

**NORTH LYON COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, 2018 BALLOT QUESTION**

**Shall the North Lyon County Fire Protection District (the Fire District) be authorized to levy additional property tax upon all North Lyon County property owners within the Fire District’s boundary (most of the City of Fernley) to be used to hire emergency response personnel, in the amount of \$0.05 per \$100 of assessed property valuation, for a period of up to 30 years? The tax would improve much needed staffing to provide for a safer community, and be exempted from the tax cap provisions of NRS 361.4722 through NRS 361.4724, inclusive the first year implemented.**

Yes.....                       No.....

**EXPLANATION**

A “yes” vote would permit the North Lyon County Fire Protection District (the “Fire District”) to levy an additional property tax to be used solely for additional emergency response personnel. This would include: hiring personnel, salaries, personal protective equipment and training for the new personnel to help meet increases in call volume. The estimated cost for an owner of a new home with a fair market value of \$100,000 (appraised value \$35,000) is \$17.40 per year, or \$1.45 per month. A “no” vote would indicate disapproval of the tax as outlined in this question and will require the Fire District to function within its current financial shortfall and operate with less than adequate staffing.

**ARGUMENT ADVOCATING PASSAGE**

The North Lyon Fire Protection District’s (NLFPD) daily staffing for emergency responders cannot keep up with 911 calls. The shortage of emergency responders increases response times, and often leaves no emergency responders for 911 calls in Fernley.

In comparison to surrounding communities, the NLFPD firefighter staffing falls significantly short, even though the population size of the community served is larger than comparison districts. For example, Central Lyon Fire Protection District serves a population of 17,804, has 21 paid firefighters on staff, with seven on duty daily. Whereas the NLFPD serves a community population of 19,368, and has a total of 12 paid firefighters on staff, with only four on duty daily. NLFPD has the lowest tax rate in Lyon County as compared to the following: Central Lyon (\$0.60), Smith Valley (\$0.3767), Mason Valley (\$0.3536), North Lyon (\$0.30). The request to levy an additional five-cent property tax will provide an increase in district funding that will be used solely to increase daily staffing for emergency responders. Increasing staffing for emergency responders will decrease response times. Increasing staffing for emergency responders will ensure a responder is available.

Fernley only has four firefighters total to man Station 61 on Main Street, 24 hours per day/7 days a week. The four firefighters on duty each day cross-staff fire engines and ambulances. It is not uncommon for Fernley to be left uncovered when there are simultaneous or overlapping ambulance transports and/or fire calls. When no firefighters are in district, mutual aid is requested from surrounding agencies for coverage. These agencies are Banner Churchill, Central Lyon County Fire, Storey County Fire, and REMSA. When these agencies cover for Fernley, they are responding from their respective locations, nearly 30

miles away from Fernley. The surrounding agencies are not always available when requested, which ultimately means no coverage in Fernley.

There are two fire stations in Fernley, but only the station on Main Street is staffed 24/7. The fire station located at Farm District Road and Red Rock Road is currently not staffed, as there are three volunteer firefighters who respond from that location. When there is no district coverage, volunteers are paged to staff the fire station. NLFPD has 11 volunteer firefighters on the roster who respond when available, but are not always available. The NLFPD tax rate was last updated in 1995, which was established at a level for an all-volunteer-level department. Since that time, Fernley's population has more than doubled in size to approximately 20,000 residents. NLFPD funding has not grown at the same rate as the population, therefore adequate staffing for public safety has been compromised. Your YES vote will ensure additional staffing for emergency responses within Fernley.

What will your \$.05 cost you? If you live in a home with a taxable value of \$150,000, this will be an increase of \$2.18 per month (\$2.18 is less than the cost of one McDonald's Happy Meal); if you live in a home with a taxable value of \$300,000, this will be an increase of \$4.37 per month (\$4.37 is less than the cost of one Starbucks Venti Mocha). Your YES vote on an additional \$.05 will ensure two additional emergency responders in Fernley, who may one day be there to save your life or the life of a loved one, vote YES!

#### **ARGUMENT OPPOSING PASSAGE**

North Lyon County Fire Protection District should NOT receive the tax increase requested until the voices of Fernley citizens have been heard and considered. In 2016, NLCPFD requested a tax increase "to be used to hire emergency response personnel." It was claimed that this would include: "hiring personnel, salaries, personal protective equipment, and training for the new personnel." In 2017, funds were found to purchase new equipment, without the supposed needed tax increase.

NLCPFD has a budget structure that is difficult to read. It needs re-written so that the average Lyon County citizen can understand. NLCPFD has a budget structure that does not include maintenance and equipment replacement costs. It needs re-structured to include maintenance and equipment replacement costs. Without this, they will continue asking for tax increases any time new equipment is needed.

Under their current structure, they will continue asking for tax increases whenever they need pay increases, new equipment, maintenance, etc. Currently, NLCPFD collects revenue based on a percentage of assessed property valuation. Because it is percentage based, as property values go up, so does their budget. Lyon County citizens are not being presented with honest reasons for requesting this tax increase.

#### **REBUTTAL TO ARGUMENT OPPOSING PASSAGE**

The NLCPFD does have monies being set aside for equipment under "acquisitions." The format of the budget is the format that the State requires. It can be formatted differently, but changing the format of the budget still will not change the fact that there's not enough money to hire emergency responders to cover the current 911 call volume in Fernley. The NLFPD tax rate was last updated in 1995, which was established at a level for an all-volunteer-level department. Since that time, Fernley's population has

grown at an unprecedented rate, doubling in size to approximately 20,000 residents. Due to this substantial population increase, and the continuing increase of 911 call demand, the district requires more emergency responders to cover those emergencies.

In response to “as property values go up, so does their budget,” in 2005, the Nevada State Legislature capped property tax increases for residential properties at 3 percent, and because of “secondary caps” included in the law that use a complicated tax formula, that increase has been substantially lower than 3%, even as home prices have steadily risen since 2013. In addition, abatements (a reduction in the amount of property tax collected) continues to affect the funding for NLFPD, and will continue to do so as abatements are projected to increase. While property values are considered during appraisal, overall property tax bills are reduced by the depreciation factor (after year one), the assessment rate, and potentially, partial abatements. This results in a reduced tax bill for those who pay property taxes, but less-than expected revenue for the North Lyon Fire Protection District. What does all of that mean for Fernley residents when it comes to public safety services? It means funding isn’t growing at the same rate as the population. Public safety is not being funded at a rate to provide residents with adequate coverage, and without any additional funding, residents should expect longer response times for 911 calls.

#### **REBUTTAL TO ARGUMENT ADVOCATING PASSAGE**

Emergency response times can be increased by staffing personnel that live within the district. Currently, NLCFPD's Chief resides in Yerington. This is a commute of over 50 miles one way to central Fernley. NLCFPD spends tax payer money for the Chief to commute in a NLCFPD vehicle to a residence outside of the district. All other districts require their Chief to live within district to ensure proper response times.

Fernley citizens take home an average salary of approximately \$52,000.00. According to NLCFPD's budget, they spent approximately \$1.3 million in 2016 in salaries and benefits. NLCFPD employs 15 full time employees and 3-4 reserves working weekend shift (primarily). This equates to approximately \$81,000.00 average salary for a North Lyon County Fire Protection District employee. Does a NLCFPD employee deserve 55% more than the average income of the people they serve? NLCFPD chief has a base salary of over \$100,000.00. Should a chief, living outside of the district he serves, make double the income of the people he serves?

As stated previously, NLCFPD draws revenue based on percentage of assessed property value. As property value increases, so does their budget. Property values have increased significantly since the end of the last recession. This money should be used to hire needed personnel.

A YES vote will mean that you'll be asked to vote for another tax increase when they feel the need to hire more personnel, purchase new equipment, wage increases, etc.

A NO vote will force NLCFPD to spend your tax dollars more wisely.

A NO vote will let NLCFPD know that they need to restructure their budget to include ALL expenses.

**FISCAL NOTE**

The estimated cost for the owner of a new home with a fair market value of \$100,000 (appraised value of \$35,000) is \$17.40 per year or \$1.45 per month and would last for 30 years. The cost for administering the tax increase would be minimal as the funds would be handled the same as other revenue by the department.