

“Supervisors plan Jefferson state vote,” *Trinity Journal*, July 8, 2015
By Sally Morris

Trinity County supervisors on Tuesday heard a long list of reasons not to join the State of Jefferson movement to split away from the rest of California and form a 51st state. They also faced a crowd of Jefferson State supporters and voted to schedule an action item at their next available date to consider a vote up or down on whether to join the effort.

A date was not set, and it was noted another coalition called “Keep it California” has requested equal time on a future board agenda before a vote is taken.

Previously, the board heard an enthusiastic pitch from State of Jefferson supporters and spokesman Mark Baird of Yreka last November inviting Trinity County to join the State of Jefferson movement to create a 51st state. Trinity County Sup. Karl Fisher was named at that time to research fiscal impacts on the county if it were to become part of the proposed state.

On Tuesday, Fisher presented information gathered since then from the California Highway Patrol, Cal Fire, Trinity County Behavioral Health Services, Trinity County Health and Human Services, Trinity County Fire Chiefs’ Association and the Trinity County Department of Transportation.

The board also heard from Baird again, refuting some of the agencies’ claims and asking the board to vote on the proposed declaration to withdraw from the state of California. So far, eight counties have joined the movement to form a new state. They are Siskiyou, Modoc, Glenn, Yuba, Tehama, Sutter, Lake and Lassen. *[NOTE: this statement is untrue. Neither Lake nor Lassen have expressed support for the “State of Jefferson movement”.]*

The State of Jefferson movement is also seeking the endorsement of Butte, Colusa, Nevada, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, El Dorado and Mendocino counties.

Baird said the movement is going forward, whether Trinity joins or not, but a “yes” vote would ensure that it has “a seat at the table, acknowledging that Trinity County does not have adequate representation in the state Legislature and that is detrimental to the county.”

He added that in the event that the movement to create a 51st state is not successful at the California State level, a court case will go forward challenging the representative benchmarks in California “where counties like L.A. get more and more representation as time goes by” and the northern counties have one representative for one million people. *[NOTE: what is meant by this statement? The counties targeted are included in three state Senate districts and six assembly districts.]*

Baird said a decision by Trinity County would not immediately change anything, “but a ‘yes’ vote will allow you to have more and better input to the type of government you want to have. If you vote ‘no,’ you won’t have that seat and this process is going to occur with or without you.”

In the economic impact report presented by Sup. Fisher Tuesday, each of the state and county agencies weighing in concluded that most of the services they currently provide here with dollars from the state of California would go away and, at best, take time to replace if the State of Jefferson movement is successful and Trinity County is a part of it.

Noting as a disclaimer that the CHP “in no way, shape or form supports or endorses the State of Jefferson movement,” Trinity Area Commander Mark Loveless wrote of staffing numbers and services provided around the clock in Trinity County with current state funding.

A staff of 28 includes 20 uniformed officers and a fleet of 10 black and white enforcement vehicles, one unmarked commander’s vehicle, one commercial enforcement vehicle, a traffic radar trailer and a utility trailer.

The Trinity River Area also receives services from specialized investigation/enforcement units that are based in Redding and available for assistance when called including air operations units and multi-disciplinary accident investigation teams, K-9 officers and commercial enforcement officers.

Cal Fire Battalion Chief Andy Reiling provided a cost breakdown for services provided in Trinity County amounting to \$25,288 per day for two one-engine stations, a two-engine station, 34 firefighters, a division chief and battalion chief, a forester and fire apparatus engineers. He noted the estimates don’t include the state aircraft and dozers that respond from Redding to wildland fires in Trinity County.

The Trinity County Fire Chiefs’ Association President David Loeffler indicated that immediate effects from leaving the state of California to join the state of Jefferson would be the loss of the three Cal Fire engine stations and the Trinity River Conservation Camp that provide fire suppression services in many Trinity County communities as well as fire hazard reduction work along roads and highways and county facilities.

Other concerns he noted were the potential loss of state fire training programs that could mean retraining and recertification being required for instructors and firefighters; loss of state Office of Emergency Services equipment currently available to assist all volunteer fire departments in the county; need for development of new policies and procedures between Jefferson and the federal agencies involving fires in their jurisdictions.

He said losing some 20 CHP officers would also impact fire services and hazardous material incidents, adding it would take time to replace the lost state services “all the while adding additional risk and costs to local fire agencies.”

Citing an annual budget of approximately \$5.2 million to operate mental health and substance abuse treatment programs which the county general fund only contributes about \$6,000 to, Trinity County Behavioral Health Services Director Noel O’Neill wrote that the majority of those state and federal funds would disappear under a state of

Jefferson. New state agreements would have to be established for new providers and that would take months or years, he said, adding the loss of relationships with statewide associations that provide information and advocacy for the county would be devastating.

Trinity County Health and Human Services Director Christine Zoppi supplied information on potential impacts to that department primarily funded by state and federal revenues, and it was noted that the current Partnership Health plan would have no authority to operate under a new state. There would be no state health exchange for the purchase of health insurance. New statewide systems, projects and collaborative arrangements would need to be established.

She predicted “a tremendous loss to the basic financial stability of probably 4,000 residents served from Health and Human Services during a transition phase.”

The county’s detailed analysis of state of Jefferson financial projections raised many concerns or questions and concluded that amounts were not verifiable or are overstated regarding revenues. It also noted that the model used places the highest tax burden on middle income and poor taxpayers while creating loopholes for corporations and failing to provide for a court system, universities/community colleges, state officers and departments, state hospitals or prisons.

From the Trinity County Transportation Department, Director Rick Tippet supplied four pages of detailed state and federal revenues for road projects, calculations and assumptions.

He concluded that leaving the state of California would significantly impact the maintenance that could be provided to county roadways and “given the conservative nature of the counties that would be joining together to form Jefferson State, adoption of a new gas tax or other forms of roadway funding are speculative and the final product would truly be unknown.”

Baird responded to several items in the report, saying state funding would still be available for many of the services mentioned “and our roads won’t return to gravel just because we change the name of the state. Forty-nine other states have firefighting agencies and state funds are still state funds and monies for the CHP wouldn’t disappear. They would go to the sheriffs who know the rural area better than the CHP.”

He added there will be people “who say it can’t be done. Where will we get the welfare money? But there are 49 other states not called California that are doing just fine. We don’t propose to reinvent the wheel. We propose a small, rural state where every county has autonomy and representation. You collect the property tax and keep it for discretionary funding, sending just a small portion to the state to operate on.”

There were comments from the audience urging the Board of Supervisors not to waste its time on the State of Jefferson movement when there are more pressing problems to address in the county and others encouraging more discussion and a vote.