

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Who will be on the council when recall is finished?

We can't predict the outcome of the recall election of Vernonia City Councilors Willow Burch and Marilyn Nicks. That's one of the interesting aspects of democracy – you just never know how any election will turn out. What we might predict is the communities approval of the process Councilor Randy Parrow (with Mayor Josette Mitchell's agreement) outlined at the July 18 council meeting. If the recall causes the removal of both Burch and Nicks, three panels of five Vernonia citizens will interview council applicants. These 15 citizens will be selected by lottery. If you want to help select the next council, put your name in the hat and see if it gets pulled out. The city charter doesn't call for an election, it calls for the remaining council members to select replacements. Parrow and Mitchell, by charter, cannot allow the panels to make the final selection, but have agreed to abide by the recommendations of the panels. Same result in the end, and they get there by following the rules; we applaud that. They also will open the application process for a full two weeks. The last applicants had only four days to find out about the process, get an application, fill it out and return it to city hall. This process, of course, depends on the outcome of the recall vote.

Please don't drink and drive

Vernonian Josh Watson died early the morning of July 10 after the car he was in missed a curve and crashed into a really big tree along Keasey Road. There were three men in the truck; one died, one went by LifeFlight to the hospital in critical condition, and another was transported by ambulance with serious injuries. We don't know who was driving, but we do know that investigators consider both alcohol and speed to be factors in this tragedy.

This provides another opportunity to remind anyone who will listen that drinking and driving will kill. It may kill a loved one, it may kill you. As Lanny McDonald has been known to say, "Don't drink and drive, the life you save could be mine." Please, don't become a drunk driving statistic – save lives, don't drink and drive.



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



Burch, Nicks and the already-recalled Kevin Hudson terminated the contract of city administrator Bill Haack in their efforts to protect an unscrupulous city police officer. Their effort to protect that employee continued even *after* a state investigation revealed a pattern of false statements that started with his employment application, and after the city's attorney explained, in writing, about potential liability if the employee remained on staff.

Their defense is to insist that there was some kind of conspiracy and that Haack was somehow at the root of it. Yeah, sure, of course, etc.

To paraphrase what I wrote in last month's column, the city won't be hurt if they are recalled. Another successful recall could be very good for the city if it results in thoughtful, public decision-making by future councilors.

It's easy to understand why local government bodies fall into decision-making ruts that amount to "it worked before so let's do it again". The easy way is good when the decision is the right one; the question is: What is right? It would have

Ballots were mailed Monday to Vernonia voters for Parts 2 & 3 of the city council recall elections, this time aimed at Willow Burch and Marilyn Nicks.

Citizen anger at harmful council action finally reached the boiling point when council members

been right to retain Haack, and it would be right to rehire him because he has shown his ability to juggle all of the elements involved in operating the City of Vernonia, including its many complicated, ongoing projects.

Presently, however, I question the wisdom of that approach. All five council members agreed to hire former interim administrator Jim Johnson as a consultant until a new administrator is hired and, after Recall No. 1, Mayor Josette Mitchell and Councilor Randy Parrow insisted that former Councilor Brett Costley be appointed to replace him. Burch and Nicks disagreed on Costley, so the seat remained vacant.

I question these decisions for two reasons: 1. When he was administrator, Johnson *did nothing* about citizens' legitimate complaints concerning that same police officer and his dog. 2. Costley (Parrow, too) went along with defending the officer, treating complaining citizens as though they were lying whiners. Mitchell and Parrow should not support those who did the same thing Hudson was recalled for. They are both capable of making intelligent decisions and should start that process by questioning their own decisions in these two instances.

One good way to start would be by allowing 10-14 days for citizens to apply for vacancies. It did no good to rush the application period for Hudson's seat because the vote deadlocked 2-2. There was very little time to apply, and few citizens knew that applications were being accepted. Also needed are *public* discussions in council meetings, before decisions are made, instead of defending decisions after the fact.