

## Governor seeks individuals to serve on medical policy board

Oregon passed historic health care legislation, this past legislative session, to move forward with its health insurance exchange and to begin transforming and improving care under the Oregon Health Plan. Our continued success in the implementation of state and federal health reform will continue to require strong public participation. To that end, Governor Kitzhaber is calling for nominations of people to participate in a process to help define the state's essential health benefits.

As part of the Affordable Care Act, the federal government proposes that essential health benefits are defined using a benchmark where states have the flexibility to select a

benchmark plan that reflects the scope of services offered by a "typical employer plan." If Oregon does not select a benchmark, the federal government intends to propose a predetermined default benchmark.

To help Oregon select its essential health benefit benchmark, the Governor will be appointing individuals to serve on a jointly chartered Oregon Health Policy Board and Oregon Health Insurance Exchange Board workgroup.

Deadline for application is 4 p.m. tomorrow, Thursday, March 22.

For information on how to apply, go to [http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/boards.shtml#How\\_to\\_Apply](http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/boards.shtml#How_to_Apply).

## Attendance was low at the recent Johnson/Witt Town Hall

State Senator Betsy Johnson and Representative Brad Witt held a Town Hall in Vernonia on March 10. Though not well attended, with only five citizens and City Councilor Randy Parrow present, the discussion was lively and covered a variety of topics.

Starting with a short overview of the latest legislative session, the first full session in an even numbered year, they discussed using last year's state budget holdback of \$340,000 to fill this year's budget in order to prevent major cuts in programs or a large release of prisoners. Other business of this session included help for struggling homeowners, employment, underemployment and a ban on discrimination against the currently unemployed.

They were very happy to discuss the \$4.5 million set aside for schools, as \$4 million of that amount will come to Vernonia as part of a grant/loan package to help finish the new school. Witt said, "While we did this as a team, in the final analysis, it took the goodwill of all legislators to come out and say 'There will be a school for these kids in 2012.'" Johnson added, "As far as I'm concerned, that's the biggest deal of the session, I think it's a measure of us, as Oregonians, that this bill passed."

Comments from the audience ranged from concerns over removing senior citizens property tax deferrals and the effect on their home mortgages, to the need to get rural status for Vernonia in order to make it easier for healthcare providers to locate here.

## Between the Bookends

by Nancy Burch, Librarian  
Vernonia Public Library



As the featured items on the library display table recently changed from those promoting Columbia County Reads, to others promoting Vernonia's Community Reads, patrons have been a little confused.

Last fall, the Friends of the Library applied for a grant from the Columbia County Cultural Coalition to expand Vernonia's Community Reads. The Cultural Coalition, in partnership with Oregon Cultural Trust, approved the grant request.

Matched by funds from the Friends of the Vernonia Library, this grant allows events and/or activities – for youngsters, young adults and adults – that are associated with books chosen for each age group. The new display features this year's selected books—*The Rain Stomper* by Addie Boswell, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, and *The Sky Fisherman* by Craig Lesley. Also on display are other books by these authors, suggestions of similar authors/subjects, and brochures listing the activities associated with each of the books. Highlights of the events will be a discussion of *The Hunger Games* on Thursday March 22 beginning at 5:30 p.m., An interactive art activity related to *The Rain Stomper* on April 10 at 3:30 p.m., and a visit by Craig Lesley on Saturday, April 14 at 4:00 p.m. All of these events are free and will take place in the library. **This will be Vernonia's Community Reads for 2012.**

After the application had been made for this grant, the Columbia County librarians decided to have a Columbia County Reads. Books with western themes were chosen for the county activity, which recently culminated with a visit from

the author of *Hearts of Horses*, Molly Gloss. So, this year, Vernonia residents will be participating in two **Reads**. Your participation and input was appreciated in the recently concluded events and is encouraged in the current activities.

Appreciation is also expressed for those who donated, organized, sold, and bought books at the recent sale sponsored by the Friends of the Library. This organization is instrumental in supplementing library materials and services. Examples include the family pass to OMSI, annual movie licensing, lodging and gas for authors, books—especially for children, snacks for the after-school program, the "tree" addition to the children's area, publicity and refreshments for presentations held in the library, and other needs as they arise. The next meeting of the Friends of the Library will be Tuesday, April 3 at 6:30 p.m. in the library. New members and ideas are always welcomed.

Library staff continues to try to provide materials by authors and on topics relevant to the interests of the library patrons. New acquisitions include *Victim* by Jonathan Kellerman, *Cinnamon Roll Murder* by Joanne Fluke, *Bossy Pants* by Tina Fey, *The Lorax* by Theodor Seuss Geisel, *Lone Wolf* by Jodi Picoult, *The Night She Disappeared* by April Henry, *Bridge of Scarlet Leaves* by Kristina McMorris, *Force of Nature* by C. J. Box, *Stay Close* by Harlan Coben, and *Pandemonium* by Lauren Oliver. Recommendations from patrons are appreciated.

Book discussion will take place Monday, March 26 at 5:30 with Hillary Jordan's *Mudbound*, being discussed.

**Vernonia Public Library:** 701 Weed Avenue  
**Hours:** Mon., Wed., Fri. 10 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
Tues., Thu. 1:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.  
Sat. 10 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
**Preschool Story Time:** Mondays, 10:30 a.m.  
when school is in session.  
**Phone:** 503-429-1818

**Below; only five community members and one city councilor attended the March 10 Town Hall with Senator Betsy Johnson and Representative Brad Witt in Vernonia. There are eight people sitting in the audience, but one is from this paper and another was from Brad Witt's office.**



## Water rates set to go up in June for all Vernonia customers

**From page 1**  
\$102.00 for all services.

The new water rates discussed after the many meetings, then approved at the March 19 city council meeting will be based on water meter size. Most residential and business customers (835 of the total 874 users) have either 3/4 of 5/8 inch meters. Both of those meter sizes will be billed at \$36.00 for the new base rate and \$4.25 for each 1,000 gallons over the 2,000 included in the base rate. For a home using 3,000 gallons of water, this change will mean a bill of \$40.25 instead of the current \$36.25.

Users with larger meters will pay a higher base rate, but will

get a larger allowance of water included before the \$4.25 consumption rate kicks in. The EDU (Equivalent Dwelling Unit) system currently in place that affected a few places, such as the Vernonia Inn, and set a base rate per room will be removed.

Council directed City Administrator Bill Haack to work with Tice to "develop a new water rate" based on the \$36 base rate and \$4.25 consumption rate, with Councilor Donna Webb voting against the new rates. Council will put the new rates in place and re-evaluate them in one year. The new rates will go into affect in June, showing up on the billing due in July.