

Public forum

by Roselinda Maycock

Lately, there has been talk of a constitutional convention. So far, some twenty-nine of the two-thirds of the States needed have petitioned. Apparently, Governor Brown of California would like to see an amendment to the constitution that would compel Government to balance the Federal Budget.

Some have raised the anxious question, "Would such a law involve changing large portions of the constitution?"

Others, less careful, would happily settle for a little change here and a little change there while they're about the business of balancing the budget.

At least one person has more sweeping notions: "The American people wrote the constitution, and the American people can change the constitution," he writes in a statement more ambitious than accurate.

This is all fair and square actually. The American Government is of the people, by the people, for the people. The people rule. And if they want change, by all means, they should take the legal steps to make change.

But before trying for a better constitution, it would not hurt to look backwards. To paraphrase one very perceptive author of the 19th century E.G. White, "We have nothing to fear for the future except as we forget the past."

And the past shows that the American people have a constitution of which they can be proud. Indeed, one cannot help but admire the quality of the men who fashioned it. The framers of the constitution are a splendid example of men's ability to treat problems with breadth of thought and vision... a trait prevalent in the male species. The minds of women may be every bit as good as man's. Yet, men will always exceed, as a rule, in leadership and in the skills of rule and government. But we are digressing here.

The constitution of the U.S. has endured for almost two hundred years. And it is still in good shape. There was, as defined by men like Hamilton, Madison and Jay, sound logic behind every one of its articles. Their goal of personal freedom plus strong national leadership became its foundation. It is a foundation wrung from four months of hard compromise. And it has worked ever since. Has it not brought America to see a pinnacle of glory?

But history has demonstrated that every pinnacle has its decline. The last thing anyone wants to admit today is that we are sliding. But we admit it. And we lash out in every direction in an attempt to check that slide. Some would solve it with a growing chain of trivial laws. Other point accusing fingers at the constitution.

If the laws had been different, this would never be happening.

But the problem is not with the laws. It is with the people. Changing the laws will not change the people. Even if the constitution were perfect, it could not make a nation great. That responsibility lies with the people of the nation.

And yet some think the solution lies in changing the constitution. No government—God's or man's—can function long on a changing law. Principles that shift and change with circumstance are no laws at all. It is the unchanging nature of a principle that brings stability. When a law is demonstrated to be good (indeed, the very best that can be devised in a complex situation) it will never improve things to change, abolish or replace it. Replace it with what, anyway? An inferior law that inevitably uses force? A nation governed by inferior laws is most certainly on its way out.

No. The principles upon which the constitution has been built definitely cannot be changed without loss. Some of these principles lie close to our hearts. Like the belief in the natural rights of the people; or the limitation of the power of the Central Government; or the concept of a Government that must have flexibility enough to lead; or the idea of a Government with power enough to guard our liberties, as stated by Hamilton in the first of the Federalist papers: "The vigor of Government is essential to the security of liberty."

Laws that change can eventually create in the minds of the people a tendency to take lightly all law. Anarchy is not far behind. On the other hand, the substitution of inferior laws can take the nation into the bondage of tyranny.

It is true that amendments have been added since 1789. But any amendment is acceptable if it does not change the basic principles of the constitution. Such a change simply affords a wider application of the codes. But repeal an admittedly good law and we pull stability out from under a society dependent on law for order.

It is at times of stress that the quality of a nation's people surface. Under pressure, how many are there that spin into panic with cries for a law, any law to bring relief? Well, if we check back to the last gasoline crisis, we see that so far not many have cracked. Americans still seem inclined to stand for their law though the heavens fall.

The test of the people will come at times of great pressure. What then? Will we throw our perfectly good principles and snatch at quick and easy solutions out of distress? Only time will tell.

eventually not produce good fruit, so too will a town decay if not taken care of. I urge everyone to get involved with a positive attitude towards making Vernonia a better place to live—to raise a family or to retire in.

The community schools concept is one solution. Its purpose is to meet the needs of the community whatever they may be. However, the ability to solve the problems is directly related to the degree of participation by the community. So let's start thinking about what we can do rather than what "they" should be doing. There are no limits to what we can do—believe this. Call the community center for information on what you can do to help (429-9771). Let us know your ideas or your needs. Together we stand, divided we fall. With everyone's help we don't have to settle for "as good as," we can be "better than."

Norman Jensen

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Vernonia Sewers

by Paul Seamons

There is a school of thought which holds that for our planet or nation as a whole, the ultimate limits to growth will not prove to be lack of resources or energy but over abundance of pollution and the costs of dealing with it. (This is certainly the current situation with the nuclear power industry, for instance). I mention this not to preface a discussion of global limits, thankfully, but to note that this situation - "Pollution Paralysis" - prevails here in Vernonia.

Locally, pollution paralysis takes two forms. The first is the rules of the state Department of Environmental Quality regarding the location of septic tanks. While the county has recently taken over septic tank approvals, the County Sanitarian is still guided by D.E.Q. regulations. There are no end of complaints one can hear about the "arbitrariness" and "incompetence" of the inspecting sanitarians, especially from people who have been unsuccessful in getting a septic permit.

The informed consensus appears to be that while the septic inspectors are people of good will, they are young and inexperienced, long on learning and short on common sense. Their judgement may sometimes err on the conservative side (approval denied). Of course an immediate solution to this problem would be for the County to pay higher sanitarians' salaries, attracting the more experienced sanitarians. It must be remembered, however, that many local soils are simply unsuited for septic drainage, regardless of the inspector.

In any case, County Sanitarian runs a close second behind County Planner for most thankless county job.

The second aspect of local pollution paralysis is Vernonia's sewage treatment lagoon. The state D.E.Q. has said that no more hookups to Vernonia's sewerage system can be permitted before the city rehabilitates and enlarges its sewage treatment lagoon. Currently there are about 750 hookups. The City Council is investigating the technical and financial means of modifying the lagoon so as to permit additional hookups. A citizens' committee has been appointed to assist the Council in its investigation. There is \$70,000.00 in the City's proposed budget for maintenance of the existing lagoon.

In talking to several members of the City Council and citizens' committee, I found that study of the sewage lagoon is still in its formative stages.

As far as I could discover, there is no definitive answer to the question "Is the sewage lagoon adequate for the existing population as far as the D.E.Q. is concerned?" It is essential that the city obtain from the department a formal statement of the system's inadequacies and legal violations (if any), the D.E.Q.'s authority to regulate those problems, the specific remedial measures acceptable to the D.E.Q., and objective standards against which to judge compliance. Informal conversations with regulatory officials are often contradictory and always an inappropriate basis for financial decisions.

The City Engineers have developed a proposal for enlarging the treatment plant. This enlargement would permit - indeed it would invite - the city population to double. I understand that the engineers' cost estimate for the work takes the form of a lump sum figure in the neighborhood of \$800,000, with no line item breakdown.

A lump sum estimate is a good beginning but a detailed estimate of the costs of the various components of the project is necessary. Reliance upon a lump sum estimate can only lead to financial, administrative and political grief for the Council.

When adequately presented, the engineers' proposal and estimate should be thoroughly reviewed by experienced local builders and contractors, before being used as a basis for budget requests and the like.

From the descriptions I hear of the proposal, it is a project which could be managed and constructed with mostly local expertise and labor. I suspect the engineers would be surprised at how relatively inexpensively competent local people can construct civic projects. I presume that the city would have to award any contract on a sealed bid/lowest qualified bidder basis. Local contractors and builders without adequate organization may find themselves unable to bid despite their civic spirit.

So we have the curious situation that growth in this area is being restrained by the regulatory activities of the state D.E.Q. and the federal E.P.A. However pollution paralysis is not created by these agencies. It is a fact of life and physics that more development and greater population concentrations create more unpleasant wastes which require more attention, more regulation, and more money to dispose of. The regulators are forcing us to address and pay the increased costs for increased development. The question is, at what point does the price become too high?

To Freedom

NOW HEAR THIS

by G.G. Connely
The 23rd Psalm
1979 Version

(1) The peanut farmer is my shepherd (so he says); I shall not want. (Oh, but I do).

(2) He maketh me to lie down in (not so green pastures, because of chemicals and sprays used thereon); he leadeth me beside the still waters. (void of salmon and contaminated with nuclear waste).

(3) He destroyeth my soul; he leadeth me in the path of (disbelief in his born again attitude); for his name sake.

(4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (because of his belief in De'tente and his hope for world peace). I will fear no evil (because he thinks that national health insurance will take care of me); thy rod and thy staff (causes me great discomfort, he gives it to me every chance he gets)(the EPA art with me).

(5) Thou preparest a table before me, (covered with fall-out from nuclear power plants) in the presence of mine enemies (nuclear scientist); thou anointest my head with oil; (but it will be domestic,

because Mexican oil is priced too high)(But, sooner or later my cup will runneth over with unpure water.)

(6) Surly goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; (Joe Califano Jr., the Cancer Society, Lung Association and the State of Oregon is going to see to that, by not allowing me to smoke). and I will dwell in a house threatened each year by higher taxes for ever.

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS

City Police..... 429-5141

Ambulance..... 429-5141

Vernonia Fire Dept.. 429-3131

Col. Co. Sheriff.... 429-5141

(ask for Sheriff's Dept.)

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