

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Elected and unpaid, but responsible, nevertheless

It is fairly common for disgruntled citizens to seek election to city councils, school boards and fire district boards. This is a readily available element of participatory democracy that provides local governments with the opportunity to be both vital and responsive, particularly in small towns.

Many people who complain about the actions, or lack of action, by local elected officials fail to consider the huge responsibility these volunteers have taken on. Unfortunately, many of those elected officials also show a remarkable lack of understanding about their responsibility.

Here are a few serious considerations:

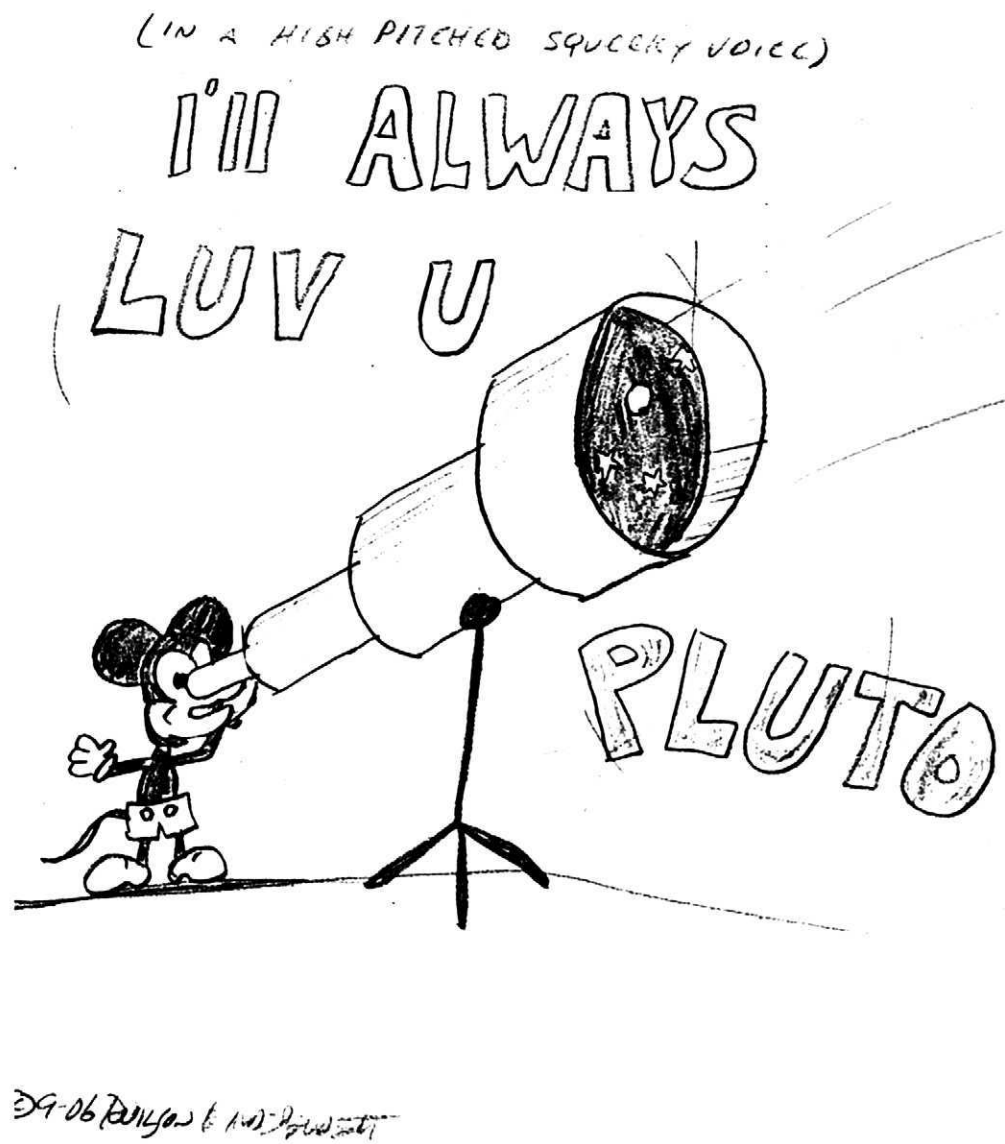
Elected officials need to know what they can, and can't, legally do in their official capacity. They are often given a pass on illegal procedure simply because they are volunteers, but it would be most unwise to rely on that good will.

They need to know Oregon's Public Records and Meetings Law. This is not simply so they can comply with the law, but because an important element of that law says that offending officials may be held *personally responsible* for violations.

When they arrive at meetings, they should be knowledgeable about the topics on the agenda. If they don't get the agenda soon enough, they can direct their administrator to make necessary changes. Policy-setting boards have the power to make systems work...unless they are asking for miracles.

These officials should also give serious consideration to their appointees to advisory committees, striving to avoid those who come with preconceived answers to situations that haven't yet been studied. If they have chosen appointees wisely, they should then listen carefully to the advice the committees provide. That advice may not always be accepted, but it should always be seriously considered.

Because of these responsibilities, a position on a council, school board or other panel often requires much more time than what is needed for meetings. Nevertheless, public officials, elected or appointed, who fail to meet the responsibilities of the positions they sought, do harm to participatory democracy, betraying the trust placed in them by their constituents.



Ike Says . . .

By Dale Webb, member
Izaak Walton League, Nehalem Valley Chapter



August has been dry and hot, with that the Nehalem River has dropped to very low levels, in fact as I write this article it is at 90 cubic feet per second (an official measurement was made a week ago). This level of flow is below the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife instream water rights. The City of Vernonia has also been notified that Rock Creek is probably at a stage that should trigger the city's water restriction ordinance. Please conserve water until we get some rains, the fish will thank you.

Dad and I took another trip to the east side of our state, this time into the Malheur National Forest in two different locations. We first went to our old hunting grounds up on Aldrich Mountain. While it appears not much has changed up on the mountain, it really has. Stop and think about it, you travel to this area once a year and a person's ability to comprehend change from year to year is very questionable. If the landscape is actually changing one or two percent a year you probably would not perceive that change, yet in 30 years it will have had a 30-60% change from your first visit to the area. This is exactly what has happened to many of our forests, yet most people do not perceive a change at all.

So what has changed in these forests? Most of these forests have grown older, yet in the spec-

trum of time of a 500 year-old forest, 30 years is insignificant. What has changed is the new growth of understory trees and the suppression of wildlife-feeding brush by this new growth. Significant cattle grazing during these years has also contributed to the reduction in low shrub growth or survival. Beside these factors, though, the single biggest factor affecting the health of these forests is the lack of fire. With the advent of Smokey Bear and the massive effort to prevent and reduce wildfires the forest have changed and not for the better.

We traveled next to the area north of the middle fork of the John Day River. This area suffered a significant fire around 10 years ago, so this is a new forest. The old forest was leveled to the ground because it was managed in a manner that allowed ladder fuels to grow, allowing the fire to spread into the crowns of the larger pine trees, killing them. Ladder fuels are usually consumed in low intensity fires that are periodically allowed to burn across large areas. Man, though, has deemed fire a bad thing and keeps putting out almost all fires. Humans like to be in control and fire is one element that we feel out of control with. The change in the number of wildlife using this area was notable – deer numbers were probably 50 times higher, elk usage was obvious and thousands of small critters are utilizing the new growth and the old snags left by the fire. While we were there we observed two fire fighters who had completed putting out a small fire in the area and were waiting for a ride. We asked them why they are

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