

Only three commissioners aren't enough to serve valley

In 1852, when Jackson County was established, the population was under 4,000, reportedly 3,735 in 1860. This is when membership of our Board of Commissioners was set at three.

The population of the county is now over 220,000, making us the sixth-most populous county in the state. The ratio of commissioners to residents at establishment was one commissioner for every 1,250 or so residents. If that was deemed adequate then to allow representation, simple math would indicate that the number of commission members now should be over 170.

Clearly the maintenance of a Board comprising just three commissioners is unrepresentative. The number of residents each represents has multiplied nearly 60-fold.

The number of elected county administrators in Oregon ranges from three to five. In 24 counties these comprise members of a Board of Commissioners, while in 12 they comprise a county judge and two commissioners. Five of the 36 counties currently have five elected administrators while the remainder have just three.

It is probably no surprise that the counties with five commissioners include four of the five counties larger than Jackson.

It may cost a few thousand dollars to accommodate an increase in the number of commission members from three to five, but the county annual budget is well north of \$500 million.

The question for voters is whether democracy is better served by having one commissioner for every 73,000-plus residents or one for every 44,000. Frankly, even the latter seems grossly inadequate to assure reasonable representation.

Alan Journet / Jacksonville