Jeff Cogen
FOR DISTRICT TWO
MULTNOMAH COUNTY COMMISSIONER
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Hope all is well!
JC

Dear Margie,

I'm writing to you today because last year you helped me in my campaign to become Multnomah County Commissioner, and now that I have been in office for just over a year I wanted to let you know what I've been doing. I'm not asking you for anything today other than a few minutes of your time.

I ran for this office to restore the County's credibility, strengthen our economic competitiveness, support critical community services and bring innovation and inspiration to local government. I think we're off to a good start.

Restoring Credibility
During my campaign, I promised to work hard to restore civility to Multnomah County, because its breakdown deeply damaged the County's credibility and hurt the entire community. I'm happy to report that the Board of County Commissioner's is once again conducting itself in a professional manner that the community can be proud of.

Credibility, of course, requires more than the absence of rancor. We have also been working hard to address the tough issues facing Multnomah County, including restoring accountability to the management of our jails, creating a new community partnership around urban renewal, finally siting a long delayed North Portland library, preparing for the challenges facing veterans who are newly returning to our community, and, by late this year, finally opening the Wapato jail.

Strengthening Our Economy
The County's mission can best be realized if our local economy is strong and is producing good jobs. To help make this happen this year I led the passage of two reforms to our local business taxes.

First, for the first time ever, we made our County Business Income Tax less burdensome to small and mid-size business, by doubling the income level where the tax kicks in and by significantly increasing the owner's compensation deduction. Second, I partnered with City Commissioner Sam Adams to eliminate a ridiculous venture capital tax that had caused nearly every venture capital firm in Multnomah County to leave, and which undoubtedly discouraged them from investing in businesses in Multnomah County.

I have also begun, along with Chair Ted Wheeler, a series of visits to local businesses – to listen, to brainstorm and to see how we can help them to thrive. So far, the response has been terrific.

Supporting Critical Services
Although the County has faced severe budget shortfalls, I have pushed to focus cuts on administration wherever possible. I also believe that some services are so important to the community that they must be protected. That is why last year I successfully fought to protect funding for health care and after-school programs for kids. This year, though we face additional budget cuts, I have worked with our Health Department to identify administrative savings which help us respond to our declining funding while avoiding any cuts in direct services.

An Innovative, Inspiring Government
I believe that government needs to innovate and nimbly respond to our rapidly changing world. I'm proud to have led the creation of a series innovative responses to local challenges. A few of the highlights:

Solar Savings: This spring we will begin construction of the largest solar energy facility in the northwestern United States on the rooftops of a group of County facilities. By partnering with a private company and the non-profit Energy Trust of Oregon, the County not only doesn't have to pay any upfront costs for the project, but will begin saving money on its electric bills on day one – with rates secure for 20 years - a significant savings for County taxpayers.

Self sufficiency: The County's anti-poverty work typically focuses on short term assistance to those in need. While this is clearly important, in the long run we are all better off by helping people to be economically self-sufficient. That's why I've been excited to partner with Hacienda CDC on the "micro-mercantes" project. This project assists poor, immigrant women in setting up small-scale food businesses that can support them and their families. The results so far have been impressive.

Supporting Neighborhoods: The County resells tax-foreclosed properties, typically for use as affordable housing. However, many foreclosed properties are raw land which is unsuitable for development, which means the County spends scare tax dollars indefinitely maintaining vacant land. This year, I created the County Digs project, which works with neighborhoods to transform these lots into community gardens and small scale local agriculture projects. Not only does this save taxpayer dollars, but it provides wonderful resources for urban neighborhoods.

Well, that is an example of what I've been working on. For more details, check out my website at www.commissionercogen.com. Thanks again for your support. Please let me know if you have any questions, concerns or ideas for advancing this agenda.

Jeff