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Letters

Committee seeking ideas from citizens

To the Editor:

Last month, the City Council asked a number of local activists to staff a strategic planning committee. Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) helped us do a strategic plan after the 1996 floods, and a city consultant just completed a planning process that generated several typed pages of input from citizens. The City Council asked this new ad hoc committee to evaluate and prioritize the new ideas, placing them into a format similar to the one RDI used in 1997.

Committee members represent specific constituencies

within the city. They include: Brett Costly, former city council person, Bill Haack, Interim City Manager, Catherine Helmer from Parks, Dan Brown and Nancy Dailey from the Planning Commission, Karen Davenport, Marilyn Nicks, Willow Birch, Tim Bero and Sharon Bernal from the Economic Development Committee and the Downtown Business Association, Mike Seager from the Airport, Cynda Allen, Janelle Cedergreen from Vernonia Pride and George Tice from the Public Works Committee.

Each of these committee members has agreed to bring the collected ideas to their particular constituency for input. We are hoping to engage the

smart, experienced citizens of Vernonia to help us identify ten to twelve, feasible, top priorities. The City Council, staff and volunteers can use these priorities to keep the city focused for the next ten years.

Our first meeting (of three planned) will be at 7:00 p.m., on July 22nd, at Vernonia City Hall. We encourage citizens to attend. If you cannot, copies of the 1997 strategic plan and the 2009 idea list can be obtained at City Hall or by emailing me (jimtierney@verizon.net). Even without these documents, feel free to let me know your best idea for our town. Remember to explain your idea as well as you can. We need to evaluate ideas for feasibility, so if we don't fully

understand it, your good idea may not get its best chance to make the list. You can contact any of these committee members or me by phone or mail at: 503-429-0720 and 1209 Bridge Street.

**Jim Tierney
 Vernonia**

Policy on Letters

The INDEPENDENT will not publish letters with personal attacks on private citizens. Preference will be given to brief letters, 300 words or less.

All letters must be signed and include a verifiable address or phone number.

"I have always strenuously supported the right of every man to his own opinion, however different that opinion might be to mine. He who denies another this right makes a slave of himself to his present opinion, because he precludes himself the right of changing it."

—Thomas Paine, 1783

Salem Scene

By Representative Brad Witt
 Oregon District 31



In my last newsletter I was in Salem attending 3 days of legislative hearings that are designed to help us to keep on top of things during the 18 month interim between sessions. At that time, the state economist issued a new quarterly revenue projection that showed an unexpected \$577 million shortfall from the previous forecast.

In the past several weeks, Governor Kulongoski has taken a two-pronged approach to solving this shortfall. First, he announced his plans to cut \$577 million equally across the state budget. That amounts to an across the board cut of 9% for all General Fund expenditures, 95% of which is dedicated to education, health care and public safety. The Governor asked all state agencies to submit their proposed cuts by June 7th, which they did.

Secondly, the Governor outlined the recommendations submitted to him by his "Reset Cabinet," an experienced and thoughtful group of advisors tasked with the responsibility of giving him a no-holds-barred assessment of what it is going to take to get Oregon back on the road to recovery. The Governor's Website, which outlines the Reset and gives you an opportunity for input, is:

http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/governor_reset_cabinet/reset_state_govt.shtml

We now have these two outlines before us and the depth of these cuts is sobering. This is not just about numbers, it's about people. Families and communities will feel real pain when these cuts go into effect. We must now determine if it is possible to mitigate some of the worst cuts, while also anticipating the budget challenges of the 2011-2013 biennium.

Some have called for the Legislature to go into immediate emergency session, but I believe that would be a mistake. Until we receive the August 26th revenue forecast, and determine what, if anything, the federal government is going to provide in terms of aid to the states (Oregon is not alone), it makes no sense to call ourselves into session. We do not want to repeat the experiences of the 2002 Legislature that met in five emergency sessions, resulting in huge costs to the taxpayers.

Here are the immediate steps being taken:

- The Legislature sent a letter to Oregon's Congressional delegation requesting aid for services to remedy the deficits caused by lax federal regulation and the resulting global recession that has put all states at risk.
- We are in the process of scrutinizing proposed agency service cuts to determine the best path to preserve the most critical services for schools, public safety, seniors and vulnerable families, for both this biennium and the next.
- We will implement a fair share of budg-

et cuts for the Legislature, Judicial Department, Secretary of State, and Treasurer, since the Governor's allotment authority doesn't extend to those agencies.

- We are engaging stakeholders statewide in discussions about the impact of cuts and strategies to protect core services.
- We are assessing what additional resources we can bring to bear, including reserves and other funds, which are about \$175 million (less than 2% of the state's biennial general fund budget).

As we continue to recover from the recession, we see hopeful economic signs all around us. For example, Oregon employers in the construction sector added 1,700 jobs in May, the third consecutive gain. Oregon is one of 17 states where unemployment is lower than it was a year ago, and the reduction in the unemployment rate last year, 1%, is one of the largest drops in the nation.

Rural Energy Assessments Available...

On a happier note, I received an email from the Oregon State University Energy Efficiency Center, which is making its services available to Oregon farmers and rural businesses. This new rural energy assessment program is available to any small rural Oregon business or farm – as defined by the Small Business Administration – that makes more than half of its gross income from agriculture. Those using the program save an average of 10% of their annual facility energy use.

You can access more information by going to <http://eec.engr.oregonstate.edu>.