

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Odds and ends that add up

The Opinion in the May 6 issue mentioned the long, drawn out process the Vernonia council has gone through, not to mention thousands of dollars spent on a consultant to come up with a strategic plan. Public meeting in March, council looked at it and wanted more in April, then at the first May council meeting it sounded like they adopted the 1997 plan (why did we need the consultant to just adopt what we've already had for 13 years?) with parts of the new information to be incorporated. At the May 17 meeting, they held the second reading, so it goes into affect in 30 days. And, what did they adopt? The 1997 plan with no additions. They stated they would adopt it, then amend or add to it, using the new information. So, what seemed to take three months, in reality took 13 years – to adopt something that is now decidedly out of date. Now, that's a piece of work!

When council adopted the 1997 plan, the vote was unanimous. That, unfortunately, isn't unusual. Looking back at all of the votes taken between January 19, 2010, and May 17, 2010, the council voted 31 times. All 31 times the council voted, they voted unanimously. That's right, they are in full lock-step together. Nobody thinks independently, or if they do, they say what they think, then vote the same as everybody else. Why? Most likely it's because they have all bonded to the point where no one wants to be the odd person out. It's a bad sign. One thing the paid consultant left us with, from the very first meeting, was a great quote, attributed to General George Patton: "If we're all thinking alike, then we're not thinking." That about sums it up.

Another subject, since the city is in the budget process. Reviewing the expenditure reports (the pay-outs) from the consent agenda portion of Vernonia council meetings for 2010, here are some interesting figures. Since January 19, the city has sent \$23,684.24 to the city attorney. City Administrator Bob Young has been paid \$2,225.22 (over and above his salary) for such items as lunches, conferences, training, mileage, fuel, and cell phone reimbursement. That amount includes one entry for \$120.53 listed as CA business lunch. Expenses so far this year for Young's city owned Jeep add up to \$676.91 including tires (as usual, purchased out of town). The Vernonia Police Department spent \$27,765.84 this past five months on such items as \$24,311.78 to pay off the Charger and the '06 Crown Vic. They then turned around and surplused the Crown Vic, selling it to some other police department (don't know how much they got for it). There is also \$1753.00 for weapons (from Keith's Sporting Goods), \$336.86 to repair or replace the Dodge Charger spotlight, \$370.06 for uniforms (does

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Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



We are now 40 years into our "War on Drugs", so what do we have to show for it?

It has cost \$1 trillion and hundreds of thousands of lives, but drug use is rampant and violence is increasingly brutal and widespread.

We have empowered organized crime here and in Latin America, and terrorists abroad. Our policies have raised prices, increasing profit margins for everyone from drug cartels to the Taliban.

We have vastly increased the percentage of our population in prisons. The United States incarcerates people at a rate nearly five times the world average. The number of people in prison for drug offenses rose from approximately 41,000 in 1980 to 500,000 today. Before the war on drugs, our incarceration rate was about the same as that of other countries.

We spend seven times as much on drug interdiction, policing and imprisonment as on treatment.

How did we get to this stunningly ineffective and wasteful "war"?

The first U.S. law restricting the distribution and use of certain drugs, primarily opium and heroin, was the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914. The Narcotic Drugs Import and Export Act of 1922 expanded federal enforcement.

In 1919 the National Prohibition Act banned the sale, manufacture, and transportation of alcohol for consumption. The law had little effect on alcohol consumption, but it made "criminals" of people who were caught drinking beer, while creating an incubator for organized crime. By the time the law was repealed in 1933, organized crime was a well entrenched part of our society.

In 1930, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) was created to incorporate the enforcement responsibilities of prior agencies. Harry J. Anslinger, who was appointed by Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon to lead the FBN, lobbied for stronger penalties for drug usage, and the FBN is credited for criminalizing drugs such as cannabis, with the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937.

This may be a conspiracy theory, but according to a story that I *have not* been able to verify, the 1937 marijuana act was passed largely as an effort of Mellon, William Randolph Hearst, and the Du Pont family to destroy the hemp industry. The reason being that hemp had become a cheap substitute for the paper pulp used in newspapers and Hearst thought it threatened his timber holdings, while millionaire Mellon had invested heavily in the Du Pont family's new synthetic fiber, nylon, and hemp was serious competition.

Regardless, the main focus of the FBN was on opium and heroin smuggling and, over time, they established offices in France, Italy, Turkey, Lebanon, Thailand and other locations of international smuggling. This effort was sometimes

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