

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

It's been interesting, hopefully, it's over

A six-year controversy, under litigation for four years, is, hopefully, coming to an end. The U.S. Supreme Court can now decide the fate of Vernonia School District's mandatory drug-testing policy.

Like Don Dailey, chair of the district's Board of Directors (See Letters), we are pleased to see that the system works, that a question of national importance can go before our highest court without regard to the origins of the question. No matter how the court rules, the same question will arise again some time in the future but, with luck, it won't be here.

There are many projects that can use more energy and attention, among them the Community Center Project, Jamboree, Spring Spirit Day, the school district's facilities study, and numerous City endeavors. One project that seems to have been orphaned is the annual fireworks show. Is there a group around town that can raise several thousand dollars by mid-June for fireworks?

With all our desire to move on to something else, one thought makes us pause . . . what if the court doesn't rule on the constitutionality of the policy? What if they remand the question back to a lower court???? For today, that possibility will be ignored.

Hwy. 47 realignment may actually go out for bids

The long-awaited realignment of Highway 47 between Beaver Creek and the Nehalem River finally has a bid date—April 27, 1995. Unfortunately, the fact that a date is set is no guarantee the Oregon Department of Transportation will follow through.

It isn't as though ODOT has been in a rush to correct the problem they created. It has been about 35 years since they built a "new" bridge across the Nehalem River, with the promise to realign the road and eliminate the worst of the curves created by changing the angle where the highway and bridge join.

ODOT still refers to the realignment as a "modernization" project, rather than a safety project, in spite of the documentation they have received—several times—confirming the accident toll their "new" bridge helped cause.

The situation has become further complicated, too, with paving for the Banks-Vernonia Linear Park tied to the highway realignment project. If ODOT doesn't put the job out for work this summer, there is still the possibility of losing the money intended for paving the park. ODOT insists the money won't be lost, but how many times have they said the highway would be realigned "next year"?

Words are cheap (with ODOT, too often totally worthless) but projects cost money and ODOT continually approves cost overruns on other projects while saying there's not enough money for the Hwy. 47 project.

Let's all keep an eye out on that April 27th date.



The Josi Report

By Rep. Tim Josi
Oregon Representative, District 2
(Two of Rep. Josi's columns have been combined for this commentary on education reform legislation. Ed.)

There is an old adage that says ignorance is bliss. For some that may be true but for most individuals, and for society as a whole, ignorance is a grave danger. We have become aware over the last decade that many of our society's problems are created or exacerbated by ignorance. Generally, we look to our schools as the primary vehicle for dispelling ignorance, but today too many of our children are graduating from high school without the ability to write or speak proper English, to read, compute simple math problems, think critically, or understand their part in the history of mankind and the universe.

In an attempt to develop educated citizens who are capable of not only surviving, but thriving in the new world economy and as the leaders of world democracies, President Bush and the nation's governors created Goals 2000, a list of reforms they felt would improve the nation's educational standards and results. Since 1989 the federal government has been encouraging states to create their own educational reforms to achieve these goals. The Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century, also known as HB 3665 or the Katz bill, was born of this process in 1991. Oregon's schools are now in the midst of putting the reforms into practice.

During this process concerns have arisen regarding some of the Act's provisions. Some people see Goals 2000 as a federal conspiracy to control the minds and attitudes of the nation's children. Others are concerned that the reforms are too nebulous and will not achieve the goal of better educated citizens. Some people would be happy to see the entire reform scrapped, others believe that fine-tuning is all that is required. The House of Representatives opted last week to fine-tune. HB 2991, addresses many of the concerns about the Act that have surfaced since its passage in 1991, including clarification of some of its language.

Modifications proposed in the House legislation fall into four categories: state responsi-

bilities, local options, local responsibilities, and academic requirements. The state will allow a timeline extension for local compliance; provide statewide tests at grades 3, 5, 8, and 10; eliminate specific dates for lengthening the school year; and require rigorous academic standards throughout the state that are continuously reviewed and raised when necessary.

School districts will be required to issue Certificates of Accomplishment rather than Certificates of Initial Mastery in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 based on the state tests and class work; certificates may also be granted in other school years. Grades will also be issued, as will a diploma upon graduation. If a student fails to meet the goals of the Certificate of Accomplishment then the school must provide an individualized instruction plan and/or alternative programs. School-to-work programs must provide at least 2 years study/work experience and shall include career endorsements. Districts are also required to develop and implement discipline plans to be reported on annually to the State Board of Education.

Locally, the schools may determine the composition of site councils or eliminate them if they choose; however, the state encourages parental involvement. The schools are able to select their teaching methodologies, including developing public school choice schools. The bill also stresses that all social services available to children and families at school sites are optional.

Academically, the primary grades will concentrate on reading, writing, science and math. These subjects will be supplemented with language arts, health, geography, history, civics, art, music, P.E., foreign languages, computer technology and humanities. By the year 2002, graduating students will be required to have completed two years of language study.

I believe these changes make the original bill much stronger and give us more direction in our effort to change the course of our educational system.

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