

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Scout Cabin gets a reprieve for repairs

It was obvious at the last Vernonia City Council meeting that the "Scout Cabin" in Hawkins Park generates good memories for many of Vernonia's long-time citizens and that they are adamant that the cabin be renovated and put back in use.

Most of the people who spoke...Bill Sword, Elroy Miner, Robb Wilson, Jeff Patterson, Dale Webb, Sharon Parrow, Shirlee Daughtrey and Corey Colburn...though not all "old timers", were eloquent in their defense of the role the building has played and/or could play in the future.

The compromise developed by the council is a good one: It allows the building to be renovated if enough people are willing to work on the project and, at the same time, allows the City to maintain the necessary control over how the job will be done.

One tactic used by a few supporters of the renovation is, however, counterproductive. They want to blame "newcomers" for the decision to raze the building. That can only make people wonder who let the building fall into its current state of disrepair...old timers?

Obviously, what matters isn't how long people have lived here, but how much they care about the community and how hard they are willing to work in order to achieve common goals.

This may prove to be a prime example of how compromise (ie., consent reached by mutual concession) brings about satisfactory, even desirable, results.

Who knows, if the Scout Cabin project is successful, maybe the picnic shelter and the horseshoe pits will be renovated. Hawkins Park could be a great site for family or organization picnics - if enough people care.

WOEC directors approve move that may help City

Another example of sensible compromise is a decision last night by the West Oregon Electric Cooperative Board of Directors to approve a resolution that authorizes the co-op to continue helping the City of Vernonia pursue a zero-interest loan from rural development funds that can be accessed only through a rural electric co-op. The city is seeking the funds as part of a financial package for its greatly needed, new municipal building.

The directors have mandated that any assistance to the City must be accomplished with absolutely no cost to its ratepayers. That is certainly appropriate and is a position the city council not only understands, but endorses.

It hasn't been very many years since the City and WOEC were at loggerheads over electric rates, franchise fees and just about everything else, generally trying to place blame on someone else for their respective financial problems.

It is good to see those barriers removed because progress for either entity will, in the long run, become progress for the whole area.



The Josi Report

By Rep. Tim Josi
Oregon Representative, Dist. 2

The 1997 legislative session is over. We finished at 5:30 Saturday morning, July 5th, after a 20 hour marathon session that started at 9:30 the morning before. On the way home, I felt a sense of relief. Although each week at the capitol was challenging and enjoyable, leaving my family every Monday morning for the last six months was hard to do.

This legislative session, on a personal level, has been very productive. I ushered thirteen bills successfully through the legislative process and into Oregon's state statutes. One of my bills actually removed a law that required needless regulation and expense for owners of certain sewage treatment facilities. Here are three of the most important issues the legislature faced:

SCHOOL FUNDING: For the first time in six years, schools will be funded at a level which should preclude teacher layoffs for most school districts in Oregon. Oregon schools have faced budgetary cuts since 1990's Measure 5 tax limit cut into their chief source of money, the property tax. State government filled in much of the gap with income tax revenues, but the money never has been enough to keep up with inflation and student enrollment growth.

Schools will receive \$4.15 billion in income tax revenues for operations for the next two years and another \$50 million in classroom grants for next year. Voters will be asked to authorize \$150 million in state-financed bonds for schools which would then be available in the 1998-99 school year.

COHO SALMON: Faced with a threat by the Federal Government to list the main runs of coastal Coho Salmon as an endangered species, the legislature committed \$30 million to a salmon recovery plan. Almost half of the money needed for the effort to clean up streams and restore habitat will be paid for by the timber industry. The aggregate industry also volunteered to help and will be paying for about \$1 million of the effort. So far we have

been successful - a listing was avoided.

HIGHWAY DOLLARS: The biggest disappointment of the 1997 legislature was our inability to increase the gas tax. This may sound like good news at first glance but we have not infused new money into our transportation system since 1991. It takes about a penny-per-year increase just to keep up with inflation and population increases. For this reason, we are about a billion dollars behind schedule with highway and bridge maintenance projects. By comparison, Idaho spends twice as much as Oregon on their highway system. Washington and California spend twice as much as Idaho.

For three legislative sessions the "no new taxes" theme has prevailed. Too much time was spent bashing ODOT and not enough consideration given to putting more dollars into our highway system. Twice, during this legislative session, the House sent a transportation package to the Senate and both times the bills did not receive the necessary votes. In the end, Oregon's economy will suffer as our roads continue to crumble. The price tag to fix our roads is high now. When these roads reach a certain level of deterioration, the cost to fix them is much, much higher. The fiscal hole the legislature has created, by not acting prudently since 1991, will be much deeper in two years when the legislature reconvenes.

I want to finish by saying that being a legislator has been a very gratifying experience. Having the opportunity to represent over fifty-thousand people at the state capitol is a tremendous opportunity. I will always be grateful to the people in my legislative district for electing me. Being a State Representative is a wonderful, challenging and, for the most part, fun experience.

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