

from the editor

When we started *Vernonia's Voice* six years ago, we did so with the intention that this newspaper could be the voice for all of our community. We have purposely asked for and received content that reflects many divergent opinions, thoughts, and ideas about issues happening in and around Vernonia. We have welcomed Letters to the Editor, articles, stories and regular columns from all types of people, with all types of viewpoints, about all types of issues and interests.

We have also occasionally rejected content for various reasons-the quality of the work, the specific message it contained, or because it was just not something we wanted to see in print in a publication that has our name on it.

I am learning that printing other peoples work, especially if the editor and publisher don't agree with the author's point of view, can be very tricky business. We, the publishers, in the end, are responsible for the content we publish. Even when someone else's byline appears on the article. Even if we don't agree with the content or the message in an article or column that we decide we should publish.

Our intent has always been to help better our community. I have always thought that sharing ideas, opening up the opportunity for dialog, and creating a place for constructive criticism has been an important role for our community newspaper. Especially around topics of great concern to the community as a whole.

High utility rates are one of those topics. The City of Vernonia has been struggling to create a rate structure for water and sewer that allows them to manage their infrastructure, the current needs of the community and their future needs, as well as meet regulatory requirements. West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC) is also struggling with how to manage and upgrade a rural utility that has had an extremely bad run of luck with nasty weather events. I, like just about everyone else in this community, am concerned about increasing utility rates and the impact they are having on our citizens.

Recently a group of local citizens organized themselves and began asking questions about the operation, the budget, and the management of WOEC. "The Power of One" has been highly critical of the Board of Directors, the management and the staff at WOEC.

Because utility rates are such

an important current issue, *Vernonia's Voice* was open to the idea of publishing a regular column from the membership of "Power of One," giving them more of a voice and a place to publicly raise their concerns. We also started including a regular column from the staff at WOEC, giving them equal time and space to share any of their issues or concerns, as well as a place to answer questions from the community. We hoped that by giving both sides space, we could help better inform the public about a key and vital issue.

Covering all the diverse and pertinent stories in a small community can be challenging. City politics, utility rates, school construction issues, public safety, and health care are just some of the complex issues we try to cover. Unfortunately we don't have the time, energy or talent to give each of these issues as much time and space on the pages of our publication as we would like. Sometimes it's really helpful to have someone in the community who is passionate about a particular issue volunteer to write about it for us.

Which finally brings me to my main point. The views that are expressed in the pages of this publication are not necessarily the views of the editor and publisher. Some of the articles, stories and columns do not reflect my personal values, my concerns, or my viewpoint. I don't always agree with, or share, the message being conveyed in the content we publish by other contributors.

I have a lot of respect for the

staff at WOEC and the job they do, keeping the lights on for us. I believe they are a good bunch of people, doing the best they can, under difficult circumstances. I also have a lot of respect for the members of the Board of Directors who serve as our member representatives at WOEC. From what I have seen and know about these folks, which I admit is fairly limited in some cases, they are intelligent and competent people.

Do I like to see rate increases? Of course not. Do I think there is something that can be done to lower or at least hold current rates steady? I don't know the answer to that, yet. Do I think public discussion about utility rates is appropriate and potentially helpful? Of course I do.

My hope is that the "Power of One" will respectfully continue to ask their questions and raise their concerns and will get satisfactory answers which will help them better understand the operations at WOEC. My hope is that some new ideas and possible solutions to our high rates may also be discovered in the process of asking those questions. My hope is that the Board of Directors and management at WOEC will continue to listen to the members, hear and consider their concerns, and continue to look for ways to control rates. And ultimately, my hope is that the citizens of our community are better informed about an issue that is of great importance.

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VERNONIA'S
voice
reflecting the spirit of our community

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One year subscriptions
(24 issues) \$35

Vernonia's Voice is published
on the 1st and 3rd Thursday
of each month.

Vernonia's Voice, LLC
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Vernonia, OR 97064
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