

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

What's a committee to do?

Committees in Vernonia have gone through the same turmoil as city council members and city staff in the past few years. New and/or interim city administrators have come and gone, each with their own idea of what committees should be doing. Similarly, councilors have come and gone and seemed to have different expectations regarding the role of committees.

Now that council appears to be ready to get to work and City Administrator Bill Haack is onboard and no longer serving in an interim capacity, it's a good time to revisit the role of city committees.

First, the Planning Commission is not the same as the committees, the commission has a state mandated quasi-judicial role in city government. The Planning Commission has some autonomy in certain areas of planning.

The other committees do not have any autonomy to change rules and/or regulations or make decisions for the city. They are designed to act in an advisory capacity only. Also, committees should route their recommendations through Haack first, not only so he knows what's coming, but because he's responsible for the "big picture" and may have more information council will need.

We're not picking on committees when we give this example: The Public Works Committee has recently had three meetings with some or all of council on results from a water rate study. The committee has not developed a united direction and doesn't appear to have reached a consensus on how the study's information should affect water rates. At the end of hours of work session, the council made a list of additional information needed in order to make a final decision. This should have been done for them by the committee. Even if the committee can't agree, they can still provide information to council on two, or more, possible approaches.

Committees are the specialists, while councilors are generalists and must rely on the committees to provide enough information regarding their informed recommendations. Council can then make their own informed decision as to the direction the city should take in the areas of the committees' expertise.

Committees should also consider asking for work sessions with council to find out what council wants them to work on, and for community town halls to get more input before making recommendations.



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



With less than 20 working days left before Congress takes its year-end break, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives has presented seven abortion-related bills, but not one single jobs bill.

They do have a sort of reverse jobs bill in committee hearings, unfortunately its goal is to eliminate about 120,000 Postal Service jobs. What a great way to increase joblessness in the U.S.— with brains like these, we can wave our foam rubber index fingers and shout “We’re number one!” What a proud moment to be jobless.

Probably incidental is that the House GOP knew the abortion bills would not pass the Senate; they were for symbolic reasons.

Also probably incidental, is that eliminating Postal Service jobs will increase those needing unemployment benefits – without saving a dime of taxpayers’ money. The Postal Service gets no taxes.

Remember: This is the House that has several times threatened to force a government shutdown over debt and deficits.

The other half of our legislative branch of government is slightly different, but the outcomes are similar.

The Senate should be Democrat controlled, the numbers are there, but a Senate maneuver

called a “filibuster” requires a super-majority of 60 of the 100 Senators to pass a bill. This isn’t in the Constitution, which requires only a majority vote, it is a Senate rule. While a filibuster can prevent a really bad bill from passing, it can also prevent much needed legislation from even being considered.

That is exactly what happened to the Democratic jobs bill the Senate should be considering. When a “will of the Senate” question was presented, asking only if the Senate should *debate* the jobs bill, the question was filibustered to death. Yep, 48 Senators (46 GOP, 2 Dem.) said they didn’t want to talk about jobs.

Millions of Americans are out of work, but 48 Senators don’t want to talk about jobs.

This was so blatantly dismissive of people’s economic needs that the GOP has come up with a jobs plan which they say is “different”. Some of them even say that President Bush’s approach didn’t work, so this is “different”.

- Their new, “different” plan will create jobs by:
- Cutting government spending dramatically;
 - cutting taxes on the rich and corporations;
 - repealing the health care reform act;
 - further deregulating Wall Street;
 - eliminating regulations that protect the environment, safety, food, etc.;
 - eliminating the ability to unionize;
 - emphasizing oil and gas for energy policy;
 - speeding up more “free” trade agreements.

If this is “different”, why does most of it read like a rerun of the Bush economic plan, or even like a history of the United States economy during the “Gilded Age” of the 1920s?