

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Drug policy harms the school system

When Vernonia School District started its mandatory *suspicionless* drug testing policy in 1989, it took only a short while before the district started amending it.

First it was changed to eliminate automatic disqualification from extracurricular activities in the event a student had two positive urine tests. Then it was amended so it applied only to students who were involved in extracurricular athletic programs.

The changes didn't occur haphazardly; the first was callously calculated to reduce potential liability of the district and the board of directors, after they were warned about that possibility. The second change was adopted because another school district had been able to support "protection of athletes" as a reason for a similar (not the same) policy.

Then, the most interesting change of all occurred. At the time the policy was initiated, the justification given by the district was that drug use, or drug-affected students, disrupted classrooms so severely that the teachers couldn't do their jobs adequately. But, after talking to many different legal authorities, the justification suddenly became the protection of student-athletes.

It was the same policy, applied to the same students, in the same school, by the same administration. Nevertheless, when it appeared that the district or the directors could be held liable, they very cynically "changed" the policy by adopting — after the fact — a different justification for its inception.

At that point, the policy was no longer designed to quell classroom disruptions; it somehow became a "protective" system on the basis that drug-affected athletes could be injured or injure others in their altered state.

The district accepted their own rationale so completely that Superintendent Ellis Mason even testified, under oath, that the policy was started to protect athletes. When asked about that statement, he responded, "Well, that's what it became."

Another interesting point is the claim in the trial brief that Vernonia is a "small, isolated logging community of approximately 3,000" people. Attorneys aren't generally noted for their creative writing skills, but that opening statement about the isolation of a town just 40 miles from a major metropolitan area shows that some attorneys are frustrated fiction writers.

The population figure also seems to have been the figment of someone's imagination. At the time the brief was written, the combined population of the town and the surrounding areas was closer to 7,000 than 3,000.

In Vernonia, some professional educators have violated their students civil rights; some blithely disregard the truth and entirely too many support imposing "order" under the shameful dictum that the end justifies the means.

There is no justification for the example set here.



The Josi Report

By Rep. Tim Josi
Oregon House District 2

Among the important topics to be discussed in this legislative session is the health of our watersheds, the management of this resource for the future, and how we can participate in this process.

It may seem too obvious to state, but without water there is no life and without a stable watershed system providing a clean and dependable water supply, our Northwest lifestyle is in jeopardy. We depend on water for consumption at home and work, for generation of hydro-electric power, for agricultural and industrial purposes, and for the sustenance of our wildlife.

During the last decade, Oregonians realized that our watersheds were deteriorating. We share responsibility for this through increased consumption of water due to a rapidly growing population, agricultural and hydro-electric demands, logging practices, the development of roads and other structures too close to stream beds, and the drainage of industrial waste into our water supplies.

One of the most obvious signs of this deterioration has been the decline of wild Pacific salmon populations. In 1991, the American Fisheries Society found that of 400 distinct salmon stocks on the West Coast, 214 were at risk of extinction and 106 were already extinct. Ocean catches of coho declined from 5.3 million in 1976 to 292,000 in 1993, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service. Listing of the coho as an endangered species is considered to be imminent.

In response to this widespread problem, the legislature created the Strategic Water Management Group (SWMG) in 1985 to coordinate local, state and federal agencies dealing with water policy. In 1987 the Governor's Watershed Enhancement Board (GWEB) was formed to provide grants for enhancing watershed health or creating educational programs to gather data on watersheds and to communicate the importance of watershed health. The Board has been particularly interested in individual projects. When HB 2215 passed in 1993, a program was established that encourages local, state, and federal agencies to work with private citizens to restore our ailing water-

sheds through formation of local watershed councils. Council action projects may receive grant funds from SWMG.

Watershed councils that have already formed around the state have a variety of histories. Some councils have been initiated by county governments that asked citizens to participate in council formation; others have been created by interested groups of citizens concerned about the quality of their watersheds. All councils, regardless of their beginnings, must receive official recognition from their county government in order to receive state technical assistance and possible funding. Once local government approves the council members then the state Strategic Water Management Group either confirms or requests changes in the council membership.

One reason for the state oversight is to provide a balanced perspective in the development of watershed policy for each area. That requires representation from watershed residents with agricultural, industrial, governmental, recreational, proprietary and/or environmental interests.

Many councils also have technical and advisory members that help research, compile and interpret data on the direction of the council. These members represent federal, state and local governments and are extremely valuable for their ability to provide leadership in a variety of ways and for information on compliance with existing law.

The councils pull together to create a management plan for their watersheds. These can include pollution control, riparian enhancement, revegetation/erosion control, fisheries enhancement, training and education programs, and water conservation projects. The ultimate goal is to improve the overall health of the watershed for the benefit of all groups.

I want to help in watershed council formation in any way I can. If you are interested in being involved in this process, contact my office in Salem for further information.

Rep. Josi may be reached at:
State Capitol Room H491
Salem, OR 97310
Phone: (503) 986-1402
FAX: (503) 986-1575
E-Mail: RepJosi@America On Line