

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Committees are needed, and need do's and don't

Like most small towns, the City of Vernonia has many advisory committees and, because they were started at different times, they lack a uniform approach.

While the city is trying to develop uniformity in how its various committees operate, this may also be a good time to consider how committees work. This applies not only to the city, but to all local agencies.

Like members of city councils, fire district boards and school district boards, members of the various advisory committees are also volunteers. Their time and effort deserve respect, but they need to understand that effective work requires coordination by many people.

The primary governing board – city council or board of directors – should have written regulations for how committees are to operate. No committee can be effective if its work uses one direction today and another direction tomorrow.

Committee members should expect staff support to include recording meetings, preparing minutes and any other information needed. They should be provided with everything they need for the next meeting – in advance. That time line will vary; it may be five days or two days, depending on the complexity of the information needed by committee members. Staff cannot run the meetings, or vote.

Committee members also have responsibilities. They should be on time for all meetings, and be prepared for the meeting by studying all of the information in advance. They also need to be courteous to other committee members, staff and the public.

Within the regulations set for their operation, committees should be allowed to elect their own chairman and vice-chairman. It would be inappropriate for either staff or governing board to make that determination except in situations where a committee's responsibility is specifically targeted to a limited technical objective.

NOTICE

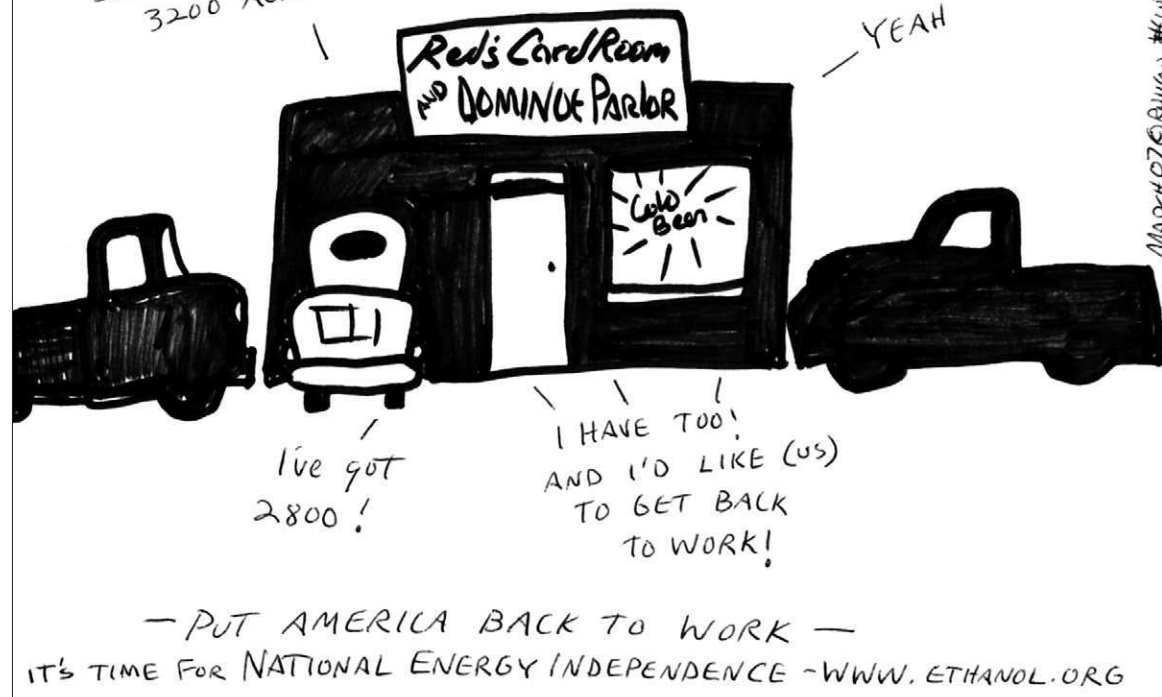
The INDEPENDENT publishes on the first and third Thursday of each month. Because there are five Thursdays in March, the next issue will not be published until April 5, 2007.

The deadline for articles and ads for the April 5 issue will be Friday, March 30, 2007.

CONVERSATION HEARD FROM ACROSS AMERICA

by OUR Noble, Worthy + Independent Farmers

I WONDER WHY OUR PRESIDENT IS DOWN IN SOUTH AMERICA BUYING ETHANOL WHEN I HAVE 3200 ACRES LAYING FALLOW?



Out of My Mind . . .

By Noni Andersen

During and after the Vietnam war, many Americans were rightfully accused of not supporting our troops. Active military and veterans were derided and/or ignored by many, both in and out of government. Although the Iraq war is opposed by even more citizens, all profess support for the troops.

The definition of "support" has almost as many variations as there are opinions. Some feel, notably Vice-President Cheney, that even verbal opposition to the war shows a lack of support for the troops. Others insist that true support would be to bring the troops home as soon as possible. Even though these polar opposites will never agree, they both pale when compared to the gross lack of support for both active military and veterans by our government, particularly the Pentagon and the Veterans Administration.

A recent Congressional study noted that National Guard units returning after overseas duty, became "not ready" for combat because of equipment shortages. Oregon National Guard units, alone, are short more than \$100 million worth of equipment, largely because five years of deployments have depleted weapons and vehicle stocks. According to Brig. Gen. Mike Caldwell, 5,000 of Oregon's 8,000 citizen soldiers have been called to active duty since Sept. 11, 2001. When they go, they take their equipment with them; much of it is damaged or destroyed; and some is left for other troops to use. They now lack much of the equipment needed for either training or to respond to natural disasters.

Deplorable conditions in outpatient facilities at the Army's Walter Reed Medical Center have resulted in a number of high-profile resignations and firings, but many questions remain. Records reveal that, when the Pentagon first considered privatizing support services at Walter Reed, a cost analysis showed that privatization would cost more than the existing program. For reasons never publicly explained, the analysis was revised and a five-year, \$120-million contract was awarded to IAP Worldwide Services (run by Al Neffgen, a former senior Halliburton official). More than 300 federal employees providing facilities management services at Walter Reed dropped to fewer than 60. IAP replaced them with 50 private workers.

Cockroaches and mold are a small part of the overall problem. Just before the Iraq invasion, rules were changed to reduce the number of veterans entitled to use the veterans' health care system. Then, two years ago, an electronic information system that would have allowed a quick transfer of military medical records to the VA was canceled.

While we spend billions in Iraq, much of it untraceable, veterans with traumatic brain injuries and serious mental health issues are not being adequately evaluated or treated.

Complaints are coming from people who rarely complain – soldiers, veterans and military families. They made a deal with the government to risk everything in defense of their country, in return for being taken care of if they were hurt. They kept their side of the bargain.