

Keep asking

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Consolidation issue's removal from the ballot shouldn't end talk about replacing three counties

Legal problems seem sure to keep the issue of consolidating county and other regional governments off this November's ballot. Metro Executive Rena Cusma says that an appeal of Multnomah County Circuit Judge Lee Johnson's decision to strike the measure isn't likely.

That doesn't mean, though, that the consolidation issue should drop out of sight.

Cusma and the Metro Council did accomplish something in their bungled attempt to hold a regional advisory vote on whether to abolish Metro, Tri-Met and Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas counties and replace them with a new county.

They got people talking.

Now the challenge is to turn that talk — and some of the bad feelings their mad dash to the ballot created — into constructive pursuit of a better way to organize metropolitan-area government.

One possible forum for that discussion could be the committee headed by former Gov. Neil Goldschmidt and appointed by Gov. Barbara Roberts to study metropolitan government. That group already has suggested consolidation of the three

counties' road-maintenance work and some sharing of law-enforcement services.

Since any attempt to restructure Portland-area government would require action from the Legislature, involvement by the governor's committee could help smooth that path.

Additionally, Portland State University's urban-affairs department may be willing to study what services are best provided at what level of government. Its objective examination would help answer the concern that a three-county consolidation would yield bigger, but not necessarily better, government.

One key to any of these moves, however, will be to line up support from some key players in each of the three counties and Tri-Met.

Another key will be to move quickly as well as thoughtfully. Measure 5 makes it clear that government at all levels will be squeezed for money. Any money that can be saved through consolidation is money that can be spent on needed programs and services.

Just because voters won't be giving any answers on consolidation this November doesn't mean regional officials should stop asking the question.

Metro plan continues to stir area conversations

By Ron Oswald
of The Review

Catherine
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OREGON CITY — Metro's plan to abolish Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties and replace them with one regional governing body drew a dozen people to an Aug. 17, meeting of the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners.

The proposed ballot measure, asks voters inside the Metro's boundaries for their opinion of the plan. Metro representatives have said it would save 10 percent in taxes.

Measure 26-2, was taken off the Nov. 3 ballot as the result of action taken by both Clackamas and Washington counties saying that the ballot title was misleading. Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Lee Johnson on Aug. 14 said Metro did not have the authority to call for an advisory vote and removed the entire measure.

The county commission, however, feeling that Metro may appeal the decision, decided to hold the meeting and present a ballot title of their own.

Judie Hammerstad, chairwoman of the County Board of Commissioners said that the wording of the measure was more of a directive than asking for an advisory vote and it would affect the entire county, not just that part within Metro. She said the 91,000 people living in the county outside the boundary could be the most affected.

Tri-Met will need some time to evaluate any Metro consolidation

When Tri-Met officials were asked what their reaction was to Metro's action, spokeswoman Catherine Merten said that officially they found it an interesting concept but that they needed time to evaluate it more. She said that it would be treated the same as any other plan that was brought out to increase government efficiency.