

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Vernonia water rates up

Monday, March 19, a majority of the Vernonia City Council voted to raise water rates (see story on page 1). For the first time in many years, they followed a process instead of a whim. Months ago, they gave some preliminary information to the Oregon Association of Water Utilities (OAWU), a nonprofit set up in 1977 to provide technical assistance to water utilities. Yes, there is a cost for this assistance, but it's minimal for the expertise they bring to the table. The preliminary information was not sufficient, but it did bring Tim Tice, the OAWU Projects Manager, to Vernonia to explain best practice information to the council. Such information included that most municipalities aim for a base rate that covers 60-75% of expenses with the remainder derived from consumption charges. Tice told council that Vernonia's current EDU (Equivalent Dwelling Unit) formula is non-standard, and explained why it's neither the fairest nor best way to handle water rates. The city was also exposed to tiered rates, where the consumption rate goes up as a customer uses more water. Council and the public works committee decided the tier structure provided no real benefit to Vernonia water users.

The public works committee and the city council met together and separately, several times, to discuss what type of water rate structure would be most equitable for both the citizens and the city. They didn't always agree, and it got loud and unhappy a couple of times, but nobody gave up and the process continued. That, alone, is a distinct difference from decision making processes of even a year ago.

Once Tice had good information, including a planned water budget of \$550,000 in order to build reserves to repair or replace water system components, the information coming back started making sense. One councilor and a couple of committee members were unhappy with the outcome, but council voted to change the rates for a year, then see how it's working and how much additional revenue is generated.

We will pay slightly higher rates, but this was good problem solving by a committed group of volunteers using available expertise. Now, the challenge for the city is to find a mechanism whereby money set aside in reserve for a specific purpose doesn't disappear or get re-purposed. We hope to see a positive result from that challenge, too.



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



What do we know about the recent killing of 16 Afghani civilians in their homes?

We know the following:

1. One American soldier, Staff Sgt. Robert Bales, turned himself in, and reportedly claimed responsibility.
2. Sgt. Bales was on his fourth combat deployment.
3. He was 38 years old, and has two children.
4. He was twice wounded in combat.
5. He was flown out of Afghanistan within two days of the killings.

That's it; all else is conjecture at this point.

Yes, we've heard or read about his financial problems, his background, his marriage, and much more. What is conjecture and what is factual will eventually be sorted out.

The next question is: What do we know about the people who were killed?

1. Nine of them were children.
2. Some or all of the dead were set on fire.

We don't know their names, we don't know their ages. We don't know their relationships or their backgrounds. All we know is that they are dead, apparently at the hand of an American soldier.

My first thoughts on reading of this tragedy were probably similar to most other Americans, "What happened to him? Were the four deploy-

ments too much for him?"

Reading about Afghani anger and rage, though, made me wonder how we would feel if we had been occupied for 10 years by another country that was "protecting us" by hunting for terrorists here.

I doubt that we would be complacent when our protectors bombed our towns into oblivion, or when targeted drone strikes hit the wrong target. Would our protectors' heartfelt expressions of regret assuage our grief and anger at seeing the mangled bodies of our children?

What if our protectors accidentally included Bibles in a trash fire, or if there were pictures of their soldiers urinating on dead Americans that they considered to be terrorists?

Would the knowledge that they had suffered many casualties make our losses less painful? Of course not. Yet many Americans wonder why the Afghans are so angry; after all, we have apologized for accidentally killing the wrong people!

After World War II, America led the world in feeding and reconstructing nations that had been devastated. We were universally admired.

There were valid reasons for WWII. While there were reasons for Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, Iraq (1) and Libya, we need to question the validity of those reasons. There were no reasons for the second Iraq war, only lies.

We are no longer universally admired. For reasons that should be obvious, we can not win the hearts and minds of people by bombing them into oblivion.