



Benton County Republican Party

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Benton County Republican Party Calls for Amendment to Benton County Public Safety Tax – Giving Secondary Priority to Funding Fire Districts

May 5, 2019, Benton County, WA. -- On May 2nd, 2019 the Benton County Republican Party adopted a resolution calling upon Benton County Board of Commissioners to place an amendment to the language of Proposition 14-5 on the next ballot. The amendment directs the county to prioritize spending of surplus public safety tax funds on local Fire District requests once law enforcement-related requests have been considered.

Amendment Addresses Public Safety Priorities

Currently, the Public Safety Tax uses the fund for the hiring of additional police officers, corrections officers, prosecutors, the Metro Drug Task Force, gang and crime prevention efforts, as well as court and clerk programs including drug and mental health courts. In addition, the Board of Commissioners has authorized appropriations of a portion of these tax funds for a variety of other programs under the auspices of gang and crime prevention. Local Fire Districts – a vital component of public safety – were unable to submit any funding requests due to the constraints of the existing language within the proposition approved by the voters in 2014.

“Benton County Fire District #1 does not currently own ambulances, yet 90 percent of our medical calls require transporting a patient to the hospital. Having our own ambulances would reduce emergency response times by as much as seven minutes as well as reduce the strain on neighboring agencies. Last year, we asked the voters to approve an EMS levy to allow these purchases. Unfortunately, a super majority (60%) was required for the ballot measure to pass even though a clear majority (54%) of people in our community supported the levy. We have not given up on the goal to improve our EMS program however, we cannot fund those purchases out of existing revenue,” said Lonnie Click, Benton Fire District One Chief.

Bill Berkman, Chairman of the Benton County Republican Party added, "The language of Proposition 14-5 was well-intended, however, the changes from the original RCW's text precluded other bona fide public safety agencies such as fire departments from receiving funding from this tax. Our request to have the language amended through a ballot proposition is the best way to serve the interests of the citizens of the County while preserving the will of the voters."

Text of the Adopted Resolution

Proposal for an Amendment to Benton County Proposition 14-5

IN THE MATTER OF PLACEMENT ON THE BALLOT OF AN AMENDMENT TO THE PROPOSITION FOR AN INCREASE IN SALES AND USE TAX FOR FUNDING PUBLIC SAFETY NEEDS IN BENTON COUNTY,

WHEREAS, the Washington State Legislature passed RCW 82.14.450 in 2003 to authorize county legislative authorities to submit propositions to the voters that would authorize an increase in local sales and use tax by up to three-tenths of one percent (0.3%) of the selling price in the case of a sales tax, or value of the article used, in the case of a use tax; and

WHEREAS, the tax referenced above shall not apply to the retail sales or use of motor vehicles or the first 36 months of a lease thereof; and

WHEREAS, RCW 82.14.450 requires that at least one-third of the revenues from such a tax be used for specified criminal justice purposes and that the County retain 60% of said revenues and 40% be distributed to the cities therein based on relative populations; and

WHEREAS, the original proposition did not include the full scope of entitlement under RCW 82.14.450 chapter 5, that includes fire protection purposes as a beneficiary of the one-third allocation of any tax passed.

BE IT AMENDED, that if the collections under Proposition 14-5 exceed a surplus of \$2.5 million dollars, that all Fire Departments and Protection Districts in Benton County, all Fire Departments and Protections Districts in the Cities in Benton County, and all EMS/ Ambulance response teams based within have priority after all law enforcement needs are met, to apply for the allocation of surplus funds. Fire Departments, Fire Protection Districts, and EMS/ Ambulance may apply for funds to update and/or improve any equipment and apparatus that would increase their efficiency and ability to provide service to the community. Fire Departments, Fire Protection Districts, and EMS/ Ambulance may also apply for funding for building construction, be it new or remodeling of an existing station, to offset levy costs that would be passed on to the taxpayers of Benton County.

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