

# The INDEPENDENT

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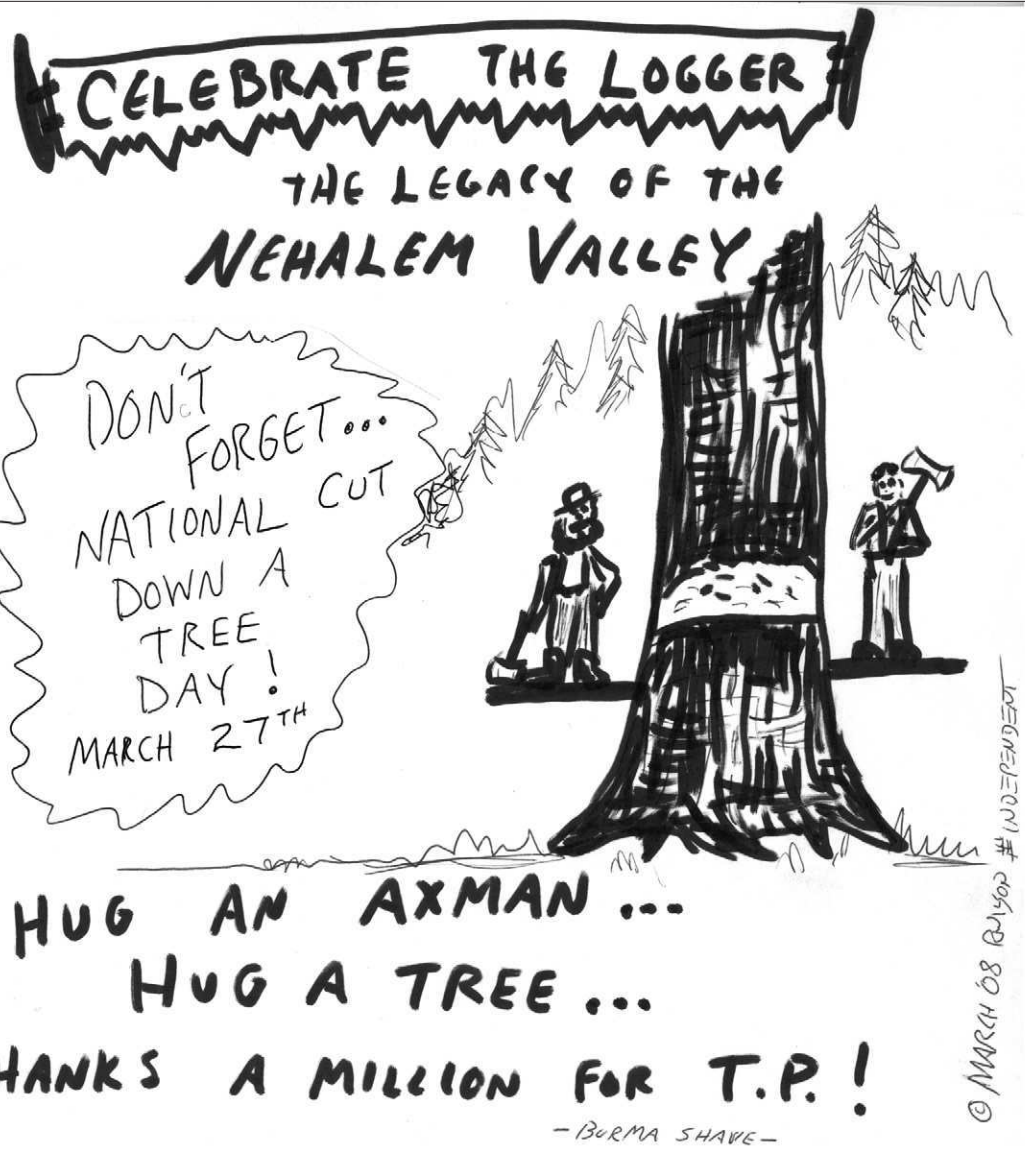
## Opinion

### Just whose council is it?

A city council is supposed to represent the citizens, right? Does Vernonia's council represent the citizens? No. How can we tell? One way to tell is to look at how much thought goes into decisions. Mayor Sally Harrison has said they picked Dick Kline for interim city administrator because he lived closest to Vernonia. Dick Kline later abandons his job during the flood and its aftermath, unscathed, while his "underlings" busted their butts to keep Vernonia running. Does the council give Kline the boot? No, they just create a new position for him and make City Planner Aldie Howard the interim city administrator. Howard has since shown himself to be a divider of people with knee-jerk decision skills. When pushed to act on getting a real city administrator the council can't make a decision and instead is dragging their heels on when to start the hiring process. In the meantime Howard, instead of putting his limited abilities toward important decisions concerning the needs of the citizens, prefers to start petty battles with The INDEPENDENT by insisting that the librarian and chief of police submit their newspaper columns to him for review. Given the high quality of their columns, that's akin to having a 3rd grader review a college professor's work.

Wonder how it's going for us getting public records these days? We got the audit and we're reviewing it. More about that in a future issue. We put in a request for the year-to-date expenditures and revenues (outgo and income) on March 13, handing it directly to Howard, who didn't seem to have any idea what it was. We even offered to give him a sample, nope didn't need that. We still haven't received anything from Vernonia. We stopped off at Banks City Hall the same day and asked for the same information. Five minutes and \$.75 later, we had six pages of information, including a comparison to the original amounts in the budget. Banks includes that report in every council packet. Vernonia's city council only sees the checks going out. Another example of the city not serving the citizens.

Now on to something great. It brought a tear to more than one eye to see Don Coghill get a letterman's jacket and a standing ovation at the recent Sports Dessert. Coghill has been a really big fan of Vernonia sports for years now, even keeping his own set of stats. He loves Vernonia sports and what a wonderful way to acknowledge him. Way to go, Vernonia School District!



### Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen

Do elections make a difference?  
Is government secrecy important?

The operation of government is the business of the people. Aside from specific exemptions in Oregon law, such as contract negotiations, the business of the public is supposed to be public. Most of the exemptions, even, become public record after decisions have been reached.

So, who oversees the operation of government on the local level?

Our elected officials – mayor and councilors – sought and accepted the responsibility to represent us in the operations of city government. They are responsible for setting policy and hiring key people with the appropriate experience and judgement to use those policies for the good of the people.

Among the actions that Vernonia's elected officials have actively supported or passively allowed, is an appalling lack of transparency. If you think there is nothing wrong with withholding information from the public, then you really should wonder why your business is being kept secret from you.

We still have had no explanation for why our finances are, to say the least, murky. If you go to any neighboring city and ask for a statement of revenues and expenditures for this budget year, to date, it isn't a problem. Most cities will produce it in less than 30 minutes, and charge 25 cents per page for photocopies.

In Vernonia, it's a major production. First there are the excuses: (Director of Finance M.R.

"Dick") Kline isn't here and he's the only one who can get it, or, we have a software problem but it should be cleared up by tomorrow, or, that information is being updated and we'll have it later in the week, or, etc., ad infinitum.

Kline, who has been here since mid-2006, first as "interim" administrator, then administrator, now director of finance, spent his first year blaming financial problems on previous administrations but, give him credit for persistence, he still hasn't run out of excuses. And he still has the support of our elected officials.

Some actions supported or allowed by our elected officials are simply nonsensical.

One recent action by "interim" administrator Aldie Howard is notable only because it is an astonishing insult to Librarian Nancy Burch and Police Chief Mat Workman. This popinjay of an administrator demands that they turn over their newspaper columns to him, instead of emailing them directly to *The INDEPENDENT*.

Does he fear subversive propaganda? Is he concerned that incorrect grammar would reflect poorly on the city? No, this is all about ego; it's a way to show that he's the BOSS. Not only do his subordinates have to bring him their work, but *The INDEPENDENT* has to go to him to get the columns.

In the 20-plus years that *The INDEPENDENT* has published Vernonia library columns, this is the first time the city has treated a local librarian like an untrustworthy child. Additionally, Workman's columns have been a great help in devel-

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