

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Park access is threatened

Vernonia has a lot of parks for the size of the community. There's Anderson Park, Shay Park, Hawkins Park, Ora Bolmeier Park, Spencer Park, Airport Park and Vernonia Lake.

Gerie Reynolds has been an excellent park host at Anderson Park this year. So many people have gone out of their way to thank her and commend her for the clean park and her pleasant demeanor. We want to add our thanks to her for demonstrating what a great park host can add to this camping area.

Since last October, though, there seems to have been an unprecedented amount of littering and vandalism at Vernonia's parks. As these problems arise and continue, the pleasure and amenities of the parks go down. First, there is the displeasure of seeing graffiti or litter. Next, the restrooms got closed and stay closed at Hawkins Park because of vandalism and lack of cleanliness by those using the facilities. Next, the restrooms at Vernonia Lake ended up closed, replaced by those pleasant to look at (and smell) port-a-potties.

At last Monday's Vernonia City Council meeting, former councilor Shirlee Daughtry, spoke to council about problems at Hawkins Park. A wedding was scheduled in the park on Saturday. The city crew cleaned up the park on Friday, then two citizens reported having to pick up litter later that day, and finally, Daughtry picked up more litter and found some new vandalism on Saturday morning.

What's to be done? Well, some of the ideas discussed at the council meeting included closing the parks at night by posting closed hours, closing some parks by putting up fences around them, surveillance cameras in all parks, more police presence in parks, or citizen patrols.

We have beautiful parks and would hate to see access restricted or so closely monitored that it would feel like, as one person at the council meeting put it, "Big Brother is watching".

It really doesn't take much. Please don't take out your frustrations on the community spaces or public restrooms and parks. Pick up after yourself, and don't vandalize. There are much better ways to express yourself so that everyone can continue to enjoy, unrestricted, the community parks and facilities. Find something else to do to 'express' yourself, or 'show the man' or whatever is causing such destructive behavior. Leave the parks in better shape than you found them so we can all enjoy them for many years to come. Thank you.



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



It's interesting to watch the "outrage" that has been fomented by using deliberately false descriptions of elements proposed in health care reform bills.

A good example is to require that health insurance pay for patient-physician consultations regarding end-of-life care if/when a patient is unable to make their wishes known. In Oregon, we have long been advised to complete an "advance directive" or "living will." We can even have it included in our health care file. This is nothing new and it makes sense to specify our end-of-life preferences when we are in control of our thoughts.

Nevertheless, this sensible measure is trumpeted by opponents of health care reform as "death panels that would force the evaluation of old or disabled people to determine if they are worth keeping alive." Geez, get a grip!

Pharmaceutical companies, for-profit hospitals and clinics, and particularly health insurance companies have reasons to oppose health care reform – billions of dollars worth of reasons. Not one of those reasons has anything to do with a thirty year decline in the quality of health care, or people who can't get health insurance because of pre-existing conditions, or the increasing millions of Americans who can't afford health insurance, or the people who are dropped by their in-

surers when they become critically ill. This is health care rationing for profit.

Consider these numbers provided by Wendell Potter, a 16-year Cigna health insurance executive who left the industry a year ago:

- From 2000 to 2007, health insurance companies' profits increased by 428%.
- From 2000 to 2007, the number of uninsured people rose by 19%.
- Only 70% of premiums are spent on health care.
- The average annual compensation of health insurance CEOs is \$11.9 million.

According to Potter, the companies use "shills and front groups to spread lies and disinformation" to block reforms that would benefit not just the 40 million uninsured Americans, but millions of people who are in danger of losing health coverage. It is wise to remember that insurance companies don't make money by paying claims.

Another of the lies is that reform would harm veterans health care. It won't. In fact, the American Legion, wants to expand VA health care to veterans' families. Opponents don't want that because people are beginning to realize that the Veterans Administration now runs the most efficient health care system in the U.S.

While health insurance companies will oppose any change that may reduce profits, the one element that really rocks their boat is a "public option." This proposal would expand Medicare to cover people who can't afford, can't get, or don't want commercial health insurance. Medicare is

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