

Budget committee will try to establish priorities for next biennium

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biennium would probably not be known until mid-June.

The budget adopted for the current year (2002-2003) has had to be reduced by approximately 20 percent over the course of the last several months, to create a balanced budget for 2003-2004. Funderburg said that recent action by the legislature to increase the percentage of transportation reimbursement for schools in eastern Oregon decreased the amount of money in the common school fund and cost the Vernonia district about \$12 per student.

At the time of the meeting, legislators were very unhappy about school funding, Funderburg said, and there was an effort to increase the state school fund to \$5.0 billion from the \$4.8 billion budgeted for the biennium as of May 1. Recent news reports indicate that some efforts are being made to raise the state school fund as high as \$5.3 billion. Nevertheless, the district has to budget without any firm numbers.

Funderburg recommended that any revenues resulting from a decrease in the cost of PERS be placed in the contingency fund because, in this depressed economy, in six months the district could be in the same position as it was last December when expected revenues did not materialize. Increasing the contingency fund could allow the district to make adjustments to the budget without cutting school days. According to Funderburg, money should also be held in contingency until any future litigation regarding PERS is resolved.

Funderburg urged the committee to adopt the budget as presented, including all the reductions discussed at previous meetings, and then identify areas of concern about reduced funding levels accompanied by corresponding areas that could be used to provide funds to support programs of concern.

Darrell Hamblet, a school board member who has worked for months as a member of the Budget Assistance Team (BAT), said that there wasn't a person in the room who would be unable to find something in the budget that he or she did not like. Further, he said, if a committee member just could not support a particular cut, he hoped they would suggest where to get the dollars to in-

crease support.

Board member Jim Krahn immediately identified three areas in the budget that greatly concern him. First, he said, deep reductions in athletic transportation (\$17,7000 remains in the budget) made "unrealistic [assumptions] about what can be expected of kids. In addition, the elimination of junior varsity coaches could create a "garbage program". Krahn said that he would rather see the district support fewer sports fully in order to have good teams. Further, Krahn agreed that the contingency fund should be increased.

In addition to reducing or eliminating junior high and high school track and cross country, Krahn said he would support eliminating shop (vocational education) "as it is run today." He suggested that wood shop could be taught as work experience, though any concrete example of how all students could be accommodated was not forthcoming. School board member Cari Levenseller pointed out that the high school is low on electives, having already cut auto shop, international foods and business education. Krahn responded that he doesn't see vocational education as a core academic class and that, in his opinion, students participating in shop are probably the same students kept in school with a good athletic program.

Budget committee members Vicky Rice and Robyn Bassett both spoke very positively about the value of vocational education and said they would not support any additional cuts to elective programs in general or vocational education in particular. Board member Leslie

O'Leary agreed with Krahn that, if the district could not afford to transport students, the district should not sponsor a program. To fully fund athletic transportation, Funderburg told the committee, \$15,000 would have to be taken from somewhere in the budget.

Bassett, who chairs the budget committee, encouraged members to examine the budget in detail in an effort to find money to support programs. According to Bassett, there is "always more room for vision" and an opportunity to create a balance so that everyone has a piece of what is needed for kids. Bassett suggested scheduling another meeting to discuss changes in the budget document and to establish priorities for increased spending. The committee stumbled along discussing both topics for some time. Funderburg told the committee that the work of the BAT was reaching "a thousand compromises" and that the committee could not create a whole new document at this point or a budget with "fictitious dollars," i.e. potential increases in state funding or local fund raising efforts.

Hamblet, after first moving that the budget be adopted as presented (which died for lack of a second) suggested that the BAT be disbanded. The committee reached a consensus that all discussion must now be at the full committee level. O'Leary said that one duty of the committee is to accept the document, review it and allow the public an opportunity to digest the proposal. Board member Randy Hansen added that establishing a list of priorities is a paramount duty of the committee.

Cathy Ward, a Washington Grade School teacher, sug-

gested that the board review the "Pay-to-Play" policy as a way of funding athletic transportation and assistant coaches. Ward also said that she thought all kids should have to pay, including those eligible for the federal lunch program, or work for the district in some capacity in order to participate in sports. According to Deputy Clerk Dawn Plews, revenue received from the Pay-to-Play

program (approximately \$10,000) represents a minor portion of the total athletic budget (over \$60,000 excluding transportation) as currently budgeted.

The committee will meet again June 9 to approve the budget and develop priorities for any potential increase in revenue.

King places third in Spelling Bee

The 27th Annual Spelling Contest for the State of Oregon was held May 13 at the Clatskanie School District Office.

The following first place winners will represent the county at the Oregon State Competition on August 30 at the Oregon State Fair:

Division I (Grades K-5): Nicole Spencer, Rainier Middle School.

Division II (Grades 6-8): Chelsea Clifton, Scappoose Middle School.

Division III (Grades 9-12): Kelli Hackett, St. Helens High School.

Contestants from Vernonia included Gabriel Rule, Timothy Brown, Brittanie Roberts, who

placed third in Division II, and Alex Bittinger, all of Washington Grade School.

Vernonia High School student Marshall King placed third place in Division III; Stephanie Lane also participated.



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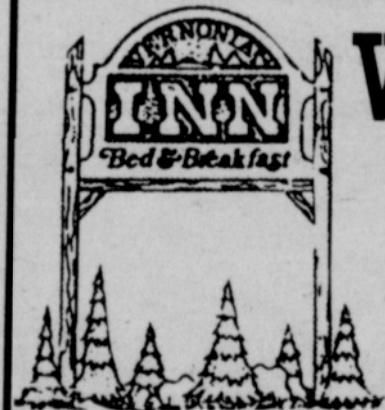
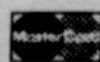
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