

The INDEPENDENT

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Publisher Clark McGaugh, clark@the-independent.net
Editor Rebecca McGaugh, rebecca@the-independent.net
Mentor Noni Andersen

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Opinion

On Bond Measure 5-197

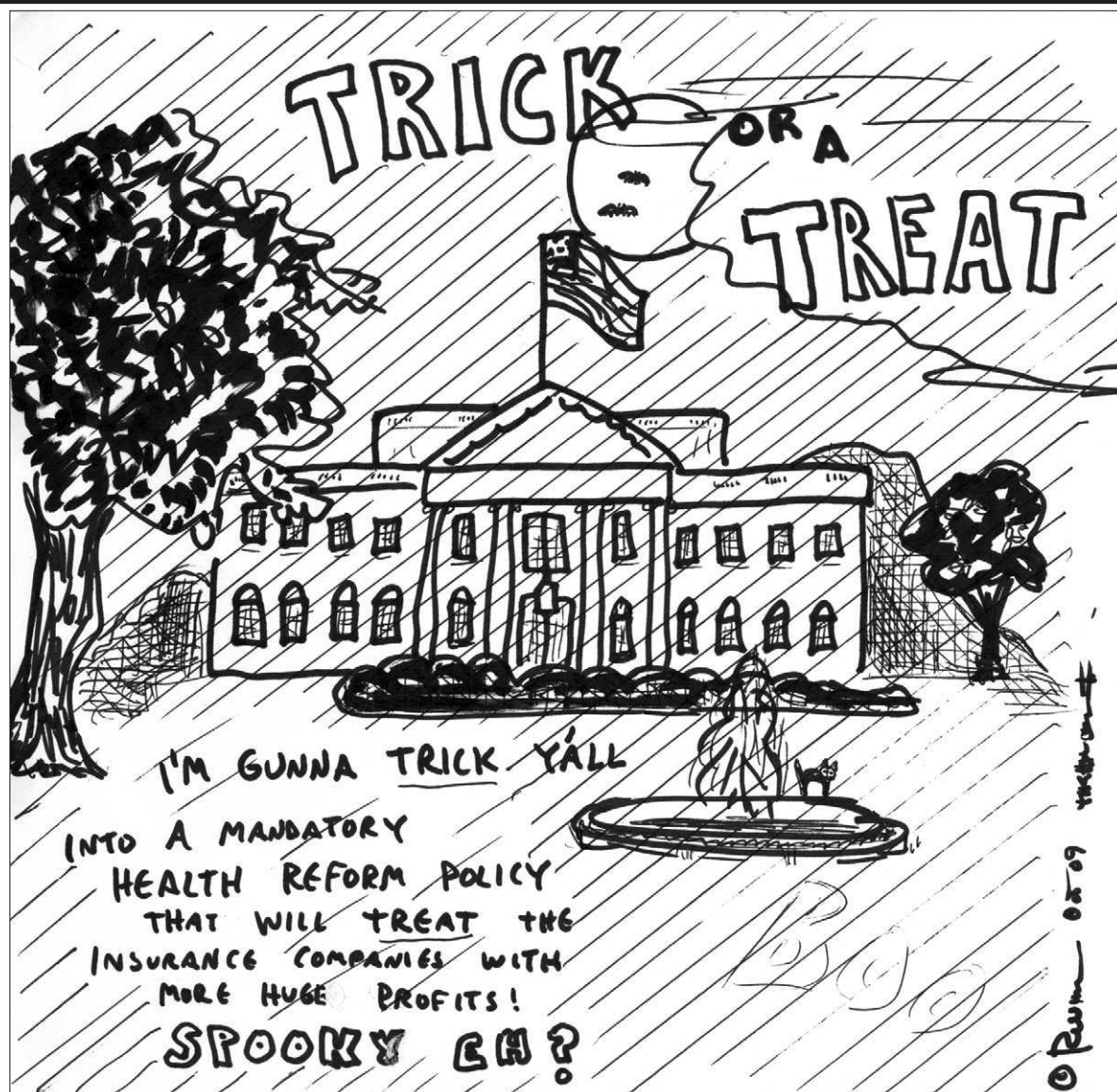
Know how you'll vote on 5-197? That's the \$13 million bond measure (see related story page 1) for Vernonia's new school project. We have reservations about where the other \$24 million needed to build new schools will come from; our problems with past decisions made at the schools, such as siting the middle school in the flood zone and selling the only school that wasn't in the flood zone (Lincoln Grade School) and our concern for the citizens of this district, including us, who have been hard hit by this economy. In spite of all that, we have decided to vote yes. The cost to us personally will be under \$15 per month, how can we say no to something that will cost less than our coffee bill? We don't like to gamble, but we hope this one pays off.

New policy at city council?

During the "Topics from the Floor" portion of Vernonia City Council meetings, council will call on citizens and allow them to speak for up to five minutes. But don't voice concerns about how city employees perform their jobs. If you do, some members of the council will interrupt you, talking and even shouting over each other to say things like, "It's against the law to let you talk," or "Take it to a lawyer." They will also threaten to have you removed from council chambers for trying to speak. The council's censorship isn't just for "personnel" reasons, either. You can't speak about council's decision not to let somebody be heard, either. If you do, after being given the floor (recognized to speak) it will be taken from you by Councilor Kevin (the Enforcer) Hudson. That was what happened at the October 5 council meeting. Lest all council members be painted with the same brush, we must add that Councilor Randy Parrow wasn't present at the meeting and we didn't hear Councilor Brett Costley chime in.

We have always told people to take their concerns to council meetings, become involved with their city government and have their voices heard. Vernonia has become the exception. Unfortunately, Vernonia's city council lacks the common sense to just let someone speak, without interrupting or feeling they have to censor or respond to the topic. Oh, yes, and Madam Mayor — use your gavel appropriately to restore order amongst your fellow councilors and/or the audience.

The long and the short of it is, it really doesn't matter what a citizen says during their time, the appropriate response from council is to listen (without grimacing or smirking), then say, "Thank you." Try it.



Guest Opinion

by Alice Vachss, JD

Years ago I was chief of the Special Victims Bureau for the Queens County (New York City) District Attorney's Office. We investigated and prosecuted what a community member once described as "the bully crimes" — sexual assault, domestic violence, and crimes against children and the elderly. It was an accurate term. If I had to name one trait common to virtually all the defendants we prosecuted, it would be bullying. Almost as soon as I moved to the Oregon coast, I recognized a familiar enemy.

A few weeks earlier, a jury had acquitted a Newport police officer of domestic violence charges, dividing the town into polar opposite camps. Although I was later to become involved professionally on behalf of the accuser in a civil (not criminal) matter, this Viewpoint contains only my personal observations of those times and their effect on our community.

The acquitted officer had worked for the Toledo Police Department before transferring to Newport. Both police forces sided squarely with the officer. They had been strident witnesses for him at his jury trial and later attended court proceedings in a show of force when he was subsequently accused of violating a temporary restraining order. A few months later, the International Association of Chiefs of Police issued a model policy for what it calls "officer-involved domestic violence." It recognized the conflicting loyalties inevitable when accusations are leveled against a fellow officer, and crafted strategies for

departmental fairness and impartiality. Toledo and Newport police were perfect examples of what not to do in such cases. In fact, they simmered with resentment toward a community that had dared to require such standards of them.

The opposition was equally vehement and unreasoned. Few of those objecting to an unjust verdict had attended the trial, or knew anything about the evidence. They blamed all law enforcement, ignoring the superb efforts of the Oregon State Police and the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office. Nor did they rally in support of one courageous Toledo police officer who had been fired for being kind to the accuser during the trial.

In my experience, we judge crimes far too much by what we think of the victim. I know the truth is always present somewhere beneath the rhetoric. So instead of displaying blind allegiance to doctrinaire groups, I looked at the crime and the criminal. According to newspaper accounts, the acquitted officer was accused of a bullying crime. I wanted to know if he was a bully in other areas. Had he been accused of "excessive force" as a police officer?...Yes. Was he rougher with marginalized populations than he was with the general public?...Yes. Did he make a point of ingratiating himself with superiors, particularly by favor-trading?...Yes. Was he unprofessional with people he supervised or volunteers under his command?...Yes.

The Lincoln County Sheriff's Office investigated complaints from the original accuser that the

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