

## Letters

### Join volunteers to Make Vernonia Shine

To the Editor:

A reminder to all you able-bodied people that April 28 is the annual "Make Vernonia Shine Day."

Registration starts at 9:00 a.m. at the Providence Medical Center. Groups may pre-register by calling Genny Fisher at 429-4019.

There will be no free dump day this year, however there will be a dumpster for green

waste – no garbage, please – located on the south side of the library on the old railroad grade.

Dad's Recycling will be open that day and he takes almost everything. Metals, bed springs, metal buildings, wire fencing, car batteries, paper and clean plastic, engine transmissions, computers. On that day, he will also be taking computer monitors, and all appliances, even those with freon; free of charge. Check with him for a more complete list.

Lunch will be served at 1:00 p.m. at the Scout Cabin.

Please come out and help us make this the best clean up day ever.

**DeLoris Webb  
Vernonia Pride**

### Have healthier air to breathe; don't burn

To the Editor:

I, too, have been guilty of buying a couple of burning permits. But, I am no longer naive, and am aware of the hazards of

Global Warming.

I see all the huge piles of wood ready to be burned, and those burning, and see that there are still many naive. We must change our ways. Buy a chipper.

Oregon is the 3rd worst state in high smoke emissions – and everyone needs to stop burning now! Or was it yesterday?

Also, I've heard cars can run off of water, so why do we trap ourselves in this gas crisis? Make the obvious mandatory [change] immediately, and let's

try and save our earth.

We need all to "Pitch-in" and reverse Global Warming.

**Virginia Kepner  
Vernonia**

### Changes have been made in Youth Soccer

To the Editor:

Spring has started and sports have sprung. As some of you have noticed, though not for Vernonia Youth Soccer... yet! To better focus on the fall

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## Salem Scene

By Representative Brad Witt  
Oregon District 31



The Rainy Day Fund that the Legislature approved several weeks ago is already paying off for taxpayers. This week we received very good news from the State Treasurer's office. Standard & Poor's, one of the three major national credit rating agencies, revised Oregon's general obligation bond rating from "stable" to "positive." The agency cited the state legislature's approval of the Rainy Day Fund as a reason for the upgrade. Wall Street clearly approves of what we have done to shore up our finances and we are now just one step away from getting an increase in our bond rating, from AA- to AA.

An improved credit rating would save the state millions of dollars each year in interest. For instance, veterans' home loans would be less expensive, and public schools would enjoy lower interest rates on their bond issues through the Oregon School Bond Guaranty Program. Other positive issues mentioned in the S&P analysis include a more diversified state economy and a manageable debt burden. One item that helped get Oregon's financial house in order was the Public Employees Retirement Fund (PERS) reforms that took place during the 2005 legislature. Because of those reforms, PERS is now fully funded.

In addition to this good news from the Treasurer, the Legislature has passed several very good bills that I would like to share with you as well. The first, HJR 14, seeks to reform Oregon's double majority election law. Currently, any property tax increase must be approved by both a 50% majority of those voting and at least 50% of those registered to vote. In other words, even if 100% of those who turn out to vote approve the measure, if they do not make up at least 50% of the registered voters, the levy will fail. This gives those who do not vote more control over the ballot box than those who do. There is something patently undemocratic about this.

HJR 14 does not of itself change the law. Instead, because the Constitution would need to be amended, the bill calls upon Oregonians to once again consider this issue at the ballot box.

If passed, the new law would allow local property tax levies to be passed with a simple majority twice a year, at the May and November elections. This ballot measure will come before the voters at the next general election, November 2008.

The next bill, SB 362, expands the Oregon Prescription Drug Program (OPDP) to include business associations, employee groups, employer-sponsored health plans, and additional individual users. The OPDP was established in 2003 in order to create a pool of participants large enough to have some purchasing power in the pharmaceutical market place.

In November of 2006, Oregonians overwhelmingly passed Ballot Measure 44, that allowed any Oregon resident without prescription drug coverage to participate in the state's purchasing pool. SB 362 expands upon that measure, further harnessing the state's bulk purchasing power to make prescription medications more affordable. This measure is good for business, it benefits families, and it is simply the right thing to do. It passed the House unanimously. As of February 2007, OPDP has enrolled approximately 12,500 people with an average savings of \$28 per prescription.

The last measure I want to discuss is HB 2650. This bill will set minimum standards related to portion size, calories, sugar and fat content of food sold to students through vending machines and school stores. The standards would also apply to school-prepared individual entrees, but not the broader school lunch program administered by the USDA.

In the face of an epidemic of obesity facing our nation's children, a coalition of parents, public health advocates, physicians, nutritionist, teachers and administrators expressed concern about the proliferation of unregulated junk food sold in schools. Oftentimes this undermines the efforts that parents make on the home front to provide their children with a nourishing, low-fat diet. Hopefully, this legislation will help our children avoid a future plagued by the many illnesses linked to obesity.

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## Out of My Mind . . .

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back most of his \$15,000 bonus. Town left Fort Carson owing the Army more than \$3,000. Why did he settle for this?

Town said a psychologist at Fort Carson assured him that he would receive disability benefits, VA medical care and that he'd get to keep his bonus. He discussed the good news with two soldiers in his unit at Fort Carson. "We talked about it many times," Brandon Murray confirmed. "Jon said the doctor promised him benefits, and he was happy about it." Town shared the excitement with his wife, Kristy, shortly after his appointment with the psychologist. "He said [the doctor] had explained that he'd get to keep his benefits," Kristy says, "...it was all coming with the chapter he was getting." Promises were made about what would happen if he went along with the diagnosis.

"The final day, we find out, none of it was true. It was a total shock. I felt like I'd been betrayed by the Army."

Russell Terry, founder of the Iraq War Veterans Organization (IWVO), said his veterans' rights group has been receiving calls from distraught soldiers discharged under Chapter 5-13 for more than a year. They describe how their military doctors pushed the personality disorder diagnosis, strained to prove that their problems existed before their service in Iraq and refused to acknowledge evidence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury and physical traumas, which would allow them to collect disability and medical benefits.

Trying to reverse a 5-13 dis-

charge is a frustrating process. A veteran has to conquer paperwork, appeals panels and backstage political dealing. Even with the guidance of an experienced advocate, few are successful.

In the last six years the Army has diagnosed and discharged more than 5,600 soldiers because of personality disorder – 805 cases in 2001, 980 cases in 2003, 1,086 from January to November 2006. "It's getting worse and worse every day," said an official who handles discharge papers. "...the numbers started out normal. Now it's up to three or four soldiers each day. It's like, suddenly everybody has a personality disorder. They're saving a buck. And they're saving the VA money too. It's all about money."

What does the Army get for throwing wounded veterans out on 5-13 discharges? With an average disability payment of about \$8,900 a year and a medical cost of about \$5,000 per year over a 40-year period per soldier, separating 22,500 of them would save the Pentagon \$8-billion in disability pay and \$4.5-billion in medical care over their lifetimes.

Terry noted that recruits are screened psychologically when they join the military, and has a pertinent question: "if all these soldiers really did have a severe pre-existing condition, how did they get into the military in the first place?"

To read the full article, including more veterans' experiences and responses from Army officials, go to <[www.the-nation.com/issue/20070409](http://www.the-nation.com/issue/20070409)> and click on "How Specialist Town Lost His Benefits".