

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Hazard mitigation and wastewater treatment are both essential projects

A lot of improvements have been made to Vernonia's wastewater treatment lagoons since the 1996 flood. Unfortunately, a lot more is needed.

When the flood hit Vernonia, all three of the treatment lagoons were flooded, spilling sewage that spread with the flood waters. Since that time, the only thing that's been done to mitigate the hazard of flooding is to dredge one of the lagoons, making it about a foot deeper.

Other work has been done to improve aeration and chlorination in the treatment process, making it more efficient. This is all necessary, but not sufficient.

Flood proofing measures at two sewage pump stations on Rock Creek and Mist Drive will cost about \$1.4 million. "Pre-disaster" mitigation to elevate the lagoon dikes by nine feet will require another \$2.6 million. This would also include lining the existing lagoons and adding a pre-treatment holding lagoon and wetland detention area.

The whole project is designed to use wetlands efficiently, much as nature provides. Additionally, because of electricity costs, a conventional sewage treatment plant is out of the question.

There will be public meetings before the final decisions are made, but Vernonia has no choice about whether to make the improvements. We have been out of compliance with wastewater discharge regulations for years and time is running out. It makes far more sense to pay for improvements than to pay fines for failing to make improvements.

Progress can be uncomfortable

There is often some feeling of loss when an old building – school, barn or whatever – comes down, but they really don't last forever unless they are constantly maintained at increasing expense.

While it's sad to see the old building in Banks being replaced by a park, it is also a gentle kind of progress. Banks business community has struggled for years and will see some benefit from completion of the Banks-Vernonia Linear Park. It is past due for the trail to have a terminus in each of its namesake towns.



Salem Scene

By Representative Brad Witt
Oregon District 31



As you know, my first session in the Oregon Legislature turned out to be the second longest in Oregon history, 208 calendar days. I like to think it was just a coincidence! Nonetheless, it was a session dominated by one issue – education, how to improve it and how to fund it. The issue was complicated by the long and deep recession that we had just experienced, and by the defeat of two revenue raising ballot measures. No one was in the mood to raise taxes, even though that would have been the prudent thing to do to keep our schools from stumbling on a whole host of obstacles. In the end, the Legislature appropriated a total of \$5.24 billion for the biennium, with an additional \$23 billion if the economy continues to improve. Not nearly enough, but not nearly as bad as it could have been.

As stated in one of my previous newsletters, the school superintendents in my district did yeomen's work when it came to making themselves available to testify before the Revenue Committee. It was an impressive display of knowledge and experience. They shared what every dollar cut would do to their districts, and indeed, what years of fiscal uncertainty had already accomplished. In listening to these folks, and many others who contributed to the discus-

sion, it would be easy to become discouraged. Rather, we are led to an understanding of how hard the work is, but also how worthwhile. I'd like to devote this newsletter to some interesting facts and figures that help to illustrate what a remarkable and complex task it is to shepherd "Dick and Jane" through our educational system.

Teacher, Teacher...

- ✓ The average teacher in Oregon is 43.3 years old with 13.1 years of teaching experience.
- ✓ Oregon has a much larger percentage of teachers with graduate degrees than all other western states.

- ✓ In the last 12 years, while student enrollment has increased by 8.1%, the number of teachers has only increased by 0.1%, and in the 03-04 school year, there was an actual loss of 426 teachers statewide.

- ✓ As of the 03-04 school year, minority student census had increased by 23% while minority teachers had only increased by 4.7%.

Student Achievement...

- ✓ Although SAT scores for graduating seniors consistently rank either 1st or 2nd in the nation, our graduation rate of 82% falls short of the national average of 85%.

- ✓ The majority of school spending is allocated to classroom services, 95.1%, with 4.9% allocated for central support services.

- ✓ As of the 2002-03 school year, Oregon experienced the fifth consecutive decrease in the high school drop-out rate, down to 4.4% of total

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