

# The INDEPENDENT

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## Opinion

### Budgeting requires adequate information

It's budget time for government bodies in Oregon; the only problem is that local governments don't yet have enough information to complete the process.

Vernonia School District doesn't yet know how much it will be getting from the state...and won't know until the legislature and the governor agree on the amount. When this legislative session began, the Republican leadership was talking about first taking care of education funding. This time, they said, they weren't going to let it drag on and on. It sounded like they really understood the need for efficiency. That was in January.

It is now nearing the end of March and the legislative leadership is no closer to making a decision on school funding than it was in January. As a matter of fact, there haven't been any funding decisions made at all.

Anyone who has tried to plan a budget knows how impossible that task is without any idea of what your income will be. It is time - past time - for the "leadership" to stop talking about what they are going to do and start doing it.

When the voters passed Measures 5 and 40, which eliminated local control over school funding, it became the responsibility of the legislature. When a person is elected to the state legislature, they accept that responsibility. If they can't handle the job, they should resign.

The City of Vernonia has delayed completion of its budget for an entirely different reason. Collective bargaining is underway and, until negotiations are final, they also lack necessary information.

There are two other problems facing all public agencies this year: Health insurance premiums may increase by as much as 30 percent and nobody knows how much energy rate increases will be.

This is not an easy year for public budget architects.

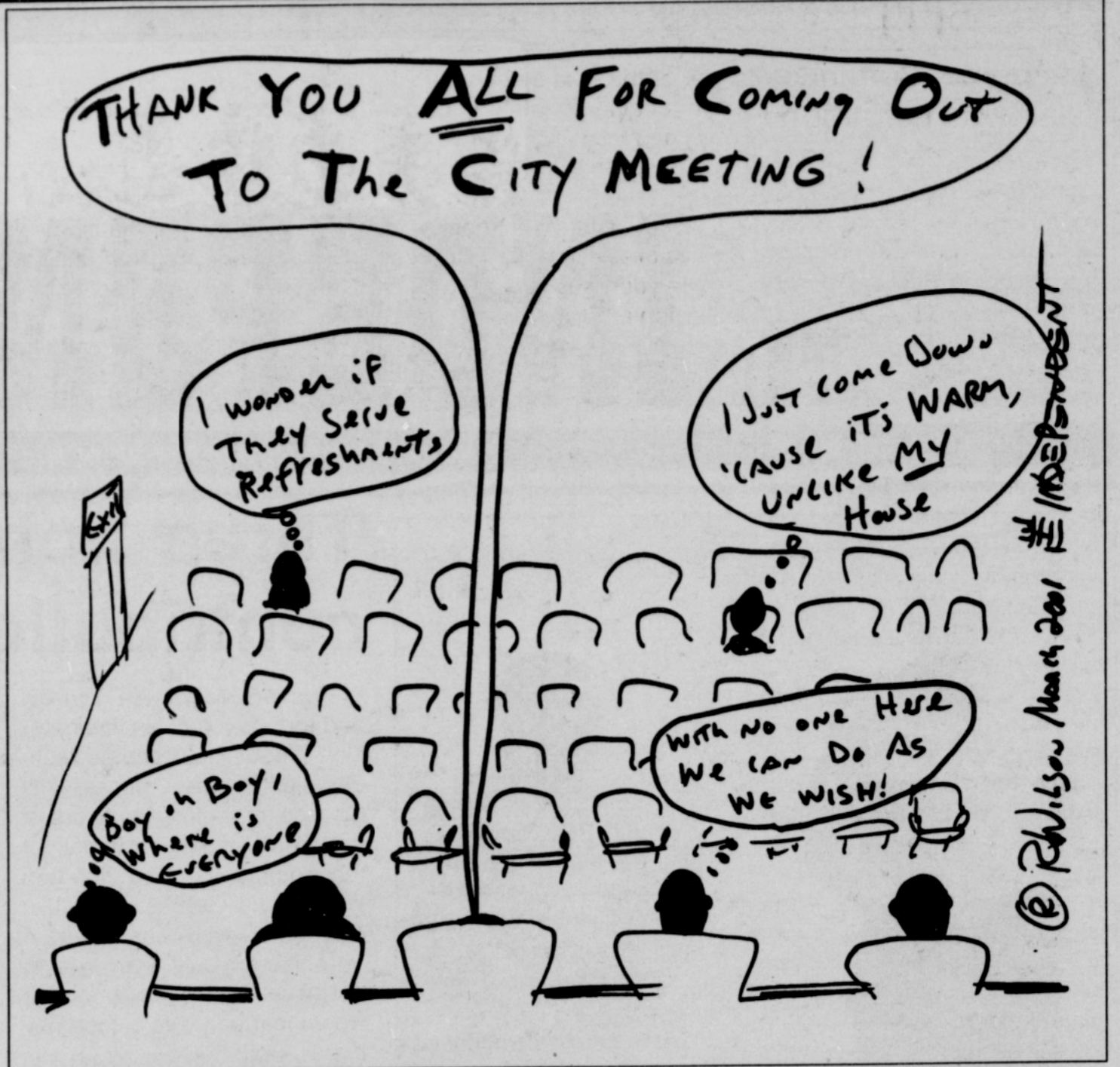
### Speaking of budgets...

There are vacancies on the Budget Committee of the Vernonia School District and that is a great place for new school board members, or anyone really interested in local schools, to become acquainted with reality. The two new directors in the Vernonia district would be wise to apply for spots on the budget committee.

Jim Krahn has some experience in that venue and could quickly become a contributing member. Rick Hobart, on the other hand, has yet to attend a school board meeting so it would be even more valuable for him to get started as quickly as possible.

*Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not; it is the first lesson that ought to be learned; it is probably the last lesson [we] learn thoroughly.*

—T.H. Huxley  
(1825-1895)



### Salem Scene

By Rep. Elaine M. Hopson  
Second District

MARCH 9, 2001

A busy, busy week as bills come through, needs are identified, and money decreases. As you are no doubt aware, there appears to be a slight downturn in the economy and that projects a reduction in the revenues available to the state to fund programs. This impacts all areas and tough choices will need to be made.

On March 6, the Speaker's Task Force on Funding for Seniors and Disabled Services had its first meeting at the Hilyard Senior Center in Eugene. The hearing was attended by over one hundred people, mostly seniors and citizens with disabilities. Numerous issues were presented including the severe impacts cuts will cause to our programs for these special populations. It is safe to say that everyone sees the benefit of the programs targeted for potential cuts; however, there is not agreement as to where the money is to address these needs. It is so distressing to realize that in order to provide funding in one area, resultant cuts will occur in other areas.

There was every expectation that the Community Colleges budget would be passed on Thursday. Although the budget is very reasonable and deserves support (in my opinion), it was put on hold to await more information regarding revenues and the total, overall state budget. The most important factor is the \$45 million to address the student growth issue. There are some other related programs that apply specifically to certain community colleges that do not support us directly. These programs are open for discussion at some later point prior to the budget moving the Ways and Means. During these times of tight money, special programs, especially those that were originally set up as "pilot programs" may need to be dropped, even though they are excellent.

MARCH 16, 2001

The Governor finished his press conference just a few minutes ago and has "re-balanced" his budget. Included within his rebalance are the following: restoration of \$12.5 million for senior services; \$6.8 million to restore up to 50 percent of Oregon Project Independence; \$45 million to Oregon University System; \$9.7 million to Oregon State Police; \$6.4 million to retain Tillamook Youth Accountability Camp; and \$5 million to the Emergency Fund. These additions will certainly help us in District 2 to address some of the needs we have in education, senior services,

and education. The Governor maintained his support for the Oregon Children Plan as originally set out in his budget.

Last Saturday, the Task Force on Seniors and Disabled traveled to Medford where we heard from seniors and residents regarding the proposed budget reductions. Tomorrow, March 17, we travel to Bend to talk with folks there. There continues to be hope that money will be available to support these much-needed services.

Forestry and Agriculture Committee passed out a bill that would allow money from gifts and grants to the Oregon Department of Forestry to be used for enhancements for recreational purposes in the State Forests. The committee continues to address issues that attempt to balance the various needs of our agriculture, farming, and forestry needs with the demands imposed by various conservation needs in order to protect the future.

In Education, we spent considerable time on changing the mandatory school attendance age from ages 7-18 to 5-18. With the understanding that some five-year-olds are not ready to attend formal education, there is a continual challenge to find ways to educate our youth to their full potential. The issue has become quite controversial with strong feelings on both sides. I am in favor of the change with the understanding that concerned parents who can offer their children more benefits at home or in other programs should be allowed to do so.

In Education Ways and Means we have spent this week on the Oregon Student Assistance Commission (formerly known as the Scholarship Commission) budget. This is the organization that provides financial assistance to higher education students including community colleges and four-year institutions. Oregon is somewhat unique in that both public and private colleges use the same system and this streamlines the process for applicants. Although there are some monies available from the federal government, the state also allocates funds in the form of grants and loans to assist those in need. These financial aids serve students of all ages.

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