

# The INDEPENDENT

Serving the upper Nehalem River valley. Published twice monthly, on the first and third Thursdays of each month, by Public Opinion Laboratory Ltd., 725 Bridge Street, Vernonia, OR 97064, as a free newspaper. Editors and Publishers, Dirk & Noni Andersen. Phone/Fax: 503-429-9410, e-mail: noni@vernonia.com

## Opinion

### Board action wrong during fiscal crisis

After spending a great deal of time and energy loudly worrying about inadequate school funding, the Vernonia school board made a foolish decision to reimburse six administrators \$1,500 each for attending a national conference. This is the sort of action that creates disbelief among the general public.

This is not an argument about the value of such conferences, nor is it disagreement with the potential for professional development that can create positive results for the district's students. Director Darrell Hamblet was correct in viewing the expenditure as an investment in the future.

#### BUT NOT AT THIS TIME!

High school Principal Mike Durbin and elementary school Principal Kirk Sherrill – who were not consulted – both understand the problem. They have cut non-teaching positions and have asked their respective staffs to do more with less.

"I'll use all the professional development I can get," said Durbin, "but how would my staff feel if I spent money for a national conference? I can't do that."

Sherrill said he appreciated the board's acknowledgement that administrators should have opportunity for professional development. "But I must respectfully decline," he said, citing reductions not just in resources and supplies, but jobs. "We've cut people," he said.

The potential \$9,000 expenditure will neither make nor break the budget. It's not enough for a text book adoption; it won't replace a job. If the board's desire is to acknowledge dedicated administrators who did not get either a raise or a COLA, this is not the way to do it.

Politicians foam at the mouth, declaring they can balance the budget with money that's wasted, and most voters forget to ask for details. Unfortunately, this potential expenditure of \$9,000 is the sort of thing that is used as an example of "crying 'wolf'." This is not a foolish board of directors, but it was a foolishly untimely decision.

Speaking of foolish: Rep. Betsy Johnson was in Vernonia to talk with constituents about how to balance the state budget. Many people showed up (the largest crowd she had anywhere), but there was not one school board member, not one administrator, not one teacher. Not one person involved in education. That really goes beyond foolishness; it's unfathomable.



### Administrators offered conference, refused COLA

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the district will pay an increase in the cost of their insurance and continue to pay the entire cost of health insurance. The salaries of three confidential employees, – the district deputy clerk, superintendent's secretary and district accounts clerk – were adjusted to bring their salaries closer to similar positions in comparable districts.

In a four-two split, the board approved an allowance of up to \$1500 each for the high school and elementary principals, vice-principals and special education coordinator to attend a national conference. Director Darrell Hamblet said that he viewed the potential expenditure of \$9,000 as an investment and that, in his experience, national conferences produced improvements in the system far outweighing their immediate cost. Voting in favor of a motion by Jim Krahn to approve the expenditure, were Hamblet, Krahn, Cari Levenseller and Carla Strand. Tim Titus and Randy Hansen were opposed to the motion; Director Leslie O'Leary was on vacation.

The board adopted the budget for fiscal year 2002-03 as approved by the budget committee, with the exception of the correction of errors not previously noticed in the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 figures. They did not discuss the guidelines and priorities recommended by the budget committee if anticipated revenues are not received, instead referring those decisions to the administrative team.

The board approved a resolution appealing to the legislature to cooperate in reaching a bipartisan agreement to provide schools with stable funding and restore at least \$200 million to the state school fund.

High School Principal Mike Durbin told the

board that end-of-year events were very successful, with the election of next year's class officers at the Spring Fling. Spring sports were enjoyed, with players receiving first team all-league and honorable mention in both softball and baseball. Boy's golf placed third at state and track placed fourth in district competition. The Equestrian team won several awards at State competition, most notably the Sportsmanship Trophy at both the district and state.

Elementary Principal Kirk Sherrill reported that teachers Matt Blair and Michelle Eagleson organized the first annual grade school field day. Blended teams of students in grades 3-8 competed in a variety of events all over the Washington Grade School campus. Sherrill – and board members who attended – said that it was great watch the teams work together and supporting each other in order to accomplish their goals. Other events included the junior high awards assembly, OMSI overnight, field trips, band concerts, and eighth grade promotion.

In other business the board:

- Approved an adjusted policy for admission of foreign exchange students.
- Approved an agreement with Jewel School District for the 2002-2003 football season.
- Tabled an extension of the architect's contract.
- Were told that the district will not know the results of applications for a school renovation grant, technology grant and special education grant until mid-August.
- Set a board workshop, at the request of new Superintendent Mike Funderburg, prior to the July 11th board meeting, to discuss goals for the upcoming year.