

Yreka News

Daniel:

Andy Fusso, here to talk about Measure S and the new political action committee being formed – the Siskiyou Forward Movement.

Intro:

Thank you, Daniel – I’ve had a long career as an accountant, and first, I’m trying to spread the word and let people know what a terrible deal this Measure S sales tax increase is for Siskiyou County. Our population is actually declining, yet the sheriff and supervisors want to spend all kinds of money we don’t have, to triple the size of the jail while ignoring real needs. Financially they are scraping the bottom of the barrel which is why I’m so against it. We need government to live within its means.

Secondly, the good news is that all this foolishness has now inspired us to start siskiyouforward.org which I’ll also talk about.

Can’t afford it

So we can’t afford the jail, it’s a terrible deal. Nobody likes crime but this is just too big and it kills what jobs we do have. Taking in state prisoners isn’t going to make us safer, it just builds an empire.

Most people we know, if they make \$50,000 a year, if they’re regular working people, they aren’t going out to buy a \$20,000 car. They’re smart, and they live within their means. And that’s the same ratio, when you look at the \$44m construction cost compared to the \$114m county operating budget.

Doing that, with no money set aside for gas and maintenance, you’ll be left on the side of the road. Same thing - there’s nothing extra in this tax to staff it, feed all these new prisoners, nothing to run it!

They are raiding reserves and using the sales tax money to pay high interest “non-traditional” debt just to cover part of the matching funds from the state, for construction. That’s not free money, we all pay state taxes, too whether the bureaucrats toss the money around to each other before they spend it or not. Measure S is like going to that payday lender for your car loan.

This isn’t a tax wealthy people pay – it falls on regular people and hurts our small business owners who already have to compete with Oregon where there’s no sales tax at all.

It's a bad deal

As someone who has worked in finance – people think of us as kind of stodgy, but actually some of the most creative people around work in finance. We saw this during the housing crisis – people around here lost up to 70% of the value of their homes.

So the county in its wisdom wants us to tax ourselves so they can take out loans with these lenders – and we have to pay high interest because our credit rating isn't so great – and that's the highest priority? Not schools, not roads, not economic development? We have some hard working, resilient people in Siskiyou County, and I just don't think if people know what's true here, they'd be ok with that.

There's been a history of financial mismanagement in the county, particularly I'm sorry to say in the Sheriff's department. In March 2014, the state department of justice made them pay back \$615,000 because the sheriff's office provided "crime data in its grant application that were not supported by available evidence." That just never happens.

We really need to ask questions when we hear these statistics.

With the jail, the numbers just don't add up. They've been getting military equipment from the Pentagon. Then they couldn't find one of their M14s, so they were suspended from that program. And last year some inmate stole their gas card and used it for 14 months, cost us \$40,000 before anyone noticed. No wonder we have a bad credit rating, better to work on that.

If you look online at siskiyouforward.org I've linked to the Siskiyou Daily News articles and you can see the costs keep changing like a yo-yo. It says to me they don't have any good idea how much this will really cost, and that's a concern.

It's too big

So let's talk about what we need. They built the current jail in 1988, not that long ago, with 68 beds, then they've already expanded it once, to 104 beds. Bear in mind they are not actually getting rid of the current jail when they do the expansion, they will keep the mentally ill inmates, of whom there are a lot since state mental hospitals were closed. They will keep them in the current facility so the real costs and total inmates/mentally ill population will skyrocket.

They're saying everyone in the jail is a felon but looking into that, well, it's not entirely true. The latest data shows 4/5 of the inmates haven't yet been sentenced for a crime, they are there because they can't make bail. It's a poor county. Some of these men and women need to be locked up, but there are others who are just broke – and for them the solutions are ankle bracelets, even more probation officers – so we aren't housing and feeding them while their families get evicted and then we have even more criminals in the future.

Let's talk about state prisons. Back in 1987 and 1994 our voters rejected plans to build state prisons here in Siskiyou County. I still have this button. This was during a big building boom – the state prison population increased by 500%, they build 23 new prisons. There's a principle

that - things that just can't go on, don't – and it didn't. They couldn't hold any more, so the state had the great idea to send the overflow to the counties. It just like before, just re-branded as a jail.

So when a jail of this size is too big for our local criminals, they will need to fill it with state prison inmates from the south who just might like it here when they are released. What could go wrong? You only have to look at Susanville to see the destruction of a rural community based on prison industry. I don't want to see that here.

In 2011 the county staff looked at the realignment and told the supervisors it might add 34 inmates to the jail population. And so with their math, they started planning up to 300 new beds in this massive new facility. Meanwhile you have prop. 47 which passed with bipartisan support – Rand Paul said “you have more room in your prisons now for violent criminals” – all this is documented and referenced at siskiyouforward.org.

And of course the legalization of recreational marijuana this fall in California is polling with 60% support. This isn't my issue but it does affect how many people will be locked up in Siskiyou County – right now the sheriff is concentrating on this, it's an obsession.

His own statistics, he just released, show they've taken their eye off the ball when it comes to property crime and violent crime. I'd be really mad if my house was burglarized and they weren't investigating that because they were looking for pot growers and making money from asset forfeiture. It's not serving the people of the county.

Again, we are an agricultural county and from my time in the city I know what it's like to have a bunch of NIMBYs coming up and over-regulating. There's a “right to farm” movement that talks about agricultural zoning – let's face it, pigs smell bad. So a lot of this is just about zoning – keeping industrial and agricultural uses away from residential areas.

The point is, back to the big new jail, these changes could leave us with a white elephant of something we don't need and can't afford, while we miss the boat once again economically. That's why it's so important to VOTE NO ON MEASURE S.

[The Siskiyou Forward Movement](#)

So Measure S is a problem. And with Facebook and social media it's easy for us to stay in front of our computers and complain. I'm probably guilty of that. So looking at this county, which has amazing land and resilient people, and I see too many people saying no when we need to work together to say yes.

It's been twenty something years since the spotted owl, and I was just flabbergasted to hear my county supervisor, after the Weed fire, basically blaming the owl for the fire! What, exactly, has our leadership been doing in the last twenty years to get good jobs for the county? Sitting

around complaining? Moving low paid water bottling employees in from elsewhere for a Japanese corporation, not creating one new net job for locals. How's that been working for us?

I've been on the Mount Shasta Ecology Center board for a year and a half, and while I think bottling water and sending it halfway across the world is a dumb idea, I know we won't keep our quality of life in Siskiyou County unless there are jobs, where people can thrive and their children don't move away after high school. None of this stuff is left or right, it's real problems needing real solutions. We can't just sit around and wait to be given jobs, and I don't think that's what the people of this county want.

The Siskiyou Forward Movement started also because we are circulating a Groundwater Initiative to level the playing field, removing an exemption for water bottlers from the county ordinance. This is an example of another bad deal for our citizens and agricultural users. I've been thinking we needed an organized political movement for a while, and sponsoring this presented an opportunity to start the organization with this and the No on Measure S campaign as our first projects.

So the Siskiyou Forward Movement – as a business guy, as a finance guy, I look for opportunities, and I'm seeing lots of them here. It's the small, local businesses that need the county to promote them, not drive their customers to Oregon. Getting high speed internet to our towns and citizens, that's huge. We'll have \$100,000 jobs, thriving restaurants, music.

People come here to revitalize, to refresh, to go outside and enjoy what we have that's super special. They'll pay us money for that, for pristine nature, we just have to create for them and they'll come. Stop complaining and do something, say yes to well thought out changes!

To do this we need to invest not in a bigger and more massive jail but in infrastructure and right-sized promotion – not to create traffic jams, but at least to fill the empty storefronts. That's what true sustainability means to me.

And I will just say, I don't have all the answers. So after the election, please look to the siskiyouforward.org website. We plan to start by holding "listening sessions" once we get that organized. I want to get citizens of this county, beyond the usual suspects, to have productive and good conversations about solutions. It's time to go beyond business as usual which hasn't worked, and do something positive!