

from the editor...

It seems like every year around this time, we all find ourselves talking about the crazy and unusual weather around here. Which probably means that crazy spring weather really isn't that unusual in Vernonia. I don't have anything more to add to the conversation that you've probably already had down at the coffee shop or over breakfast at Mariolino's or Cafe 47, except if it's not raining, snowing, hailing or blowing... and sunny-- all within the same hour-- then you're probably not in Vernonia this spring.

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Don't forget to attend our "Meet The Candidates" event, a political forum with candidates who are running for Columbia County Commissioner. The event will be held on April 15th at 7:00 P.M. at the Vernonia Community Learning Center. It will include questions for the candidates from a pre-selected panel of local residents, as well as a chance to mingle with the candidates and ask your own questions. This special event is sponsored by *Vernonia's Voice*.

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I wanted to take the opportunity to say a heartfelt "Thank You" once again to our many regular con-

tributors to *Vernonia's Voice*. Since we increased our publishing schedule from once to twice each month this past January, things have gotten a little more intense and fast-paced around here. And like everyone else, we too have lots of other obligations besides work-- friends, family, volunteerism, and maybe even time for a little fun every once in awhile. So, I just want to say once again how much I appreciate the time devoted and dedication that our contributors have shown to this publication. Having their expertise, talent, and ideas-- their *voices*, really makes this whole thing happen each month. We've had regular contributors come and go, and all of them have been a big part of our existence, our growth and our success. Without our contributors, we would not be able to do what we do each issue. So once again, a big Thank You to: April Bamberg, Nancy Burch, Kim Camarda, Dawn Carr, Heather Lewis, DeAnna Pearl, Shannon Romtvedt, Sonia Spackman, Burt Tschache, Teresa Williams and the many others who have made regular contributions to this publication.

I would also like to say thank you to everyone who sends us information, photos, updates and reminders about news, activities and events

from all around our region. As a small, family-run operation, it's impossible for us to be everywhere all the time. Without the help of all our community members we couldn't do what we do.

Scott Laird
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VERNONIA'S
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reflecting the spirit of our community

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An Opinion: When Incivility Rules

By Rich Harwood
March 30, 2010

In recent days, many people have urged me to write about the acrimonious and divisive public discourse that has gripped the nation around health care. But each time someone has made this request, I found that they themselves would engage in some form of incivility. The question is: Where are we right now, and where do we want to go?

Whether you like the legislation or not, the passage of the historic health care bill has revealed glimpses of the worst in us. You'll remember that much of the nation's discord hit a noticeable low during last summer's infamous town hall meetings. Perhaps then we thought the worst of our lousy discourse was over; and yet now we know that assumption would have been wrong. In just the past week we've reached new lows as we've witnessed the spewing of homophobic and racist comments, and with some congressional members being labeled "baby killers."

I hear such comments and wonder what has gotten into those who utter them, those who repeat them, and those who egg others on. Yes, we've heard such hatred at times in the past; but does that fact make such comments good and right now? And what makes matters worse today is our ability to communicate at any moment and reach millions of people at once. One ugly comment then begets another, and on and on it goes.

During the 1990s, I was not one of those in the civic world who embraced what might have been deemed the "civility movement." I cringed when people would associate my own work and efforts with civility. I thought there was a kind of Miss Manners' notion at play -- if only each of us would be "nice" to one another, then the world would be a better place. But political discourse ought to be filled with tension, drama, and emotion; after all, when people care about something, they get worked up.

But that was then, and this is now. Today, our public discourse seems filled with hatred and rage, at times unmitigated and unfiltered, even reckless, often ridiculous. The Glenn Beck's of the world lather people up into a tizzy, oftentimes seeming to have forgotten their original point, other than to destroy their so-called opponent. Those on the left are not immune from such criticism either.

But perhaps the larger point is that none of us are immune -- that is, those who purport to want to move the country forward, and those who cherish some semblance of good, if not heated, public discourse. So many of the people who asked me to write this piece did so, themselves, using the word "hate" or "stupid" or "idiot" in the same sentence as their request -- as in, "I hate those stupid idiots who say...."

There's enough hatred to go around these days; there's also ample belief that the person on the other side of the debate from us is just plain stupid -- perhaps even an idiot. But we don't gain anything by engaging in such discourse. In fact, we lose something each time we go down that ugly path. No one individual controls public discourse; but each of us contributes to it.

No one can put a halt to the hatred we are now witnessing; but none of us has to help in its spread. No one should stop expressing their heartfelt emotions about something as important as health care; but none of us should believe that anything goes in public discourse.

Our negative comments spread like a contagion, gaining more and more momentum when left unchecked, and can leave us sick to our stomach and doubled-over. It's time to swear off such comments and stand-up straight. So here's a test I urge you to consider: When you make your point, do so with as much emotion and tension as necessary, but can we leave the hatred behind?

Reprinted with permission. Richard C. Harwood is the founder of The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that seeks nothing less than to spark fundamental change and authentic hope in American public life. The Harwood Institute is today a leading change organization, recognized nationally for a unique approach to breaking down barriers and empowering people to make progress in improving their communities. For more information go to www.theharwoodinstitute.org

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