

# Trying to grow Measure 30 grass roots

**T**his weekend, Gene Lutteman and Foster Fell, a minister and a soils scientist in Harney County, are joining some friends to make phone calls in support of Measure 30.

Gisela Cowger, a retired teacher, is going door-to-door in Stayton and Sublimity to talk to voters about it.

Liz Scheeler, a mother of two middle school daughters in Pendleton, will be sending out e-mails about the measure and collecting some more signatures for a pro-30 ad in the local newspaper.

Right now, the attitude toward Measure 30 of many of Oregon's biggest political players — including many who leaned hard on the Legislature to pass the package — is mostly to avoid getting any of it on them. But in the far reaches of the state, at the greenest grass roots, a few people are trying to talk to neighbors, one voter at a time.

They're not doing it because they're counting on the tax measure passing; life in rural and small-town Oregon these days gives you a colder-eyed view of reality than that. They're doing it because they have a lot at stake.

Whatever happens when the voting ends Feb. 3, the more urban parts of Oregon will still have reasonably funded schools and available health care — size and local taxation see to that. Towns and counties already caught in the state's rural recession have a lot less to fall back on.

"Loss of even three or four teaching positions will have a huge impact on the local economy. We don't have

many living-wage jobs," says Fell.

"We're the lowest gross-adjusted-income county in the state. Other counties can adjust to state cuts. We're very vulnerable."

As a recent Children First study showed, most of Harney County's schoolchildren qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The legislature's package included some money — bringing in considerably more federal money — to give some more of these kids health insurance. Defeat of Measure 30 puts them back outside.



DAVID SARASOHN

Across the Cascades, Gisela Cowger is putting together her own flier and ringing some door-

bells. She explains, "You've got to give it a shot.

"We're facing drastic cuts in our local school budget, \$1 million in Stayton schools. It's a safe bet we'd have to cut at least a couple of weeks at the end of the school year."

And if lots of locals are dumped from the Oregon Health Plan, "who's going to pick up the slack but the people who still have health care?"

It's enough to send her out onto the sidewalks, facing strange dogs and stranger ideas about state government.

Last year, Liz Scheeler worked on the Measure 28 campaign in Pendleton, and the tax measure actually won big in Umatilla County, because voters saw a threat to the local prison — and these days that many jobs are a serious issue in Northeast Oregon.

Scheeler was an Oregon State-trained forester when she quit to concentrate on her daughters, but then

found that education in the area was as much trouble as forestry. On this vote, she says, Pendleton schools have \$1.9 million at stake.

Over the last few years, "we've lost 80 positions, a 23 percent reduction in staff. My eighth-grader has 42 students in her algebra class."

And while lots of rural Oregonians see education and health care as their main local problems, Scheeler sees them as the same problem: "Eastern Oregon is a doctor-short region. It's hard to attract new doctors when one of the first things they look at is the school district."

Doctors finding oversized classes and little music, art and advanced classes are likely to decide to read X-rays someplace else — even if the local prison is still open.

That moves Scheeler onto her computer, and into Pendleton stores to seek signers for the pro-Measure 30 newspaper ad — and even, she says with the satisfaction of small victories, changing one shop owner's mind.

There are bigger places in Oregon, and bigger names, but many of them seem to be looking to keep this fight off their won-lost records. Besides, the bigger places have less at stake, and Oregonians like Lutteman and Scheeler fear that relatively protected Portlanders are ready to let this one go by.

So they call or visit or e-mail the people they know, one by one.

Not because they expect to win.

But because these days, they have not that much left to lose.

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*David Sarasohn, Associate Editor, can be reached at 503-221-8523 or [davidsarasohn@news.oregonian.com](mailto:davidsarasohn@news.oregonian.com).*