrolling on the roads. The patrol part takes months of academy work, if you're not already a qualified person. And we don't get the best in recruitment efforts because we're Josephine County. And no one that has experience wants to come and work here as a law enforcement officer. They don't know if the funding is going to be there. We don't know if the funding is going to be there.

Gilbertson: The issue is: I don't have the personnel. I *was* down 14 positions. I'm still down 9 positions. I've got 3 in the academy right now. I won't get them back for a month to two months yet.

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**Sheriff Gil Gilbertson:  
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Toler: I think it's been about six weeks that it's really been a problem and, but the rest of the criminal justice system is now basically operating as it has been for the last number of years.

Gilbertson: I can only provide services relative to the amount of people I have working. I have to play the cards I was dealt.

# Government, Trust, and Your Tax Dollars

First Friday: While all of this is rather dismaying, is any of it a complete surprise? What I mean is, correct me if I'm wrong: it's fairly predictable when a new sheriff comes in, he's going to take a good look at his staff and perhaps clear out some he feels are not producing up to his standards.

Gilbertson: Well, when I first came into office, we didn't know that the O&C would drop. So, coming into it I really didn't know that was gonna happen. Did I suspect? Sure I did. Did I know that we were going to have a hard time? Absolutely.

Friday: The Commissioners had a fairly good idea that we might have to suck it up for at least a year and so pull back and not increase things.

Toler: That's right.

Friday: Then there's normal turnover of personnel. So, the idea that new people have to be hired, the idea that some people are not attracted to our county due to our financial problems – and the fact that we don't have any libraries, for example – this isn't a complete mystery to you. You knew that this was going to happen.

Friday: So I know you're not saying that this caught you flat-footed (laughs). Sorry, that wasn't a cop joke.

Gilbertson: No (laughs). That was pretty funny, actually.

Toler: Yeah, I don't know what we would have done even if we would have all acknowledged all of this would come. I don't know what differently we could do to solve the problem. The problem is: at this point, we can't recruit experienced people into these positions. How would we change that without stable revenue? I don't know Dale. I don't know how we would do that.

Friday: OK, please be careful before you answer: Have we gotten to a 'catch and release' scenario, where all you can do is wave a finger at criminals, then let them go?

Gilbertson: Absolutely. I don't even have to be careful with that *That's* the system we have today. What is out there to deter the crime? Nothing. So, what's going to happen? It's going to continue. People stopped calling us because we never responded. So, how many burglaries do we really have? I don't know. I mean, I can give you what's recorded, but the total number, y'know, we may never know. Because people just stopped calling us.

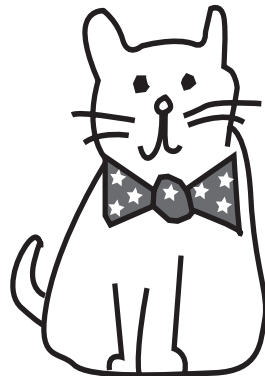
Friday: I would suggest that most people in this county are very generous. Look at what they do to help high schools, at the service organizations; we're building libraries in other countries! They're *willing* to dig into their pockets, but many of them say county government in the past has blown it in such a big way that they have a hard time trusting anymore. If they write their checks out to the government, if they pay more and more taxes, can the county be trusted to perform?

Toler: Yeah, we could even do a little better, in terms of law enforcement and patrols, on probably what would cost the average tax payer less than

\$40.00 a month. And when I look at that, my *cell* phone is \$50.00 a month.

Friday: But when citizens on Redwood Avenue pay their \$40.00, and then pick up the telephone and hear a dial tone, they can still *call* somebody, and they know they've gotten their service. When they pay their \$40.00 and call the police and say 'I've got a problem' and nobody shows up, then they're not sure that they're getting their money's worth. So when it arrives at that point where they *know* that if they make the call that they'll get the response, then I think you're going to have all the trust in the world

**My Cat Jack Says: It's no secret that the Board of County Commissioners don't always see eye-to-eye about funding. That's putting it mildly. Commissioner Jim Raffenburg has been the most pessimistic about continued federal funding. Then how could it be that he was the Commissioner who was chosen to go to Washington D.C. to ask for more federal money? How could he really lobby for that money when he was the most negative Commissioner of all? Is it possible that our leader of doubt is finally going to say, 'Oh look, now it's coming through because of ME'? Dave Toler says, "Well, we'll have to see, won't we? We'll just have to see."**



# ODF invites 19 thousand people to 1 local meeting

Despite warning property owners they could be at risk for as much as \$100 thousand in fines, Oregon Department of Forestry officials tell *First Friday*: “We’re at a loss to explain why so many people showed up at this meeting.”

Editor’s Note: Few of us who sat through the Oregon Department of Forestry’s disastrous attempt to explain the Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act of 1997 (often referred to as Senate Bill 360) believed the state’s performance could be so humiliating that they would leave – and *never* return. The state fire officials started by breaking our local fire laws. And then...well, then it got progressively worse. You had to be *in the crowd* with us to fully appreciate the irony.

We’ll try to reproduce it all.

Forestry: This is the hearing for Senate Bill 360, and I know most of you have received notification about this meeting.

Crowd surrounding First Friday: You *know* it’s bad when even the fairgrounds isn’t big enough for all the people to park.

Forestry: It’s an opportunity for us to provide some information and a hearing for you to give testimony, if you so wish.

Man in Crowd: If I wish? Damned straight, I wish! We drove an *hour* to get here, pal.

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**Forestry (ODF):  
The Fire Marshall here says we are not safe with so many people in this building. So if you’re uncomfortable and don’t want to participate, you are welcome to go.**

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Forestry: You’re not required to give any testimony.

Crowd: Not *required*? What an dumb thing to say. No, you can’t *force* us to tell you our opinion of all of you (laughter)

Forestry: The capacity for this room is 700, so OK, one of the questions we’ve been getting is: why are you here?

Crowd: Think it could be that \$100,000 bounty on my head?

Forestry: You don’t, you’re not required to testify at all. It’s a voluntary thing. It’s not a requirement.

Crowd: There it is *again*. Why does he keep saying that?

Forestry: Unfortunately, not only did we underestimate the size of this group, but we didn’t anticipate Brian’s voice going out on him tonight, and he is the *main* speaker.

Man in Crowd: Hey, good planning. You know what? I’m filled with confidence

Forestry: We’re running a little late. We’ll try to provide you with information about the bill and the process we arrived at to get to the classification that you received in the mail.

Man in Crowd: I have a lot of questions about just how in the world you ‘classified’ me one way and all my neighbors another. You’re all crazy!

Forestry: Then we’re going to have a short question and answer period.

Crowd: A “short question and answer period” – from one *thousand* people. Uh-huh.

Forestry: And then we will allow some time for people that want to give testimony to come up to a mic. We have a tape recorder system.

Man in Crowd: Yay. The state is going to tape record me

Forestry: We’ll also extend the comment period probably another ten days or so past today to give people a chance after this meeting to think about and submit testimony at that time.

Crowd: Probably ten days? We’ll be lucky to get past today’s testimonies. Y’know, this is bureaucracy at its best.

Forestry: We appreciate your concern, but if you don’t want to testify, you don’t have to.

Woman in Crowd: (laughter) Again? Do you think he’s trying to tell us something?

Forestry: The Fire Marshall here says we are not safe with so many people in this building. So if you’re uncomfortable and don’t want to participate, you are welcome to go.

Crowd: It’s not patience. It’s a matter of our fire laws. You are breaking the law.

Forestry: I think we’ll start with a PowerPoint presentation.

Woman in Crowd: May I ask a question? You underestimated the number of people who would attend this, so it’s very difficult for people to hear in the back or to ask questions. I have the law right here and I have prepared many questions. We *need* the interaction of the other people. I believe that the consensus would be that we need to reschedule all this until you are actually prepared.

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**Forestry: You don’t, you’re not required to testify at all.**

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Sergeant Dennis Ward, Grants Pass City Police: Folks, can you hear me in the back there? There’s probably double the lawful number of people in this building now – and more are on their way here. So, getting out of here is going to be nothing short of a huge nightmare, okay? So, I am asking for your patience and understanding. Well I only have four other police officers on in the whole city right now, so please be careful once you do decide to exit and be as patient as you possibly can. Thank you.

# Forestry: “We have this situation under control”

Man in Crowd (to ODF staff)  
Why are you even here?

Forestry: To show that we have this situation under control.

Crowd: (general laughter)

Forestry: We do have one more quick announcement for the people who are *leaving* and who are wondering when we will have another meeting and how you will be notified. And we believe the state will notify you similar to what they did before, with mailing a letter giving you notice and time and place.

Crowd: Oh yes, we'll rush right down here! You state guys will *never* come back. What a fiasco.

Forestry: (consternation) Due to the extraordinary turnout, we're going to have to reschedule. Sorry about that.

Crowd: Oops, sorry 'bout that!

Forestry: We're going to have to reschedule the hearing portion of this until we can have a bigger facility.

Crowd: Uh-huh. And just where would that be, Mister Forestry Man? For sure, *you* are never coming back here.

Man in Crowd: I live on Leonard Road and have some old growth trees that are about 100 feet tall around my house within 200 feet of the river and there's brush on the bank. I can't cut any of that because of state laws, and yet that's what you have redlined on my property as the fire hazard (crowd laughs). On one hand, if I take care of your fire hazard, you're satisfied. Then the state comes after me for cutting that stuff. If I don't satisfy it, you come after me. Would you make up your mind please? (crowd laughs)

Forestry: If you don't like your rating, you can appeal and we have a folder full of appeals already, and that's fine.

Forestry: What we're doing right now, um, is your actual testimony or questions, uh, or clarifications on our draft classification that you'd like to submit and you'll have the opportunity to submit those either in writing, ah, or orally when we have a hearing. Um, the contact person is Brian Ballou. Brian can't talk tonight, and I don't know where he went. I really don't remember his phone number, but, uh, we can get that for you. Oh, OK, someone just handed it to me. OK, Brian's office number is 541-665-0662.

Woman in Crowd: I have a *different* number for him and I spoke to him directly. It's 541-664-3328.

Man in Crowd: How come my neighbor right next to me has the same size lot and we both back up to the Applegate River, and he's not on your extreme danger list, but I am? Why?

Forestry: We'd have to look at that. I can't answer you

Man in Crowd: Yeah, you can't answer a lot of questions. You guys came totally unprepared and think you know what's good for us, but you don't.

Another Man in Crowd: Those who make the definitions run the whole show. They make these definitions out of thin air and we have to conform. But as soon as we conform, they change the definitions!

*First Friday*: Do you think people here know that this law has been around for a decade – and never enforced – until the insurance lobbies in Salem pressured the legislature to declare nearly the entire state's property owners to be at risk for these huge fines?

Forestry: I can't speak for the insurance companies.

Man in Crowd: Okay, if I shoot you right now, I am *innocent* until proven guilty. But, with these classifications, you have proven everyone here guilty by a helter skelter evaluation of 19,000 lots (crowd applauds). You're saying 'You're guilty; *you* prove you're innocent.' That ain't the way we do it in a democracy.

**My Cat Jack Says: Have you seen the Daily Courier at an event, then read their version the next day, and wondered: Were they even in the same room? That's what I felt about this story. Remember when 'reporter' Patty Richter admitted that she'd sometimes just skip the meetings and call Commissioner Riddle for his version of 'the news'? At one spectacularly contentious public hearing, she insisted that only the Commissioners' comments were 'really news'.**



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