

Letters

School Board works hard for community

To the Editor

Thank you School Board!

I feel that it is time to acknowledge the dedication of our school board members. They have had to deal with incredibly tough issues, and despite all the difficulties they never gave up. There is no compensation for their time and effort, they do it out of concern for our kids.

Over the last five years the board and superintendent have been working on finding a way to get a new school facility. After several attempts and a tremendous amount of effort, they came up with the latest so-

lution and ran with it.

There were public meetings where the plans were discussed. I went to a workshop and was one of maybe four people that attended. Despite the lack of input, they kept moving forward. There have been major obstacles and it has taken longer than anticipated, but they did the best that they could...and now we are on our way to a new school building.

Throughout this process there has been quite a bit of negativity toward the board and it pains me. Having served on the school board, I know how difficult it is to get the community involved; people are so busy they do not have time to participate and that is understand-

able. What is difficult for me to accept is so much criticism. If we could apply that energy positively we would live in a better community.

The next time you have a gripe or concern, get informed and get involved. Your opinions and input are needed. We can't expect the board to represent us without communicating directly with them. If we work together as a team, we set an example for our kids and everyone benefits.

To the 47J School Board and Staff...thank you for your efforts and perseverance. This is a huge step for our community and hopefully just the beginning for our schools.

Leslie O'Leary
Vernonia

Get informed and go to 47J board meeting

To the Editor:

I attended the City of Vernonia Planning Commission meeting, April 21, and was taken aback by changes in the proposal for the new school building being pushed through by the [Vernonia School] District 47J board and administra-

tion.

The Planning Commission has a difficult job; they are responsible for ensuring that proposals meet all city planning and zoning regulations. Not only does this require technical knowledge, but also the exquisite skill of separating emotions from decision making. Judging by the facial expressions and detailed questions posed by Planning Commission members, I have concluded that most of them are against the proposal at an emotional and logical level. Unfortunately, they can make a decision based only on information presented and regulations that apply to the conditional use permit requested by the school district.

Mr. Funderburg made many verbal agreements and statements during the meeting, all of which are captured on audio tape by the city. Hopefully, these will be put in writing and submitted on a revised permit application. I say this because until it is in writing, it is verbal fluff, not fact. Anyone can make verbal commitments that are well intended but poorly executed.

What I don't understand is, if

the Planning Commission agrees that the site design is not in the best interest of Vernonia, why can't they just deny the conditional use permit?

The changes in the plans as I saw it were: addition of 2 classrooms (6 now instead of 4), a looped driveway and parking lot in front of the proposed building, increased brick work on exterior walls, and additional parking areas.

These are all good additions, but parking lots, classrooms and brick masonry are not cheap. What escapes me is how, with all these additions, the price remains \$1,600,000? Does this include furnishings for the building or will this cost arise later?

There were also discussions on traffic flow and the need to redirect school busses so they drive between WGS and the play shed. A plan that has school busses crossing the busiest area of the playground twice daily is not well thought out; remember, too, that the administration built a fence across the same driveway to prevent traffic that would endanger children. Mr. Funderburg

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Legislative Update

By Senator Betsy Johnson
Oregon District 16



Last week nearly 1,000 Oregonians rallied on the steps of the State Capitol to show their support for additional funding for senior services, mental health and other important social services. Many in that gathering were advocating taking funds from schools because schools, they contend, are "not as important as caring for those who really need help".

Naturally, the school employee groups and administrators are arguing that more funding is needed for education because, "children are our future".

So it begins in earnest. Every group is trying to get a larger "piece of the pie", but unfortunately "the pie" isn't large enough to satisfy everyone. One of two things has to happen; either there must be fewer demands from citizens and advocacy groups or we need to increase the size of "the pie". I don't foresee the demand for services decreasing anytime soon and I certainly don't foresee higher taxes on the horizon.

So the only way to increase the size of the pie, in my opinion, is to increase the economic vitality of the State. More people earning a decent wage means more income tax receipts for the State which will produce a larger pie. Government at all levels, however, has a poor record when it comes to developing private sector jobs. I believe it is long past time for government to acknowledge that fact, find out why, and change their approach.

Nearly everyone understands that we need rules and regulations to maintain some semblance of order in our complex society. All too often, however, it seems that our rules and regulations take on a life of their own and become an impediment to job growth and commerce. Government agencies must work harder to understand the problems facing our citizens and strive to clear the way through the regulatory process.

When government officials make an effort to understand that time equates to money for business, maybe then we can streamline our approach to regulation. Instead of government asking, "What do you want?" the question should be "How can we help you be more successful and grow?"

One of the primary roles of government is to protect the public's interest. Business growth and prosperity means a "larger pie" for all of Oregon's genuine needs, and that is certainly in the public's interest.

Please contact me by calling 503-986-1716 or by e-mail at <sen.betsyjohnson@state.or.us>.

Salem Scene

By Representative Brad Witt
Oregon District 31



One of the largest events to take place in the Capitol recently was the appearance of nearly 100 school superintendents and their board members at a public forum on school funding. So many of these education managers showed up that the State Police established over-flow seating at multiple locations around the Capitol.

The school superintendents came to Salem to describe for the Legislature what more than a decade's worth of funding cuts have meant to our state. Broadly speaking, these cuts mean that Oregon now has the second-largest classroom size in our nation along with one of the shortest school years. These outcomes are largely attributable to Oregon having dropped to 31st among all states in investment per student.

Listening to the superintendents' testimony, I was struck by the litany of cutbacks in such areas as math, foreign languages, athletics, the arts, shop and a host of electives. My colleagues and I were astounded by the number of schools that have been closed, positions that have been eliminated (teachers, classified and administrators) and the inadequacy of many of our schools' supplies, maintenance and equipment.

I am proud to report that House District 31 had one of the best turnouts at Tuesday's hearing. Neither I nor the superintendents can find much pride, however, in the cutbacks that they reported. In Astoria, Superintendent Mike Sowder described how 14-1/2 fewer teaching positions have reduced academic excellence. Superintendent Mike Corley compared Clatskanie's 1985 budget with that of the present—an identical \$6 million and 20 years of difference. Rainier School Superintendent Mike Carter told us how his community has been forced to close three schools in five years. And Vernonia Superintendent Mike Funderburg described a declining/disengaged student body due to a shortage of classes.

If we want our youth to get good jobs, we must give them the skills to become good employees. If we want Oregon businesses to remain competitive with neighboring states and the many nations of the world, then our business leaders must have a workforce that is second to none. And if we want a prosperous Oregon, then we MUST invest in our next generation of adults.

Today's youth are the future of our district, this state and our great nation. That is why I am asking you, my constituents, to join me in supporting adequate funding (\$5.4 billion out of a total state general fund budget of \$12.4 billion) for Oregon's schools.

Please contact me by calling 503-986-1431 or by e-mail at <rep.bradwitt@state.or.us>.