

Minutes

July 14, 2021

General Meeting

Josephine County Democrats

In person and Zoom

The meeting was held at Taprock Northwest Grill in Grants Pass on Wednesday instead of the usual second Tuesday of the month because of scheduling availability at Taprock. This was the first in-person meeting of the Josephine County Democrats since COVID-19 struck Oregon last March. This meeting also included a ZOOM component with nine people tuning in through that.

Chair Dorothy Yetter saved the business portion of the meeting until after the guest speakers, State Rep Lily Morgan, Marijuana Commission Chair Amanda Metzler, and Josephine County Sheriff Dave Daniel gave presentations about the illegal grow situation in the county and what's being done about it.

The business meeting included the announcement that Democrats will be having a booth at the JC Fair this year and volunteers need to sign up for shifts. Also, she said we are still without a permanent meeting place because the Unitarian Universalist Church on E Street remains closed and will most likely be meeting at Taprock again next month on the regular second Tuesday.

Rep. Morgan spoke first, outlining HB 3000, a bill she sponsored, which will provide funding to help the Sheriff beef up his task force going after illegal grows. This includes District Attorney and Evidence Room time. It also makes the National Guard available but they will be limited to helping with plant-pulling and clean-up. She said Oregon does not allow Guard members to wear firearms when assisting with community projects.

Amanda spoke next, giving the perspective of the legal marijuana growers in the county and saying they may need support from the general public with additional legislation and county regulation being considered.

Sheriff Daniel said illegal grows are creating all kinds of problems in Josephine County, from human trafficking to homicides. Illegal water use is a big concern as is pollution from pesticides and tons of plastic used for hoop houses and watering systems. Additionally, he's seen migrant workers housed in horrible conditions. He said HB 3000 will be a great help and he's in the process now of hiring additional staff. Daniel said he has no problem with "legal marijuana grows" that are permitted and doing everything right, but the illegal growers are creating havoc and will eventually be visited by his team. He also said the continuing levy needs to pass in November if his department is to stay solvent.

Questions included "are there cartels here." Daniel said he believes there are but "we mostly see the foot soldiers." He said anyone thinking of leasing land to a grower better make sure it's legal or that land could be seized during a raid and given to the county to sell. The money from such land goes into the county's general fund and isn't directly used for his department, he said.

Where the marijuana taxes go is a concern, said Amanda, answering a question. She said people were originally told taxes from marijuana would help schools but that hasn't really come about. Marijuana tax reform is needed and her commission will be asking for public support for bills in the legislature next term.