

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Let's return to high ideals

Now that the recall of Vernonia City Councilor Kevin Hudson is over and he has left office, it remains for the other four councilors to appoint a person to fill the rest of Hudson's term. We'd like to see a return in all branches of government to high ideals, starting at the grassroots level of city government. We hope the council finds an applicant who is a civic minded individual with good critical thinking and listening skills and no personal agenda. Then, we'd like to see the new council find a way to hire back Bill Haack as city administrator when the council interviews candidates on June 24. Then, if there are indeed two more recalls (Willow Burch and Marilyn Nicks), we hope to see the same qualities in their replacements, too. Then, maybe the council can get back to running the business of the city instead of in-fighting and blocking sensible cooperation.

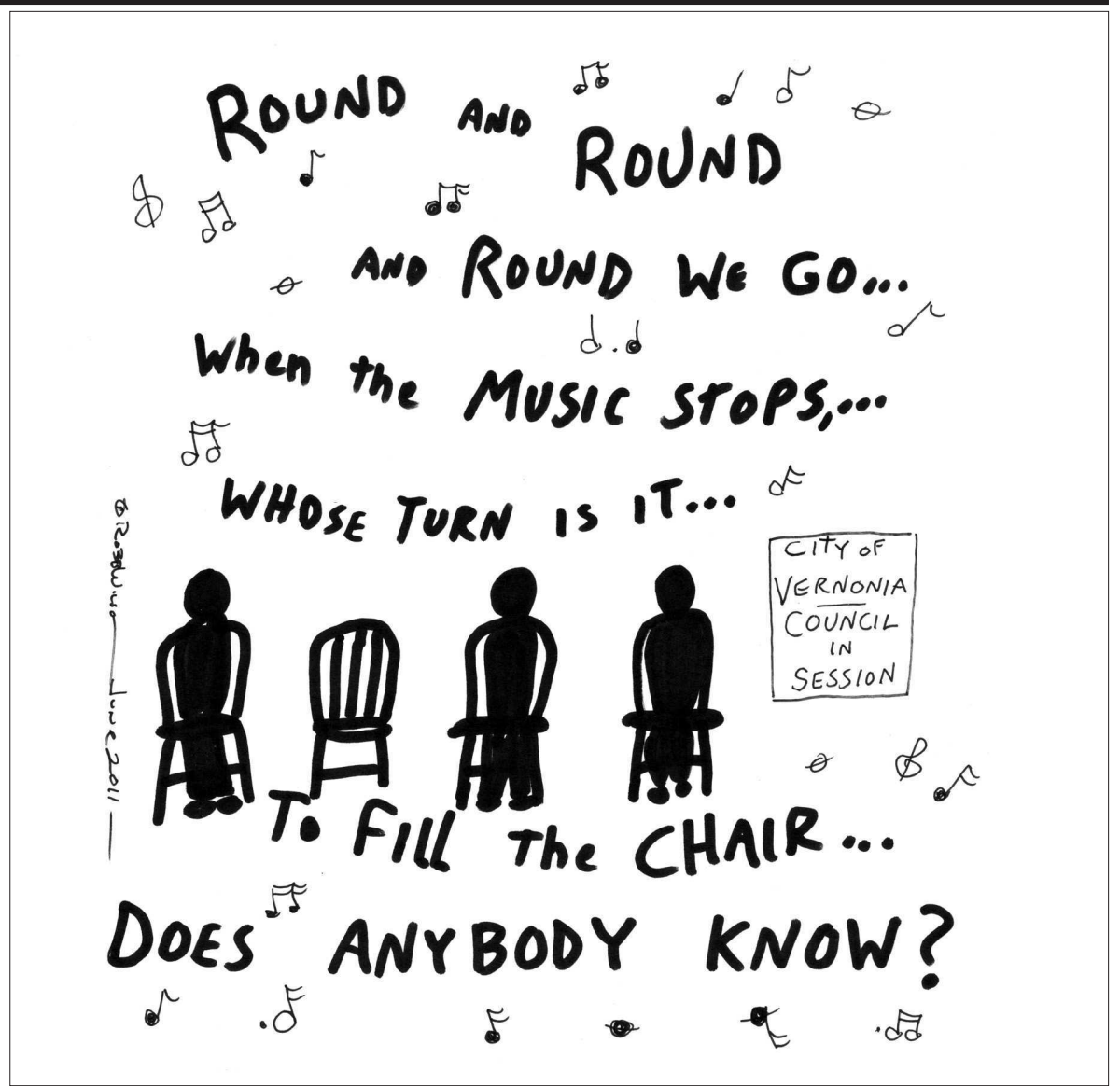
And speaking of high ideals

The Vernonia School District Certified staff (that's teachers, counselors, etc.) recently agreed to work 190 days, instead of the 180 days previously considered, but for the 180 day salary. The Classified staff agreed to no raise, no cost of living increase and will work the 190 days. Why did these people make this kind of sacrifice? Because this way there will be seven more days of school next year. They want that so they can teach more and better prepare students for graduation. In order to graduate, the kids will need to meet higher standards for reading, writing and mathematics than they did this year. More days in school = more opportunity to meet those new, higher standards. Thank you, district employees for thinking first of the needs of your students.

What not to do this summer

A recent medical study from the University of Southern Denmark and the Harvard School of Public Health indicates that for every two hours spent in front of a television, the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes increases by 20 percent, while the risk of cardiovascular disease increases 15 percent, and all-cause mortality increases 13 percent.

Spend your time away from the television and live longer and healthier. There really is life without T.V.



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



Vernonia voters spoke loudly and clearly in last Friday's election, as they approved the recall of city council member Kevin Hudson by a margin of 86 percent to 14 percent.

The current situation in Vernonia's city government shouldn't be a surprise to anyone who has been paying attention. The only surprising element is that voters are finally so disgusted that they recalled one council member and will now start another recall campaign against two more.

The three councilors, Hudson, Willow Burch and Marilyn Nicks, quite clearly earned that disgust, and the anger that accompanies it. In their unrelenting defense of an unscrupulous city employee they fired a competent professional city administrator, who they seemed to think should have protected that employee from a state investigation. The city won't be hurt if all three are recalled.

But citizens should also be asking themselves some questions: "What led up to this situation?" "Were there warning signs we ignored?" "How long has our council been so dysfunctional?" "How can we do a better job of picking council members?"

Years of citizen apathy have allowed the council to bypass good practices. That apathy allowed the council to hire a string of unqualified

and incompetent administrators to head city government. As long as the "right" people were happy, the council was happy.

One of those administrators bought "new" financial system software that was so old the city's computers couldn't use it, so he was the only person who could say what was going on with city funds. Another one tried to get rid of the Oregon Solutions team that was helping us recover from the '07 flood. Another one refused to look at complaints about that same unscrupulous employee. And still another approved loads of expenditures that were not in the budget.

We need a council that thinks good practices are a priority. Only the voters can assure that.

Earlier, in the May 17 election, voters defeated a ballot measure that would have increased funding for the woefully underfunded Columbia County Sheriff's Office. In the Nehalem Valley, the levy was defeated by a much greater margin than in the county as a whole.

If the people I have spoken with are a measure, they voted against the levy because of economics. After devastating floods in 1996 and 2007, and in spite of being hard hit by the recession, voters in the Vernonia School District approved a \$13 million bond measure to help build new schools above the flood plain. That \$13 million may not seem like much to larger school districts, but it created a big hike in property taxes for a district that has rarely had as many as 700 students. Voters in the Nehalem Valley aren't opposed to better law enforcement, they just can't afford it at this time.