

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

It must have been a really slow news day

Being a part of the "media" is sometimes uncomfortable; lately it's just plain embarrassing.

Most of our readers will recall a letter in the Jan. 2, 2002, issue of *The INDEPENDENT* that asked why the formation of a KKK group was included on a list of historic dates in a kiosk at Vernonia Lake. This was a real letter from a real person who was seeking an answer to a real question about a matter of concern.

The information on the sign was put together by volunteers from Vernonia Pride, using data from the history book, *Vernonia, a Pocket in the Woods*. The KKK reference was there, just as it is in the history of Portland and most cities in Oregon. The City's response was to remove the one line from the sign because there was no reason to make people uncomfortable. Additionally, funds for the kiosk came from a tourism grant so the reference probably shouldn't have been included.

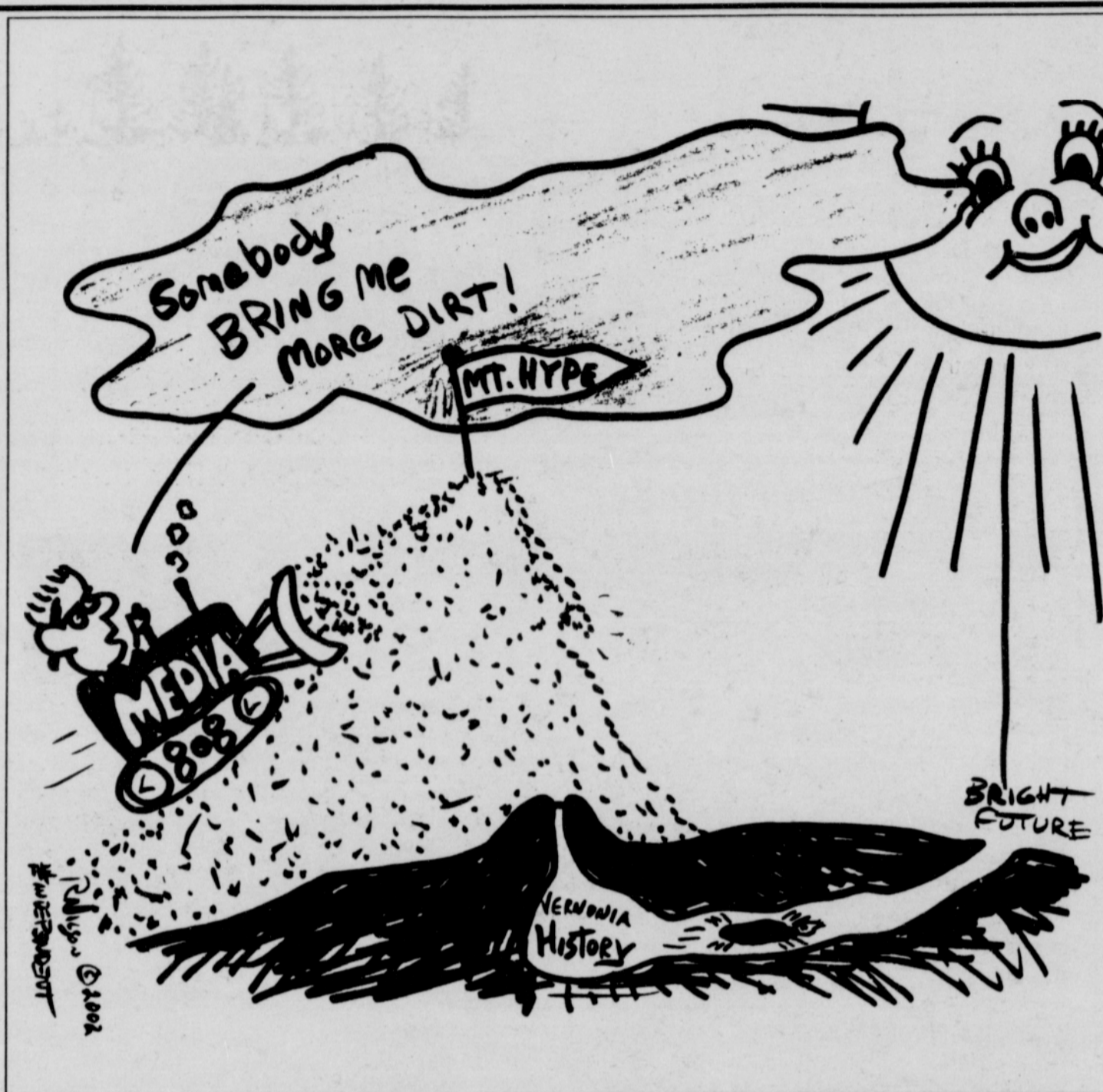
This wasn't a problem.

Unfortunately, it must have been a slow news day. *The Willamette Weekly*, *The Daily Astorian* and KXL commentator Lars Larson all apparently felt the need to make A STORY out of it.

The *Willamette Weekly's* approach was, predictably, that the information should have remained in the book. Larson's approach was, predictably, that removing the information was "rewriting history." The *Daily Astorian* straddled the fence, but still felt that this one line on a sign in Vernonia was worth a front page STORY.

Let's try to keep this in perspective: This is a small town that must rely on volunteers to accomplish many things. The community has greatly benefited from Vernonia Pride's efforts over the years. The all-volunteer organization has worked very hard on beautification projects, has raised money to install welcome signs at both ends of town, maintains decorations with seasonal themes throughout the year and organizes the annual clean-up day.

If there are others who want to do as much work as this group does, wonderful, their efforts will be welcomed. On the other hand, if the goal is to criticize volunteers' efforts because they may have made a mistake, then it's time to put life – and history – in perspective.



Ike Says...

By Betsy Johnson,
Rep., District 31

The economy, both nationally and statewide was weakening well before the disastrous events of September 11th, however those events seemed to have the very real effect of both exacerbating the decline and making the public keenly aware of it.

Even as the State Legislature adjourned from passing a \$12-billion biennial budget reports indicated that Oregon would be in a deficit position before the end of the year. In August, numbers began to show that State revenues would be nearly \$300 million less than budget estimates, immediately exhausting the \$86 million reserve left by the Legislature and creating a deficit of some \$214 million. At the beginning of October, that estimate had increased to as much as \$600 million and, with the December forecast, the number could be as high as \$800 million.

If there is any good news in all of this, it is that economists are projecting that things will improve beginning in June and will continue to gain strength through the third quarter of 2002.

The immediate difficulty is what to do between now and then. The State's budget must be re-balanced.

Several options are being considered. Some of these include the use of certain "pots" of existing money (Tobacco Settlement money, Medicaid and current utility surcharge reserves); expansion of video poker to include line games (slot machines); tax increases on beer, wine and cigarettes; surcharges on corporate and personal income taxes, and reductions in compensation

to video poker vendors.

However, even if all of these revenue-raising activities were used, their estimated total is only around \$446 million. If the personal and corporate surtax were removed, this revenue number would drop to \$321 million – not nearly enough to cover the estimated short-fall. Many of these proposals will be unpopular with the more fiscally conservative legislators. The \$254 million "kicker" has already been distributed and therefore will not be part of the debate. The average amount of individual "kicker" checks - \$157.00.

Cuts in services loom large as a component of rebalancing the budget and the Governor has asked State Agencies to cut 2% from immediate budgets as well as a long term "prioritized" reduction plan.

During public hearings in December, testimony showed strong support for preserving the areas of education, social services and public safety; these three areas make up roughly 90% of the General Fund and Lottery budgets. There was also testimony in support of maintaining a wide variety of new and existing programs, both large and small.

If the agencies are able to cut 2%, it would provide approximately \$240 million. If all of the above revenue increases, except personal and corporate surcharges, were implemented, they would raise approximately \$321 million – for a total of \$561 million. With the \$86 million ending balance, that total would be \$647 million – still far short of the \$900 million dollar target. We still must search for the balance. One possible place to find additional funding would be in new pro-

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