

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

County needs to do better for public planning on trail

There is no doubt that Vernonia has benefited from the development of the Banks-Vernonia Linear Park trail. There is also no doubt that additional benefits will accrue from the proposed Scappoose-Vernonia trail.

Doubts have developed, however, about the ability of Columbia County staff to incorporate the needed public participation in the project.

As an illustration, prior to the July 7 issue, *The INDEPENDENT* received a press release with a public meeting date of July 12. Immediately after printing that issue, we received a call asking why we printed inaccurate information. The answer, of course, was that we were sent a press release with that information. We don't know why it was sent if it was inaccurate; that is the responsibility of the county.

When new information was sent, the meeting was set for today, July 21, at 7:00 p.m. in the Scout Cabin. There was no consideration given to Vernonia residents to allow advance planning. Since two meetings were scheduled and Scappoose residents can access a weekly newspaper, *The INDEPENDENT* asked the county to switch the two meetings, with the Scappoose meeting tonight and the Vernonia meeting on the 27th. They couldn't do that, though, because the press releases had already been sent! Ah yes, actually, they had been sent twice...the first one was wrong!

This project is important. We hope the county will do a better job of involving the public than they have yet.

Keep bikes off the sidewalks

Riding bikes is both fun and economically sensible. But riding bikes on Vernonia's narrow downtown sidewalks is both dangerous and illegal.

During warm weather, more pedestrians are downtown, and some of them will be physically unable to move fast enough to avoid being hit by scoff-law bicyclists. Some of the bike riders will also be in danger, especially young ones, who suddenly realize they might hit someone and react by going into the street.

The police department can't do everything. Parents need to educate their children about bike safety and laws, or be prepared for serious consequences. There is no excuse for adults and teens who ignore the city ordinances; they should receive maximum penalties.



Salem Scene

By Representative Brad Witt
House District 31



For the second time in as many weeks, a majority of House Members voted 32 to 27 on Monday (July 11) to recess for 3-1/2 days. The vote was taken only one day after we reconvened on Sunday evening, July 10th, following our first 3-1/2 day recess. This haphazard work schedule is not the way to run our State Legislature.

In my opinion, the 32 State Representatives who voted for another paid vacation (per diem continued to accrue during these recesses) ought to be embarrassed by their votes. Embarrassed that the citizens of Oregon sent us to Salem to do their work — to develop a comprehensive state budget and to address their public policy priorities. Yet after six months, we have completed neither task. Our performance hardly warrants time off.

Members should also be embarrassed that their July 11th vote, in light of our remaining work, appears to disaffirm a Legislator's oath to "faithfully discharge" my duties "according to the best of my ability."

It is further embarrassing that the Session costs taxpayers \$28,500 per day, even when the House is off on vacation. Representatives should also be embarrassed that Monday's vote once again causes the public to doubt the com-

mitment and professionalism of State Legislators and the efficiency of their state government.

Last but certainly not least, it is thoroughly embarrassing that the same 32 members who voted for our second recess also voted 32 to 27 to disallow any debate on their motion. Too embarrassed, perhaps, to even discuss how they were compromising the public's interest. I wanted desperately to take the floor and warn my colleagues of the disrespect that they and our body would earn from another recess. I wanted, also, to tell them that their crass dismissal of any debate made a mockery of our democratic form of government, of civility and respect for others.

I wanted to tell them how our little tiff over recesses paled in comparison to the every day problems that confront local governments throughout our Legislative Districts. Real world problems like getting food to shut-in senior citizens, repairing county roads, finding school supplies for disadvantaged families, fighting drugs and crime, maintaining veterans services, adequately staffing our schools and on and on.

I wanted to tell them that, in spite of all of these problems and the paucity of resources to deal with them, our local government partners find the will to get their jobs done. I wanted to tell them that, as state leaders, we have an obligation to set an example, to get our jobs done, too.

But as I have explained, no one was allowed to challenge the wisdom of another House recess. Candidly, it is not in my make-up to accept such undemocratic treatment. As a result, I re-

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