

An Opinion: Disappointment

By Scott Laird

Two events happened during the last month that left me feeling disappointed.

The first event was a program held at the Vernonia Library on May 21 a Conversation Project sponsored by Oregon Humanities, titled “Guns In America, Exploring the Second Amendment.”

Conversation Projects are designed to bring members of a community together to discuss provocative topics and ideas, guided by trained facilitators who connect the subject to participants’ experiences and to the local community, and challenge participants to think in new ways without advocating for a particular perspective. I have attended several of these programs in the past and found them to be interesting and a great opportunity to learn more about the people I share this community with, about their thoughts and ideas on particular subjects.

The topic for this most recent conversation was, if not somewhat controversial, certainly destined to provoke strong feelings.

The conversation was billed as an impartial look at what the Second Amendment really says about gun rights and American’s right to bear arms. The presenter, Reed College professor Pancho Savery stated upfront it would be an unbiased discussion.

Currently gun rights advocates appear to be on the defensive following Oregon’s passage of stricter background checks on gun buyers, but remain passionate about their right to own firearms of all types without any restrictions, while safety concerns about gun violence in our country also remain a concern for many citizens.

I attended this conversation with the hopes of learning more about the Second Amendment and what freedoms it guarantees, and how members of our community understand their rights as gun owners.

Unfortunately, that’s not really what happened. It was obvious from the start that Mr. Savery had an agenda with the goal of proving that the Second Amendment was not intended to grant Americans the unrestricted right to bear arms. The gun rights advocates in the audience immediately went on the attack, interrupting the presentation just minutes after it started and continuing

throughout the presentation. When they asked legitimate questions, Mr. Savery reasserted his same points and brushed off arguments that didn’t support his thesis.

When the presentation was complete, I left feeling frustrated and disappointed. Throughout the presentation many of the gun rights advocates in the room appeared angry. For the most part, except for a few exceptions and several moments of drama intended to make a point, the audience stayed respectful, but struggled when their legitimate queries went unanswered or were avoided.

This provided an exceptional opportunity for gun advocates and those concerned about gun violence to come together for a moderated discussion about the Second Amendment and its true meaning. Many knowledgeable and passionate people on both sides of the discussion came prepared to discuss their point of view with the hopes of having an honest and thoughtful conversation with other members of our community. Unfortunately that conversation didn’t take place as intended, although several audience members met following the structured program to discuss the topic.

I want to be clear, I do not in any way blame the Vernonia Library staff for the disappointment I think most members of the audience experienced that evening. Library Director Shannon Romtvedt took a bit of a risk inviting a conversation about a controversial subject to our library and made every effort to move the discussion along and bring it back to the center. Savery seemed to have other ideas.

One thing I did learn from the program and through my own research is that the Second Amendment may not be as clear as some people seem to think it is. I think the framers of the constitution left their true meaning very much open to interpretation.

Personally I’m concerned about gun violence in our country. I believe we’ve created a culture that encourages people to resort to guns to settle conflicts. It worries me when I hear people talk about using a gun to stop someone from taking their possessions. I also understand that I live in a community where gun ownership is the norm.

I’m now in my mid fifties. I’ve driven and traveled all over the country, driven to Alaska and traveled Mexico and Central America, often traveling

alone for extended periods of time. I grew up in an east coast suburb and often went to the big city for sporting events and concerts. I’ve lived in the city and I’ve lived in rural areas. I have never once in my life had the need to use a gun.

Maybe I’m just lucky.

I’ve listened to arguments on both sides of the gun rights issue and participated in several on-line discussions where I’ve learned quite a bit from talking with knowledgeable and passionate people. My understanding of the issue has grown and my ability to consider others’ points of view has expanded.

The national debate on the right to bear arms contains a tremendous amount of rhetoric from both the far right and the far left. The gun lobby is very powerful, but so are the stories of victims of gun violence. The extremes seem to control the discussion and it remains difficult to create a conversation in the middle that allows citizens to share their views openly and honestly.

I’m disappointed because we missed a great opportunity to do just that in Vernonia.

The second disappointment I experienced last month was the rejection of ballot measure 5-246 which would have funded a second paid position at the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District. This position, a Training Captain, was designed to provide an additional paid responder for calls and some much needed relief for Chief Dean Smith. More importantly the

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voice
reflecting the spirit of our community

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Nominations Wanted For “Citizen of the Year”

The Vernonia Friendship Jamboree and Logging Show Committee is seeking nominations for “Citizen of the Year” to be recognized at the 2015 Jamboree celebration on August 7-9.

If you know someone who deserves recognition for their contributions to the Vernonia community please fill out this nomination form and drop it off in the box at Vernonia City Hall by July 10, 2015.

My nomination for 2015 Jamboree Citizen of the Year is:

Cedar Side Inn

Open Mic Night w/ Matt
Saturday, June 20th

4th of July BBQ

Karaoke

Every 2nd & Last Friday

Taco Tuesday

from opening until 9pm
3 hardshell or 1 softshell \$4.25

Ladies’ Night

every Thursday 6pm-close

• Free Pool • Free WiFi • Specialty Pizzas

Check our Facebook page for daily specials and upcoming events
756 Bridge Street, Vernonia 503-429-5841



Happy Hour Mon-Fri 4-7
Lady’s Night Wed 5-12

Events

Sat, June 20th
Texas Hold ‘Em

Sat, June 27th
Stepchild

- Specialty hamburgers
- Draft beer & mixed drinks
- Pool tables & satelite TV
- Pool Tourny Most Friday nights
- Free Wi-fi
- Beer & Kegs to go

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